

Freeman Funk: Third City Manager of Fredericksburg (Part V) --
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Interviewed by Nancy Bruns

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This is Nancy Bruns and we're recording again today with Mr. Freeman Funk at his Fredericksburg home. This is May 28 in the afternoon. We'll be talking about some random subjects and also perhaps about tourism. We're going to start today talking about the Virginia Central Railroad which the city owned and operated. When did the city buy this railroad, Mr. Funk?

Freeman Funk: It was given to the city. A little bit of history: The Virginia Central was started in the earlier days of railroading in the United States. It was an east-west line. It was to run from Fredericksburg to Orange. At the time of the Civil War it had been graded. But no track had been installed. That happened for east-west movement of troops it was still a good marching place. They marched right where the tracks were going to be.

Interviewer: It didn't do the rail bed any harm either?

Freeman Funk: Not at all. It was a narrow gauge and that offered some problems to them as years went by because to transfer goods from a narrow gauge to a standard gauge you've got to take the merchandise off physically and load it onto another car. Enough for history's time went on the passenger service dropped off as it did on many railroads. They continued freight and then they had to drop that off, so it came down to just a small railroad here in the city.

Interviewer: It ran over to Orange?

Freeman Funk: No, it didn't get out of the city when we got it. It was owned by the Williams brothers. Who also had another business in town. They were having some trouble operating and thought we would be distressed if the railroad had to close because the railroad did serve a dozen or so prime customers in the industrial area here in the city that had heavy movement of merchandise in and out. And they would be impacted economically if it ever ceased operation. So they offered it to the city free.

Interviewer: This would be in the '50s, '60s?

Freeman Funk: The '60s I'm sure. So council accepted it. Reorganized it. I think that I was general manager of the Virginia Central as you might suspect. I had an assistant, Art Harris, who was interested in the railroads, and he kind of took over, so I didn't have to worry too much about it. The Virginia Central at that time had one mile of mainline and three miles of siding. All it did was receive cars from the RF&P and they got them from someone else... and we had a little engine that would take those cars from the interchange and put them on the spot "spotting" is what it is called-- for the customer for whom they were intended. That went on for a number of years. Then a highway design came along-later that became the East-West connector-and that highway seemed to have to go through some the prime trackage of the little railroad. The Highway Department of Virginia offered enough money as damages so that we could bring in our own spur from the RF&P... and we enjoyed operating it and we operated it successfully. Maybe financially it wasn't highly successful. I would like to tell you one little story. I thought it might be fun to have a Kids Day-a fun day. We put a fire truck down in Kenmore Park and... we had a railroad passenger car by that time given to us by the RF&P and we had a freight car and a flatbed and we were going to offer rides to children, most of whom had never been on a railroad -- not a full sized one, anyway. And it was a fun day. I worked real hard. We weren't prepared for people to get into the box car because they are as high off the ground as this table. Maybe a little higher. And some of the people could put a child up on the car but not get up themselves. I was a "booster" all day. One of the most popular things it turned out on the passenger car was the paper cups. We had water in those little flat paper cups that we had in those days... We all had a great day. The fire truck took them on rides around the park. We had to give [these Kids Days] up because of insurance problems. You get nervous about those things eventually, but we had no injuries.

Interviewer: What happened to the Virginia Central Railroad? It continues today?

Freeman Funk: I'm not sure exactly. I didn't follow that in the newspaper after I left office the railroad stopped operating. I suppose that the East-West connector really did interfere with its operation. There was a trestle over Hazel Run-right behind Robert B. Payne air conditioning and oil place -it used to be coal, they had coal there at one time. That trestle was very expensive to maintain. It needed a lot of maintenance. I think all in all it was decided that they had to give it

up. The track maintenance was difficult. We used to have a derailment a week, I guess. Unfortunately that went into the national records on railroads as a derailment. You know it sounds like a tragic thing. Actually just one of wheels goes off the track. It slowed us down and we'd have to pump it up...

Interviewer: (laughing) And put it back on the track.

Freeman Funk: No big deal. It's just one of those things. If we could have maintained the tracks better they wouldn't slide out and open up and derail the train.

