Warren Farmer: Part I -- 12/13/2007

By Tina Mathews, CRRL Intern, editor
Interviewed by Mark Jenkins

Interviewer: This is tape number one of our oral history interview with Warren Farmer. The date is June 11, 1998. My name is Mark Jenkins, and we are going to just leap right in, Mr. Farmer. Thank you for having me over today.

Mr. Farmer: You're quite welcome.

Interviewer: I was going to ask you about your earliest impressions of Fredericksburg, since you are a Richmond native as I understand it.

Mr. Farmer: Yes. I was born in Richmond, and I came to Fredericksburg at such an early age that I don't remember when I came. Evidently it was probably shortly before I was five years old. My father was a telegrapher with the RF&P railroad, and he was transferred to Fredericksburg from Richmond, my birthplace. My earliest recollection was a very impressive one, and I have good reason I would think for remembering it, and that was the fact that I fell out of bed and bumped my head! The second experience that I remember, and probably not very long after that, was a surgical operation which was performed at home, in my home, on the dining room table. There was no hospital in those days, and the doctors came to your house and visited you and did whatever they had to do. The two doctors were Dr. John Cole and Dr. Barney. Dr. Barney administered the anesthetic, which was chloroform, the most awful stuff you can imagine, and Dr. Cole performed the surgery. I fought furiously against them putting that mask over my face, you know, to put me to sleep, and I have no recollection what the operation was about except it had something to do with a gland in my right leg. And oddly enough, many years later, long after my mother died, my father was near dead himself, I mentioned that operation and asked him what it was all about, and he said he didn't remember my having it! [Laughter] Well, those two are the first things I remember about Fredericksburg.

Interviewer: Where did you all live?

Mr. Farmer: I spent most of my time; most of our homes were in the 700 block of Caroline Street. My mother was very curious in some

ways: she was sort of a person who couldn't stay in one place very long. We would move from the first floor to the second floor, across the street and back across the street. I once counted, and I think we had lived in something like 10 or 12 houses or apartments in 15 years. She was the sort of person who just couldn't stay still. I have often thought that my father must have had a pretty hard time putting up with that. I lived most of the time in the 700 block of Caroline Street, and then about four or five years before we moved back to Richmond my father bought a home where the present Post Office is, a little dormer-windowed house which had been built by the Brent family. The Brents were merchants who had a store on Caroline Street. And incidentally I lived next door to Mr. Jim Rowe, who was the foreman of the composing room at the Free Lance-Star. His home was a two-story brick home which was right next-door to ours.

Interviewer: All these are now gone?

Mr. Farmer: All these are now gone, yes. So, I don't know what else you might want in the way of recollections, but...

Interviewer: Oh, well, let's see. Who did you use to play with?

Mr. Farmer: Well, we had what we called a gang of boys who lived in and around the 700 block Caroline Street. One of the few still left is Ferris Wafle, who is still in Fredericksburg, he's about my age. And most of them, nearly all of them are gone. I don't know of any of the others still living. But we played baseball, we could play a baseball game in the 700 block for half an hour at a time and not be interrupted by any moving vehicle, horse or automobile, traffic was so light. There were so few automobiles in my early boyhood that they were nothing to worry about. There were mainly horses and horse-and-buggies and wagons. And I thought last night while I was making my notes, of something I have never seen mentioned before in any of the recollections of people in Fredericksburg: at times I can remember, and I can remember several of these incidents, herds of cattle being brought in, apparently from Stafford County, across the old Free Bridge and being herded to the railroad yards to be shipped somewhere. And those cattle would come, great herds of them, 40 or 50, maybe a hundred cattle, right down Caroline Street

Interviewer: Really?

Mr. Farmer: There were several incidents I was told of people who, not knowing the herds were coming, had left their doors open, and an old

lady may look up in her living room and see a cow staring her in the face, you know. [Laughter] I've never seen that mentioned by anybody else, but I remember running from a herd once, going up on the second floor and watching it pass by.

Interviewer: I don't think we've had that mentioned. You did tell me that your grandfather had something to do with Trinity Church, the building of it?

Mr. Farmer: Oh, my maternal great- grandfather was a stonemason from Connecticut. I can't recall the town in Connecticut now, I may think of it. He apparently had built a church in Roanoke, and then came to Fredericksburg to build the first Trinity Church, and brought his son with him. What the son did I do not know; the son married my grandmother, Dora Farmer, and from that union came my mother. My grandfather was a printer who worked for the old Free Lance prior to the union of the Free Lance and the Star. I was thinking of my boyhood, my childhood down on Caroline Street, and I thought of what would happen in the course of a summer day: you might wake up and go outside and see the horse-drawn ice wagon pass by. My mother would tell me to tell the driver she wanted 25 to 30 pounds office; that would be brought inside the house and put in the refrigerator. There were no electric refrigerators to speak of in those days. We used to ride on the back, a step that hung down from the back of the wagon, we used to ride on that and snitch ice from the wagon. Also in the course of a day you might see something I haven't seen for many, many years: I don't know if they were local men, apparently they were from out of town and would come through: they were umbrella repairmen, who would fix your umbrellas. I've seen them in European cities, even at this late date. And then every now and then would come an organ grinder, who would have his organ with his monkey, and he would go up and down the street and people would throw coins to him.

Interviewer: Did he actually have a monkey?

Mr. Farmer: Oh, yes, he had a monkey. The monkey was great fun. Let's see what else we have here. Oh, on Sophia Street -- of course we played all over the neighborhood, four or five blocks in each direction. Didn't wander too far from the home as a small boy. On Sophia Street was something I've heard very few people mention before: a slaughterhouse at the foot of Amelia Street, just off towards the river from Sophia. I don't know who ran it, but I used to see people go there who apparently had no reason to go. They would stay for a few

minutes and then come out, and once I asked why those people went in the place, and I was told that they were the victims of tuberculosis and they drank the raw blood from the slaughtered animals because they thought that would help cure their tuberculosis.

Interviewer: They seriously did that? They weren't putting you on by telling you that?

Mr. Farmer: Oh, no, no.

Interviewer: Were you in town during the First World War?

Mr. Farmer: Oh, yes. I was born in 1907, and I came to Fredericksburg apparently around 1910 or 1911, I've gathered. Oh yes, I used to watch the -- by 1914 when the war began, Fredericksburg had a National Guard infantry company known as Company K. I used to watch them drill. And they also went off to, and served, in France during World War One. By 1914 1 was seven; by 1917 1 was ten years old when this country went in the war. And I was so eager to get in it that I could hardly hold myself together! Every kid wanted to get in the war, you know. But I also remember when the war was over one of the first men to come back lived in my block. I can't remember his name now, I think it was Morris, and we all gathered around to hear of his experiences. Somebody asked him if he was ever scared when he was in battle? He said, no, he wasn't scared. And so some years later I mentioned that to Captain Popham, a Marine, I told him what this man had said. He said, "Well, he was either a damn fool or a damn liar, I don't know which!" [Laughter] But, I saw my first airplane during World War I: I was in the back yard of my home at 708 or 712 Caroline Street, and I looked up and saw this plane overhead, and I thought it was a German bomber! And I was terrified and ran in the house and told my mother what I had seen. And she said, no, she didn't think it was a German bomber. [Laughter]

Interviewer: At least you knew it was an airplane, that there were such things. Do you recall the influenza epidemic of 1918?

Mr. Farmer: The flu? Oh, it was pretty horrible. I remember, well, Dr. Cole told me that my father was the first person that he treated in Fredericksburg for flu. He was very ill; and I had flu, I remember the day I had it: we were playing in what we called the jail alley, the alley that ran between George and Hanover Streets, and suddenly I just felt very faint and weak, and I went home and I was in bed for several weeks. But I don't remember so much about the people in the town

being ill, but there must have been many of them. But I remember the coffins being brought over from Quantico and stacked up along the railroad tracks, the train then ran through level with the ground before the overpass, and evidently they were brought here to be transferred to other places. That was a very bad situation, the flu. Dr. Cole, as far as I know, was the only doctor left in Fredericksburg during it, he nearly worked himself to death, you know. Of course, there'd be nothing to do but go to bed and stay there; they didn't have any medications for it.

Interviewer: I guess you just worry about everybody all the time.