Interviewer: It must have been the only city that ever ran its own railroad.

Freeman Funk: No there are some others. There's a Short Line Railway Association -- not all city owned by any means, but we were members of the short line association, and teamed more about railroads as we went along.

Interviewer- I'll bet.

Interviewer: Your railroad story reminds me of your story about the faucet washers. (Interviewer is consulting a set of topics and areas suggested by Mr. Funk.) They were free?

Freeman Funk: I listed this mainly to illustrate the difficulty of being manager of a local government. It was decided by the chamber of commerce and some of their members that they ought to have a home show. We thought we would like to participate in the home show through our water department. It was at a time of some water shortages and a lot of emphasis on water and we knew that water leakage could be stopped with a little effort and that would reduce the total water usage. So that was the theme of our booth. We rented a booth and we put water meters in there, and we showed how they worked for people who'd never seen a water meter in reality. To emphasize further we printed some little cards and said you can save money by the use of this faucet washer. And you might even install it yourself.

Interviewer: There was a little washer on the card?

Freeman Funk: Yes. There was a washer stuck on the card. People accepted those, and I'm sure they installed some. We were pretty

severely criticized by the plumbers for stealing their business, taking away their livelihood and every other negative thing you can think of. Based on this one cent washer. Of course the service charge is what they were after not the profit on the one cent washer. We learn something every time we do something. The lesson was clear there that we just need to be careful not to intrude on anyone's private territory. Like plumbers.

Interviewer: It's amazing ... Government is funny, isn't it? You can barely ever do anything right. Did it get more so with the years? We're a little off our list, but I imagine it got more so with the years.

Freeman Funk: More so. It has increased. We get sued for everything. It's not a horrible thing to run a city. But it has it's difficult times. You can't tell a customer to go somewhere else. If you don't like what we're doing, forget it. They will quickly tell you, "I'm paying your salary. Now do what I tell you to."

Interviewer: Did that happen to you?

Freeman Funk: Yes, oh yes. In those specific words. That shakes you up. But as I mentioned to you everyday is different. You have new problems. Interesting ones. Some not so interesting. Some routine.

Interviewer: Here's another problem-the Work Fare. You've listed it as something we might talk about.

Freeman Funk: Yes. Okay I'll tell you what I mean about the Work Fare

Interviewer: You said last week there could have been some [problems] on that, too.

Freeman Funk: There could have been. I must have told you about my relationship with the welfare department.

Interviewer: Yes, I believe you told me that you were welfare director.

Freeman Funk: Yes as an add-on title. The work was done by Alis Bailey as welfare superintendent, all through my tenure and some of Mr. Houston's. I guess from the very beginning of welfare.

Freeman Funk: I always looked after the dollars in city management. Because dollars are important. If you waste them you can't spend

them. And we needed to do everything that we could with the tax money we get. In the welfare system there were about six categories of aid or assistance, as I guess they are called now. I won't try to name them all, but people who came in and apply or learned that they might qualify and come in and apply and be granted assistance if they did qualify. Now that assistance came from three levels of government-federal, state and local. We had to be pretty careful with that but not only was the money audited, but the programs were audited to see if you were doing what you should do.

Incidentally, our local program had the best ratio of benefits to clients versus administrative costs of anything in the area. In some places they gave out very little money and spend a lot to do it and ours was very efficient. One of the programs was General Relief. That meant there would be money available to people-- men generally-but anyone who was unemployed, but not disabled in any way-and in need of money. It's a short term thing. People didn't get it for more than a month, maybe two. We paid monthly. It bothered me because 50 per cent of that was local money and that's the most local participation of any of the six programs. I talked with Mrs. Bailey about this at one of our monthly meetings. Incidentally, we did meet monthly I was the board and she was the superintendent. The board had to meet and sign off on what was done. She would brief me on what was happening... I talked to her about this General Relief and I said, "What if a person were offered a job instead of money, that would disqualify them for the money wouldn't it?" And she said. "Yes, it would." I suggested maybe I directed since I was the director - I said any time a person comes in and he is an able-bodied man and just asking for money, send him to me and I'm going to offer him work on the spot. Right there.

Interviewer: City work?

Freeman Funk: City work. We had enough flexibility in our payroll that there was always some absences, some vacancy - I don't think Mrs. Bailey thought too much of that. It wasn't in the book. It didn't say you could do that. It never said you couldn't do that. It made so much sense logically, I thought it would work. We never were challenged on it. As you can tell from what I've said, we tried it. Interesting things happened. Some of the people never got the three blocks from her office to my office. You can imagine their problem.

Interviewer: ... They decided just not to apply.

Freeman Funk: They just knew they didn't qualify and were just there for money whatever purposes they needed money for. Some came and I assigned them work, they'd work for a couple of days and ask for their money and they left.

Interviewer: You paid them the same rate as the general relief payment?

Freeman Funk: No, the regular city wage. This wasn't a buy off. I don't know if it were less or more. I think it was more. There was another third group. They came and they worked and they liked it. People liked them and they were assigned permanent work in say-public works. And perhaps worked there until they retired for all I know... I don't know. I didn't follow any case all the way through. But to me the outcome was most interesting that you could solve a problem this way if there was a problem. And you could save money. We could save money and we did. And we did get some good people.

Interviewer: I would think so. How long did you do this?

Freeman Funk: Until people stopped coming in. The word gets around. Don't apply for General Relief, they'll put you to work. It just worked its way into nothing.

Interviewer: You were saying about criticism. Was that the criticism?

Freeman Funk: The criticism would come from the federal government. We'd might have been sued in violation of something.

Interviewer: But you didn't get sued?

Freeman Funk: No, not on that one.

Interviewer: Did you have many suits?

Freeman Funk: No. Not many. Most of them were injuries. People would injure themselves on the sidewalk or something. And bring suits.

Interviewer: Would you settle those suits?

Freeman Funk: I never did like the way that worked. When I came here we were self insured and we would settle these suits ourselves. We'd have a claims committee-that I mentioned.

Interviewer: Oh, yes.

Freeman Funk: That was an "antique" way of doing things, so we decided to take up with an insurance group in the city and have a regular way of doing things. They have a feeling that if they have to defend the city they must have a lawyer and his time is worth a lot of money. And sometimes they can settle for less than it costs to go through court.

But that didn't satisfy us. First of all we had no closure on it. We didn't know if we should have been sued or if we should have lost or should have won. Second, the person who settled who mi lit have done better in court and that person is a city citizen who is 9 paying part of the premiums to start with. Then there were the denials. The insurance company would deny and say "just go to court." Well, for small things, people can't afford to get a lawyer or afford to go to court. The insurance companies play this thing like a player piano. They know what to do to benefit the insurance company. We would have liked to benefit the citizens who were entitled to be benefited.

But there wasn't anything we could do about it. Some citizens would come to City Council and say, "Look I was injured and I was denied payment why don't you pay me?" And council would want to do it. I would have to step in and caution them. Look, I'd say, you're paying premiums for insurance twice that way. You're paying a premium for coverage. Now if you're going to settle claims on your own you're stepping way over into left field. And we never did settle any that way. But it was a great temptation. Well especially with a citizen standing there in need of assistance.

(Interruption of a few minutes.)

Interviewer: We're speaking now about the Fredericksburg Police Department. Then in the mid-50's it was a small force. Two cars?

Freeman Funk: Yes, it was indeed a small force. A couple of cars, a chief and a superintendent. The two cars made it rather difficult. The city was almost as large as it is now. It's not a tiny city. We had a lot of trouble with cars. For instance, I became concerned about the cost of tires. And because most people get 20 to 30 thousand miles out of a set of tires. Police cruisers get about six [thousand]. Oh, my goodness we're either getting poor tires or we're driving strangely. Or maybe not rotating. Eventually, I called a friend who was in the taxi business. I

said, "How many miles do you get out of a tire on a taxi?" And he said, "Oh, about six thousand miles."

Interviewer: That gave you an answer.

Freeman Funk: That certainly was a comparable. Another story about police cruisers is about the radios.

Interviewer: Did they not have radios?