Mr. Farmer: I noticed that Lem Houston said in his interview that he had worked at Quantico during the war. I didn't work over there, but you know Quantico came into existence because of World War I. The Marine Corps established that base. And after the war, or even during the war, but mainly after the war, to my recollection, there still were not enough quarters there for the officers, and the officers, especially the young lieutenants, would live in Fredericksburg, and they'd commute back and forth by train. And also, there was no school for the children, and the children came to Fredericksburg by train every morning and went back to Quantico in the afternoon. That went on for many, many years. You asked me once about my recollections of the RF&P Railroad? Well, a good many members of my family, both in Fredericksburg and Richmond, were employed by the RF&P Railroad in one way or another over the years. The railroad was an important economic factor in Fredericksburg's life, I think, so many men were employed by the railroad. I think I also mentioned to you the old "accommodation train" which the railroad used to take its employees to and from work. We're thinking now of the day before the automobile when you just didn't hop in a vehicle and drive somewhere. In those days you went by train if you went any distance, and the "accommodation trains" would take the employees up and down the line to and from work every morning and every afternoon.

Interviewer: Would they ride the mainline?

Mr. Farmer: The mainline, oh yeah.

Interviewer: So they would be taking up space on a crowded route?

Mr. Farmer: How's that? Oh, you mean on the -- no, these were special trains run mainly for the employees. In other words, an employee in Fredericksburg who worked in Quantico, he had no way of

getting to Quantico except by train. Or if he worked in Ashland or someplace like that: the railroads, the trains would start in Richmond and come to Fredericksburg, and then go on, and go in opposite directions both ways. I used to ride one of the trains when I was working for the railroad many years later.

Interviewer: Did they load freight at Fredericksburg? Or was it merely a through-station?

Mr. Farmer: Freight? There was a freight station.

Interviewer: At Fredericksburg?

Mr. Farmer: Oh, yes -- not the present one you're thinking of. There was a freight station just south of what is now the passenger station. Are you familiar with that?

Interviewer- Yes sir, every morning I'm there.

Mr. Farmer: Oh, yes, that was a busy place, the freight yards. And trains were very frequent in those days, I mean people, to get from one place to another you had to go by train. So I suppose, I'd just make a guess that there were eight or ten passenger trains a day, at least, running to and from Fredericksburg on the RF&P, and then of course the RF&P tracks were leased to the other lines who used them for their trains going from north to south. I don't know, I think the Southern had its own tracks, but other railroads used the RF&P.

Interviewer: These were the days of the old steam engines, weren't they? The steam locomotives?

Mr. Farmer: Oh, yes, the steam locomotives, yes! They made a big noise. One of the things you used to hear, the last thing at night, would be the toot of the what we called the midnight freight, going north. Regularly scheduled freight trips, you know: you would hear that. I think the engineer knew that was expected: he would just sound off as he went across the bridge. [Laughter] So that's about as much as I know about the railroad.

Interviewer: But you remember when they raised the grade from the street level to ... ?

Mr. Farmer: Yes. That was completed I think in 1927. Prior to that the railroad ran flush with the streets. But there had been a flood, the

flood of...I've forgotten what year. But anyway it very much endangered the bridge, so the RF&P built a new bridge at a higher level, which meant that they had to have a higher level of the track going through the town. Prior to that, at the street-level crossings -- Caroline Street, Princess Anne Street, and Charles Street -- each crossing at each street had a watchman, and the gates were lifted to stop the pedestrians and the automobiles or the horses and wagons from crossing. There was a gateman there, he would lower the gate when the train was coming so that the traffic would stop. Either that or he'd get out with a sign and hold it up with his hand and you could see "Stop, a train is coming", you know. [Laughter] But at Caroline and Princess Anne particularly I remember, there were gates: gates were lowered across the street to prevent traffic moving across the tracks when the train was in or coming or going. It was a long time ago.

Interviewer: Oh, I'm amazed. You mentioned horses and wagons: do you remember any wagon-yards? Yards where they parked the wagons?

Mr. Farmer: Yes, there was one where the -- I think it was Harris's Wagon Yard -- which block was that? Which block is the Free Lance-Star building?

Interviewer: The new one?

Mr. Farmer: Yeah, it's the block downtown from that, where the building next door to the Free Lance-Star is. That was Harris's Wagon Yard, and until the building which is now in that block -- there was also a grocery store there run by a man named Robert Harris, who had inherited that from his father, I guess. The people used to come in, the farmers would come in and park their wagons and stable their horses there, and do their shopping, probably once a week or once every two weeks. And the wives would do whatever they had to do, and they'd go back and hitch up again and go back home. Sometimes they stayed overnight in the old hotels. That's the only one I have any recollection of, but there must have been, I know there were others, but I don't remember where they were before my time.

Interviewer: Did you yourself ever get out into the countryside?

Mr. Farmer: Oh, yes, my grandmother's sister, Emma Miller, used to come to Fredericksburg by train, and she had a daughter who lived in Spotsylvania County at a place which I do not now recall its exact

location: it was out what is now Route 3, beyond that, which was of course all dirt road in those days.

Interviewer: [Laughter] How things have changed!

Mr. Farmer: Yeah! We'd get in the wagon drawn by a horse and ride out there and spend the day, and she would see her daughter. I think sometimes we left her, but would go back and pick her up. But I didn't see much of the country. We used to walk, take walks: a favorite walk in those days was to cross the Free Bridge and then up the River Road to Falmouth and back. On a weekend it'd just be dozens of people doing that, you know. I even did that many years later at the end of a hard day at the Free Lance-Star when, sitting down and concentrating on my work, I'd get out and walk across the bridge up to Falmouth. It's difficult for people today to understand that you just didn't hop in an automobile and go, you know. Very few people had horses, and wherever you went you had to walk. For instance: in school, when I was in high school, there was no cafeteria. You either took a brown bag of lunch with you or you walked home. So living in the 600 block of Princess Anne Street at that time, my sister and I -- I know I did most of the time -- I walked back home. We had an hour for lunch from school: I would walk home and eat lunch and go back. Now there's cafeterias, you know.

Interviewer: Did you all have your big meal in the middle of the day?

Mr. Farmer: As I recall, mainly it was that, yes. I think most people did. I've never known exactly why that was, but I think it was true. They called it dinner. Dinner today is evening, but in my day dinner was the mid-day meal, and the principal meal for most people, I think. Some of the families, the more affluent people, didn't need the nourishment, maybe, to keep them going in the middle of the day! (Laughter]

Interviewer: Well, speaking about school: when you were in high school, that was when the building was new?

Mr. Farmer: I entered what is now called the Maury building, Maury school building, it was then Fredericksburg High School, the year it was opened. I was in the seventh grade that year, but they moved the seventh grade and the high school, four years of high school, to that Maury school. So I was there from the opening day. Apparently it had been, the building was built on the site of a former potters' field,

because there were skeletons around: I had a skull for many years after that I had picked up there.

Interviewer: You did? Just playing in the playground or something? Oh Lord!

Mr. Farmer: [laughing] Oh, yes!

Interviewer: Well, how did that new building strike you all?

Mr. Farmer: How did it strike us? Oh, well, it was a very imposing building, I mean prior to that I don't know what the high school -- the high school skipped and jumped around from one place to another. It used to be in the old Maury Hotel, and it was this place and that place. Public education was a comparatively rare thing in my childhood. So many people that I knew, the older people in my early days, had gone to private schools in Fredericksburg. There were several: Miss Mander, and ... oh, I can't recall the name of the people, but there were three or four private schools in Fredericksburg in those days. Not many people went to college, very few went to college. You may know that what is now Mary Washington College began as what is called the State Normal School to educate and prepare teachers for this great mass of people who were coming up to be educated who had never been educated before. Suddenly public education was something that was sprung on the public, and there were no teachers. The college gave a two-year certificate for teachers. And there used to be great fun made of it that they were taught how to teach but not what to teach! I mean, they got very little schooling beside the mechanics of teaching.

Interviewer: Let's talk about the 1926 football team.

Mr. Farmer: Well, that was for its day a very unusual football team. Football was a comparatively new sport, I mean it hadn't been going on, been in business so to speak, but a comparatively few years

Interviewer: Let me stop the tape, we are about to run out of this side.