Freeman Funk: Oh yes, they did. Two-way radios on police frequency. But we were so short of manpower but when the time came to get a new radio installed in a new car -- and we would have to get new cars every year -- you have to trade them in frequently. That meant a policeman off duty.

Interviewer: Oh because the car was out of service.

Freeman Funk: What I did was take the new police car and I would drive it to Arlington and sit in the repair shop all day while they put the radio in and then drive it back and turn it over to the police. I can never tell you the trifling things we thought we had to do to be efficient. No one would really ever understand that. They'd think that's a strange way to operate a city. But we did the most we could with what we had. ... The radios would sometimes go out... Let me go back for a moment. The new cars came out with 12 volts. The old cars had six. There was a big changeover in the whole industry towards 12 volts. Well, when you've a couple of police radios and you buy two new cars and you've got the wrong voltage you've got to throw away two radios. I said, "Well, throw one into my car," so we installed it in my car and it enabled me to stay in touch.

Interviewer: You'd take one of the old police cars?

Freeman Funk: No, I never used a city car. I had a car allowance. I had to have a car in my business. But on a couple of occasions when the police radio wasn't working in one car that meant we were down to one radio in the other car and one back at police headquarters, I would lend them my car. I didn't have a siren and it didn't have (emergency) lights, but it was a good surveillance car. And it did have radio communication. Innovation was our way of life in those days.

Interviewer: But you thrived on it, didn't you?

Freeman Funk: Oh yes.

Interviewer: Was the police force at all controversial? Freeman Funk: Yes. The main controversy came about when I appointed an out-of-towner to be police chief. It was my opinion only that we didn't have anyone on the force who was qualified to be chief, either lacking some of the characteristics that you would have to have. That offended people when we brought in an out-of-towner. I wonder if I offended people when I came? I was an out-of-towner, too, when I came to work. There was some criticism-some quite unjust-of the chief and of me. I think I talked about IQ testing and psychological testing (earlier). Interviewer: It's on our list to talk about-

Freeman Funk: That's related to the problem, you see. I tried to use as modern methods as I could. And we did little tests-entrance examinations. We couldn't call them IQ tests because people don't want to recognize that one person has a higher IQ than another-especially if it's them and me we're talking about.

(Both are chuckling)

So we use tests that were devised to overcome that problem. They weren't easy to devise because these were people with no police experience. None required. So they just used those words so lightly that you could have entered the word fireman instead of policeman and they'd be about the same thing. They were pretty much IQ tests and we began to raise the level of manpower the in the police and fire department through the use of those.

Then when we decided we were going to use a psychiatrist to evaluate people when they were about to be appointed, that was controversial.

Interviewer: I can believe it.

Freeman Funk: One man I used to see frequently at a place that I had to go regularly-some place like a gas station-he stopped speaking to me. I found out why. His son was a volunteer fireman. Bless them. We needed them. They were a marvelous organization. His son had applied to be a regular fireman and... I didn't appoint him. He applied later, and we still didn't appoint him. The man said, "How can you do this to my son when he has worked so hard as a volunteer? Now you won't put him on the regular paid force?" The answer is I was trying to make every entrance fireman suitable to be chief after the

experience... rather than have the opposite happen and have no one qualified to be chief.

Interviewer: And have to go outside again?

Freeman Funk: Yes, and yet I couldn't tell the man straight out why I didn't hire his son.

Interviewer: This would be in the '50s. Well, tell me about some of those that you did hire.

Freeman Funk: Of course really I didn't hire or fire any of those. I saw to the method of evaluation. It was up to the chief of each department to find his people. But he had to go through the personnel process. So that is the way that worked. I maintained that throughout...

Interviewer: You hired the first black policeman?

Freeman Funk: Yes. It seemed to me that it was time to integrate the police force. People didn't want to integrate the fire force. Paid firemen did not want any blacks because the firemen lived at the firehouse in such close proximity. It was not suitable to those people at that time. This may seem strange today to those who didn't live through those years... but this was in the '50s. I think it was in the '50s that we had a black man apply for the police force. Patrolman. He was highly qualified. He was experienced and he was just what I wanted and for the first time I asked City Council to help me in a personnel matter.