Pause

Interviewer: We're on side two of the tape, and we're talking about the 1926 football team.

Mr. Farmer: Well, a most unusual team for Fredericksburg. Fredericksburg had high school football teams for, as far as I know, maybe five or six years, and none had ever been truly victorious teams. They'd won a few games, but most of the time they lost more games than they won. But this team was made up of a bunch of hefty souls. I don't know how we got them together, it was just fate, I suppose. We had a line where, I guess some of them weighed 180 pounds, which was pretty heavy for a high school team in those days. It was just a unique congregation that, as I say, was brought together by fate and the fact that for the first time we had a very good coach. Coaches were not thought of any importance, nor were sports thought of any importance in schools in those days. But we had a man named Ted Woodson, who came from Ohio, and he was not only athletic director but he also taught. I don't remember what he taught. But he gave a great deal of time to the team and taught us things, tactics that we had never known before. The result was we went through the 1926 regular season, won every game, and were not scored on. Kept every opponent scoreless. That won us the district championship, which was in northern Virginia, which included Alexandria, our greatest enemy. We had never beaten Alexandria before, but we beat Alexandria that year. I played quarterback on the football team.

Interviewer: You had to play two ways, didn't you?

Mr. Farmer: Yes. I weighed 150 pounds and my legs were not very heavily coated with muscles, so the coach after the first game, which we played against the sailors at Dahlgren, the Navy team, he said, "You are the only quarterback I've got, and you stop running with the ball. I don't want you to break your leg, and I won't have a quarterback." Anyway, we went through the season undefeated, unscored on, and I think that made the boys feel a little bit too cocky, too self-assured. So our next game was with, I suppose the eastern Virginia championship, against the south Norfolk team. We went to south Norfolk and were beaten 39 to 0!

Interviewer: Got your comeuppance.

Mr. Farmer: Yes, the boys were just too cocksure, you know. But, I will add this: that game was witnessed by a sailor from Fredericksburg who was stationed in Norfolk and heard about the game, and he watched it. He told me later that he identified a number of former United States Naval Academy players who were stationed in Norfolk, playing on that south Norfolk high school football team. Were run in as ringers. Whether that's true or not, he told me that several times over

the years, he said he knew he had seen them. But it was one whale of a football game. They really beat us. I had never seen a high school football team like that before. Anyway oh, there were so few boys to make up a varsity squad in those days, especially small town schools, that when you went in a game, I played every minute of every football game during the regular season. There were very few substitutions. I played in the post season game, the last game of the year, with the Dahlgren Navy team again, the game which we won, and in that game I suffered a fractured nib and was taken out. That was the only game, which I did not play every minute. And practically everybody else did: we had what we called a "pony backfield" -

Interviewer: What does that mean?

Mr. Farmer: They didn't play very much. But we played offense and defense.

Interviewer: What position on defense did you play?

Mr. Farmer: Well, as quarterback I played safety. The line of that team was so strong that I think the longest gain ever made through the line by any team, even in south Norfolk, was four yards. The gains were made around the ends, end sweeps, that's how the Norfolk team really beat us. There was not a great deal of passing in those days. We did a lot of passing, that's what won the games for us. Coach Woodson was a strong believer in passing, and that was just coming into its own in those days. Your cousin Carter Rowe was two years ahead of me, he played quarterback and he did some passing too, but passing was rather rare in those days. They used to just bang one another, go through the line, you know.

Interviewer: You were ahead of your time. The forward pass revolutionized football.

Mr. Farmer: Yes.

[A momentary pause]

Mr. Farmer: Dr. Carter Rowe's brother Fitzhugh was my great friend, the younger one. Fitz was killed in an automobile accident. I used to ride with him, I'd be -- he was a pretty reckless driver.

Interviewer: Well, you're lucky you weren't with him.

Mr. Farmer: I wasn't with him the night he was killed. He was killed in a one-car crash, I've forgotten exactly how it happened. On Princess Anne Street, just short of the Falmouth Bridge.

Interviewer: That was not built up out there, was it?

Mr. Farmer: Oh, yes, it was built up. Not as heavily as it is today, no, no. In my early, early years, Caroline Street was -- when you came across Falmouth Bridge you made a left turn, going south, and went down Caroline. That was United States Highway One. And it was like that for many, many years. Of course, one of the ... has anybody in your interviews mentioned the floating theater?