Interviewer: Did you think people would be opposed to hiring a black policeman?

Freeman Funk: Yes. I thought they would. I was very jealous of my prerogatives, and I knew that once you let the fence down, the sheep are going to run all over the place. But this time I did go to City Council about it. But in the meantime, a constitutional officer working in City Hall saw this black man whom I had put on temporarily in a photography position. But it was well known he would be a policeman if a vacancy ever occurred. And he got on the phone to several councilmen and said, "Do you know what this guy Funk is doing? He's hiring a black man and going to put him on the police force." Well he didn't know I had already talked to council about it. And council said okay. Every one of them said okay.

So this SOB of a constitutional officer had his legs cut off on him-his tattling. He didn't know I had sense enough to cover myself in a situation like that. But that's the way it is with politics and these constitutional officers are the strongest politicians that you can ever imagine. More than council members would ever be. And just as snake-in-the-grass as they can be.

Interviewer: Well they have a long history of having to run for office and hold their offices in the state of Virginia, at least.

Interviewer: And now you had some other personnel experiences over the years, I'm sure.

Freeman Funk: Yes, one I recall vividly was the superintendent of public works was on vacation and a man came and wanted to work in public works. He was a welder and I thought he would be a good man. And he filled out an application and I told him I would not hire him because I didn't hire people directly-except a very limited number. The superintendent is on vacation and it looked like the end of the road there until he gets back, and I was afraid the man would go somewhere else. I said, "Look, what I will do, I will hire you on a temporary basis. Your job ends the day the superintendent gets back. If he wants you he can continue you on the payroll, if not I hope you'll understand- that's the way it is." He said, "All right I'll give it a try." Well he turned out to be a good employee. He became a good foreman, he directed his crew well and when the superintendent retired guess who got appointed? He became superintendent of public works. And I almost missed him.

Interviewer: By not putting him on temporarily?

Freeman Funk: Yes, but I still think pragmatism is essential. You have got to have a system and you have to follow it. If you don't the organization goes to pieces. People don't know what to expect. I hope I became predictable in many things, including personnel.

Interviewer: Well, let's talk about attitudes-attitudes that changed over the years of the '50s and '60s. You've had a lot of experience with attitudinal changes haven't you?

Freeman Funk: Yes, yes. Some of the experiences were related. Some of the experiences were related to federal programs. One of them was public housing. I was at a meeting at which one of the programs dealt with public housing. There just wasn't any public housing at this time.

This was a new subject to me. And to others there. They went on to describe how this would work. The federal government would own some buildings in your city. And would rent them at low rent or subsidized rent. I was horrified. I thought it would not suit the city of Fredericksburg. I knew the people that owned rental property and they were influential in the city. I didn't think they would want that kind of competition because that's what it was. I brought the subject to council, just routinely, and they sat on it very quietly. We'll just watch it and see how it applies to the city. Just what I thought would happen did. I don't think we had subsidized housing until the Rev. Mr. Lawrence Davies came to the city and maybe before he was On council, he became influential in getting some of these projects going for people who need subsidy on their rent. We still have people who need subsidy on rent and we have a lot of units. Putting public housing into a city is not always good for the city though it may be good for the people who need reduced rent. But it brings on other problems.

Interviewer: You're talking about decrease in the tax base?

Freeman Funk: No it is just the competition. If low rent is available in one part of the city it will affect the rental rates in other parts of the city ... the income of those landowners. Drive it down. I'm sure that that happened. Even minimum housing has a big impact on landlords. At one time we had no minimum housing law and the health department became active in that and they said it's not a big deal and everyone ought to have a reasonably adequate house. And within the arrangement within the house it ought to have running water in the kitchen and in the bathroom. It ought to have a bathroom. All those things. And they did a survey and there were plenty of places that did not meet even the minimum standards and council did enact minimum standards as a result of that and it impacted landlords in that they had to conform, spend money, rearrange things.

Interviewer: Upgrade?