Interviewer: Maybe Sidney Armstrong, I can't remember.

Mr. Farmer: Sidney might, yes, he might have. It was a showboat, a theater that was on sort of a flatboat that came up the Rappahannock River every year, usually in the month of July, and would tie up at the foot of Charlotte Street most of the time. And there would be a play every night for seven nights, a different one. The Adams family owned the boat and were the theater company. And they had a great repertoire of all sorts of plays, they'd give you a different play.

Interviewer: What, did the audience stay on shore?

Mr. Farmer: No, the audience got on. I can't remember its dimensions, but it was a pretty good sized boat. That was one of the great entertainments, of course the other entertainment was the Baron's Band that played in the park, you know, in the summertime. And the occasional minstrels and shows that would come through and played at the Opera House. But there was very little in the way of entertainment in my early days in Fredericksburg. As a matter of fact, Fredericksburg was a – up until comparatively recent years -- a very dull place to live. [Laughter] Very dull! There wasn't very much to do, you know. I hear people complaining today, kids, something for kids to do, you know. My heavens! Think of all the things they have do to that we didn't have to do. You made your own amusements, and you'll find out if you're driven to it, you can, you know, if you get a little imagination.

Interviewer: When you all started to get thirteen or fourteen years old, though, and you start looking for amusement that sometimes may have led to trouble.

Mr. Farmer: That's true, yes. But I think what you are insinuating! [Laughter] We had gangs of boys, but except for maybe an occasional turning over a tombstone in the cemetery or something, nothing violent or destructive was done, as well as I recall. I know we didn't, my particular group of people didn't do things like that. I'm not trying to bill ourselves as any goody-goodies or something like that, you know, but ... And crime in Fredericksburg was awfully, awfully rare. I mean, drunk and disorderly, that was a standard one, petty thievery that was about the only thing. And a murder was such a rare thing that it was really headline material. Now they just run them off as part of the day's work, you know. I think the police force when I was a kid probably had ... I don't remember but two policemen, but there may have been more. They'd walk up and down the streets... The first motorized officer in Fredericksburg was a retired Marine hired by the city, a motorcycle cop, and he was killed coming down Lee Hill on Lafayette Boulevard: he passed a car on the narrow road going downhill; another car was coming up the hill. And as far as I know, and I think I'm correct in this: the first auto fatality in Fredericksburg was a man named Jim Calamos, a Greek immigrant, who ran a confectionery store at the corner of Caroline and Lafayette Boulevard, which is now a vacant lot. Jim Calamos had gone to Warsaw in Richmond County to see the White Sox baseball team play Warsaw, great rivals in those days. And on the way back his car ran off the road in what we called Judyville Lane, which is on Route 3 just on the edge of, well approximately where the Renaissance event is, very close to that: there's a long straight-away there. That's the first fatality that I remember. It was a great shock to the community.

Interviewer: He couldn't have been going more than 40 miles per hour or something.

Mr. Farmer: I don't know, we used to, on Sundays -- the family of Hallbergs lived in Fredericksburg, Dick Hallberg and I were great friends, and on Sundays his father would let him -- we were all teenagers – would let him, and you didn't need a drivers' license in those days, would let him have the Studebaker. And four or five of us would get in it and drive out to Five Mile Fork. Dirt road, nothing but farmland, and on the way back he would open it up to let it go as fast as it would go: it was 50 miles an hour. That was the fastest that that car would go.

Interviewer: And that was state of the art, probably, Studebaker.

Mr. Farmer: Yes. That was a good car.

Interviewer: When did cars start appearing in some numbers?