Freeman Funk: Upgrade and some of them tore them down and they said I'm out of business. I don't want to spend money on this grade of property and we'll demolish it. That is an answer also but that doesn't help people looking for a low rent place because that low rent place is off the market. So the standards come up and go down.

Interviewer: That was a big change for government to take on the issue of minimum standards-from what you'd seen of government in the early '50s ...

Freeman Funk: Yes, zoning is much more rigid than what it used to be. And very carefully enforced now. It was sort of lax at one time. Many things get upgraded if you have the personnel to do it, and the qualified personnel. If you don't have the budget to get the qualified personnel, it doesn't get done.

Interviewer: Does this federal grant for planning that the city didn't get relate to this?

Freeman Funk: That was an interesting one. It goes back practically to the point of the first black policeman but that wasn't it. The federal government offered money to localities for planning, for mapping and that sounded mighty good to us - a little city. Not much income, we needed the mapping, the planning assistance. So we applied. Of course, federal money never comes directly to a city. It goes to a state. Then the state parcels it out. I'm sure that's the way it has to be done. We had it all set up. We knew what we wanted to do. We knew who the staff would be down in the State Planning Office in Richmond. We made our application, all approved by council. It came to the Governor's desk to sign. And he looked it over and the last paragraph was a "no discrimination clause" - the first one he had ever seen as governor and he said, "Rip (tearing sound) I'll never sign such a thing as that." So there's our planning money gone. The state did step in and help the governor out by saying. We'll find state money to do what we promised to do for you there in Fredericksburg. So we didn't suffer ... We suffered shock.

Interviewer: I guess so. It's still shocking. That would have been in the '50s?

Freeman Funk: I think so.

Interviewer: To go to the subject of planning, when you went to getting a master plan developed and you hired -- I think -- Rosser Payne was that a federal-state effort?

Freeman Funk: Yes I think it was. Most communities got a master plan in that time. Yes that's about the time that a master plan of some sort became mandatory by state law... you couldn't just wander around up here without conforming to something.

Interviewer: This relates to a subject we were talking about before we put the tape recorder on--historic preservation and tourism. When you came in the '50s the city was already very tourist oriented. How did

the city strike you? I've spoken to someone who said it was a charming colonial town. Did you see it that way? Did you see a small southern city that had a lot of things that had to be done?

Freeman Funk: Yes, essentially that describes it precisely. A lot to be done. And hardly knowing what to do. We knew the tourist dollars were good dollars. We were proud of the city and wanted people to see the city and know about it. We were happy if they could come and spend their money with the merchants and restaurateurs. But hardly knowing how to bring them in, attracting them. We began to try certain things. We developed a department- I think Pat Clark handled that at first-- as part of the chamber of commerce. We were hesitant to turn money over to the chamber of commerce without rigid control, not that we didn't trust them, but we just thought people wouldn't understand if their money was being funneled to someone else. So we did develop a staff position for tourism. We published brochures, we joined the Virginia Travel Association which was an independent member-owned organization of businesses and industries and cities, if they want to join... We got to know the people there. They would handle our brochures and they would distribute them around the state. You've got to get into something and flounder a bit before you know where you want to go. We had extensive mailing lists available to us. If someone inquired to the state of Virginia: "We're thinking of coming to the state of Virginia do you have any information on the state?" Well the state would turn the list over to us, and we'd turn out those letters saying if you're coming to Virginia you'll want to come to the Fredericksburg. It began to work. I'm sure the figures show annual increases in those years too.

Interviewer: The questionnaires I saw were taken by the League of Women Voters in 1954 and these were actually a survey of tourists who had come here and liked the attractions very much, and the preservation movement (including the organization of Historic Fredericksburg) took off from that point, as I read about it. How did the city relate to that preservation movement? These people in Historic Fredericksburg wanted to save the old buildings.

Freeman Funk: Slowly. As most government things are--slowly. Except for Central Park, that's fast. The city moves fast sometimes but not often. I'll tell you one preservation story. We were trying to build some parking lots on the eastside of Sophia Street. At one time it just sort of dropped off to the river from the sidewalk and I thought we could develop those lots from the truck loads of material we had to move to build streets and throw away when we were building the streets. Let's

throw it over there. But we had to buy the land. Those little parcels of land were owned by people. There was a single garage at street level. As little parcels came available I began to go to council and say if we can buy this one we can develop some parking there.