Mr. Farmer: Let's see, I don't know exactly, but the first car that I rode in, the first automobile, was a truck which was used as a delivery truck by Burruss's Grocery Store, which was on the even-numbered side of the 800 block of Caroline Street. I can smell the coffee now being ground there: gee, what a beautiful smell that was! They had a young man who drove the truck, made the deliveries for them, named Dick Green, who afterwards became a famous bootlegger. That was the first vehicle I ever rode in. And one day we had gone across the river and down what is now Route 3 about two or three miles, and on the way back I was eating an apple, and a piece of the skin of the apple got stuck in my throat, and I was choking to death. And Dick saw what was happening and whacked me on the back, and up came the skin! That was in the early 1920s. The first car my father bought was sometime prior to 1925, about 1923: it was a Ford -- nearly everything was a Ford, when Henry began making those tin lizzies, you know that's when really the proliferation of the automobile began. Prior to that there were very few. I think the records show that Mr. Kishpaugh, Bob Kishpaugh, had the first automobile in Fredericksburg. But ours was a Ford, you had to crank it, you know.

Interviewer: Did he make you do it?

Mr. Farmer: Yes, yes. And I don't know what tires were made of, but no matter where you went you had to get out and fix a flat tire: they picked up nails; they blew up, and were an awful, awful nuisance for many, many years. I would say sometime between the very late '20s that the automobile became a numerous thing.

Interviewer: Then they had to start paving streets and things.

Mr. Farmer: Well, Caroline in my boyhood days was a cobblestone street, and riding over that cobblestone in an automobile was, well [Laughter]. But another thing was, before the automobile became so numerous and horses were still numerous, it was rather common to see what they called runaway horses: a horse would get scared of certain things and run and you couldn't stop it, you know. I remember now seeing men run out in the street to try to stop one.

Interviewer: To grab the bridle or something?

Mr. Farmer: And sometimes you could and sometimes you couldn't: there may be a woman or a child in that buggy. The buggy was light,

you know, and would bounce all around, you could be thrown. That was the way you were hurt in the horse and buggy age, by runaways. And I suppose when automobiles came along, you know, you see old pictures of the horses rearing up, you know?

Interviewer: Right! [Laughter]

Mr. Farmer: Also in my childhood, before the automobile was so numerous and the horse was, there were harness shops: there were two harness shops on the odd-number side of the 800 block of Caroline Street. One of them was run by a Mr. Donahoe, and the other one by a Mr. Genther. And Mr. Donahoe, the saddles were put on sawhorses they call them, and Mr. Donahoe would let us come in and pretend we were riding a horse: we'd jump on a saddle and go up and down and up and down -- but Mr. Genther didn't allow that, so we didn't ride his horses. [Laughter] Oh, that was amusing!

Interviewer: How about Confederate Memorial Day or any of the old veterans?

Mr. Farmer: Well, now that was always quite an occasion. We used to have to dress just as if you were going to Sunday school, you know. The girls and boys both dressed and we would line up at school, which is now the library building, the old elementary school, and march to the cemetery, and I think we carried small Confederate flags, and we would sing the "Bonnie Blue Flag". You ever hear the "Bonnie Blue Flag?"

Interviewer: Oh, sure, yes indeed.

Mr. Farmer: "We are a band of brothers, and native to the soil. Fighting for our liberty with treasure, blood, and toil..."And march to the cemetery and go through the edge of town

Interviewer: And so you remember some of the old veterans?

Mr. Farmer: Yes. I remember reading Lem's interview: Lem didn't remember but two. I don't remember the names of many of them, but when I lived in the 700 block of Caroline Street, on the corner, a three story brick building, lived a Major Ruggles, who was a Confederate veteran. He was a crotchety old fellow, and he used to come out and drive me away if I skated by his place. He didn't want any noises, he didn't like noises. No, he lived there for many, many years. I can't remember his first name, but that doesn't matter. I saw any number

of veterans: I remember a Confederate reunion being held in Fredericksburg, a Confederate reunion of which I don't remember the year -- I was awfully young -- but I remember the veterans marching. And I also remember a parade of Ku Klux Klan.

Interviewer: Oh, you do?

Mr. Farmer: Yes, never but once. And I always understood that Dr. Cassidy, a druggist, whose son worked for the Free Lance-Star and is still living -- I doubt if he would know this -- I understood, I may be wrong, that Dr. Cassidy was one of the promoters of it. He had a pharmacy at Caroline and Charlotte Streets, which is now a vacant lot, I believe. Opposite The Chimneys, the restaurant there. But anyway, I remember the Klansmen walking, parading, up Caroline Street. But I think it was a very short-lived thing. The Klan was never, never strong in Fredericksburg.

Interviewer: I remember reading about that in Kishpaugh's little book, a little chronology of 1894-1944 Fredericksburg events.

Mr. Farmer: The organization never got a good foothold in Fredericksburg, I don't think. I never heard of it after that. I'm sure there must have been a few people who would retain their membership, but I don't know. I don't even know that Dr. Cassidy was really one, but I heard the talk at the time. He had a son who died of, what was the disease? They'd stick nails in their foot and it would become infected.

Interviewer: Tetanus.

Mr. Farmer: Well, yes, it was tetanus. It was called something else.

Interviewer: Lockjaw.

Mr. Farmer: Lockjaw. And the jaws did lock.

Interviewer: Oh, did they?

Mr. Farmer: Yes, they did. They couldn't open their mouth. He had a son who died of that. And I remember the first time I heard of penicillin: Dr. Blight Harrison came in the Free Lance Star Office one day -- this was during World War II I think -- and said, "Why don't you people keep up with the times? We got a new medicine; you've never heard of it, I've never seen you mention it. It's called penicillin."

[Laughter at the quaint Pronunciation] He said, "We got a boy, first time in the history of Fredericksburg, we got a boy in the hospital with lockjaw and this penicillin has cured him." That was the first time I ever heard of penicillin. And he never changed his pronunciation of penicillin, from penicillin to penicillin; he went to his grave with the former. Poor Dr.Harrison, he was a great friend of mine: he had a heart condition, and when he had to go out in the country he would often stop by and ask me to ride with him, just in case something happened. We would go especially down into King George County.

Interviewer: How about the old fairgrounds?

Mr. Farmer: Well, the old fairgrounds was -- the Fredericksburg fair was really a gala, quite an event in the town's yearly program. It lasted a week, and people came from all over because there was nothing else to do, you know. Country people would come to town and stay for two or three days. There were parades, and of course it was fenced-in grounds and they had a racetrack, and it had a carnival, and everybody who could go went. I never had enough money to pay my admission fee so I would climb over the fence. [Laughter] I got caught once and was taken back to the admission and the quarter I had to spend I had to pay as admission, so I went in without any spending money. But they had horse races which were wonderful to watch, and -- oh, they were great times! My mother would give me 25 cents to go to the fair, and if I climbed over the fence and didn't spend it for admission, I could buy a hot dog or a hamburger for a nickel, I could go in a couple of the sideshows for a nickel, I could ride the Ferris wheel for a nickel, I could ride the merry-go round for a nickel, and have a ball for 25 cents! Sometimes if they had -- well, circuses would come to town every now and then. And I used to get admission there by watering the elephants and that sort of thing.

Interviewer: Oh, you did?

Mr. Farmer: Yes.

Interviewer: You didn't have to be a specialist?

Mr. Farmer: Earlier, at one time we lived on Wolfe Street, and I can't remember which block that was. It was probably the 400 or 500 block, the house is still there. And that’s when I became aware of the livestock. I hadn't started school when we lived there, I was too young for school, but I remember the people in that block had a pigpen. And in October they slaughtered the pigs.

Interviewer: That's in the city?

Mr. Farmer: In the city. And everybody, practically -- I imagine probably 75 per cent of the people had chickens in their backyard. Everybody had a chicken. And they slaughtered the livestock, the pigs. In those days you didn't go to the supermarket and buy a dressed fowl, you had to go to the store and buy a live chicken, take it home, cut the head off or twist it, dress J it, and cook it. There was a lady who lived in the 700 block of Caroline Street named Mrs. Cossey, whose husband had come from Rochester, the couple had come from Rochester, New York. Mr. Cossey was a bookkeeper for the Farmers Creamery. Mrs. Cossey had the worst case of asthma I've ever encountered. She lived on the third floor of the building, and on the first floor I could hear her trying to breathe. Just trying desperately to breathe. They eventually had to leave; this climate was something she just couldn't endure. And they went to New Mexico. But anyway, Mrs. Cossey could not bring herself to kill a chicken. She paid me 25 cents to do it for her. So every Saturday -- of course, it's true that people had chicken every Sunday, I can assure you -- every (Sunday).