Interviewer: Tourist-oriented parking?

Freeman Funk: Pretty much, although downtown parking... everyone has always thought downtown never had enough parking. I challenge that. We tried to increase parking spaces without great expenditure of money. The one parcel that became available was the little house on that same extension that later became known as the silversmith house. We bought it and were on the verge of tearing it down. It was a ramshackle thing and we could park ten cars there with the lot and all. Some folks from Historic Fredericksburg came to me and said, "We don't want that torn down. It's a valuable house. What can we possibly do?" I didn't know it was valuable because I hadn't done any research on it. I said, "I can think of one thing you can possibly do. We're simply interested in 15 parking spaces. If you can buy a piece of land within a block with space to park 15 cars, I'll ask council to trade." It worked. They bought a little parcel and council let me hold off long enough on demolishing the old house. It worked. Things can work, if you're open minded and have the same objective. And we all did. The city wasn't as active in preservation as maybe it should have been. But you have to be oh so careful how you spend public money.

Interviewer: You traded them (Historic Fredericksburg) some property for the visitor center location didn't you? The bank dependency--they relocated to be the visitor center.

Freeman Funk: The city owned a little triangle of land near the Falmouth Bridge and the national bank wanted to create a drive through and it had a building in the way. A little dependency, as you said, of historic interest. It dated back to the days when the cashier had to live on the premises. When I got here the cashier wasn't living on the premises. But that building was taken apart very carefully, stored for a while until we could work out the deal, and they then built it on this triangle of land. And the city occupied as a tenant almost... for a visitors center. It was a city operated visitor center for many years. A nice location.

Interviewer: We were talking about tourism and the visitor centers and there're various visitor centers here even today. We've been talking about the one located on the Rt. 1 bypass. What happened with it?

Freeman Funk: We operated it for many years as a visitor center-- thought it was a pretty good location. It was the first thing you came to as you crossed the Falmouth Bridge. It became somewhat limited as our operation expanded. Some thought we should move the visitor center-- [it] should be downtown where the walking tours start. More room for audio visuals. They prevailed. The city moved its location down on Caroline Street. About that time someone came and wanted to buy that building (the brick dependency). I said, "Give me a letter and I will take it to council. I don't think chances are very good because this is an historic building and people's efforts went into this. I just kind of doubt it." Well, I was wrong! I was wrong. They sold it. I think it had a few caveats. It couldn't be added on to.

When 1-95 opened the state of Virginia wanted a visitor's center on the interstate. We understood the operation of a visitor center because we'd been in that business. Our chamber pushed for immediate construction and to built it here rather than north or to the south and to sweeten it we said, "We'd man it until you're ready to take it over." It was quite an experience operating a big thing like that- tourists asking the best place to stay in South Carolina or something like that. They'd ask you almost anything. And it was beneficial. We didn't fail to tell them that Fredericksburg was close by in case they wanted to stop there.

Interviewer: Did the city then move to the present site on Caroline Street?

Freeman Funk: Not because of anything that happened on 1-95. Just because of change of needs. It was a change of focus.

Interviewer: That's what I'm coming to. Where did the change of focus to make downtown into a historic shopping area come from? How did that evolve?

Freeman Funk: That came about because the mall opened up in Spotsylvania. Big stores pulled out and little stores collapsed because they were propped up by big stores Things looked pretty bleak in downtown Fredericksburg. Well, in Fredericksburg in general because the mall was in Spotsylvania County. Things were so desperate that Mayor Davies decided we ought to have that mall in the city. He didn't understand -and none of the rest of us--how big a mall was and how much parking it would take-acres and acres of parking-- and floor space. He tired to get the developer of the mall to put the mall on Maury Field.

Interviewer: It couldn't have been done there could it?

Freeman Funk: No. You couldn't have put Sears Roebuck and its parking on Maury Field. We had just no concept of the magnitude-- the scale. It was hard to envision