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

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

Interviewer: All right. You were saying you had just come back from Annapolis.

Mr. Farmer: I had been sent to Annapolis, and to other places too, but Annapolis was I think very important in laying the groundwork for the local organization, though I can't remember the details now. But that was quite a big meeting in St. George's Church basement after I came back from Annapolis. The people had a good idea of exactly what they wanted. I mean, up to that time it had been rather vague, but now they could see just what they wanted. I don't want to forget among the people who were pretty darn important in the organization of HFFI was Laurence Hooes, who the great-great-great grandson of President Monroe. Laurence had some personal traits, which were pretty hard to take at times [chuckling], but he had the vision and the knowledge and the desire to keep Fredericksburg, or preserve what we had. You can't say "keep it as it was", because everything has got to change, you know, but to change in a way that will keep some of the best and get rid of some of the worst, so to speak. After that -- I can't remember the year of that meeting.

Interviewer: 1955.

Mr. Farmer: '55 that was the year I left the chamber of commerce. And that was one of my last contributions to HFFI, I think, in the organizational sense.

Interviewer: You show up in the old scrapbooks for a few more years, up to about'58 or'60. Elected as a vice-president once, or something.

Mr. Farmer: I was? Well, I may have been. [Laughter] But actually I couldn't have been very active because I was trying to get a new business started: I'd gone in the securities business, and that took all of my time. I gradually drifted away from "active" activity in the preservation field.

Interviewer: Do you remember in the very early days the influence of the college seems to have been important: there was Dr. Oscar Darter, and the Hewetsons, and the Graveses.

Mr. Farmer: Oh, yes. That reminds me: my first recollection of the college: I was such a little boy, evidently it was just after the United States entered World War I. I followed Company K, the local National Guard infantry Outfit, from the armory what we called the armory then, the drill room, in the courthouse building up to Washington Avenue where they drilled in the open. And I don't know what time we left the Courthouse, but they drilled until it got dark. And I looked across Washington Avenue and saw the lights of the college. And I didn't know what it was. I got interested in that or something else, and when I turned to look around, the soldiers were gone. And I was lost and I didn't know how to get back home. Imagine that, not knowing how to get back home in Fredericksburg! I don't remember how I got home but I did, but I remember being terrified. [Chuckling] Now, of course, I had several experiences with the college that were both pleasant and unpleasant. I am ashamed to admit it, but I was on the college blacklist for 20 years. I was not allowed to participate in any social events because I had been a very naughty boy earlier. [Mutual laughter]

Interviewer: Who else was on this blacklist? [Laughing]

Mr. Farmer: Well, I had an assistant naughty boy with me. I can't remember the year, but it was the first year that the college enrollment was greater than the dormitory space. So they had to board some girls in town. And my friend, close friend and companion, Emmett "Skeeter" Thompson, and I found out that two girls were being housed at the home of Mrs. Tompkins at Prince Edward and Amelia Street. So one evening in October, I think it was, with snow on the ground, Skeeter and I went up and called on the girls, introduced ourselves. And asked them if they would like to go down to a restaurant and have a Coca-Cola with us. Which they did, and both girls were named Virginia: their first names were Virginia, I don't remember their last names. When we came back, the Dean of Women, Mrs. Bushnell, was seated on the front porch of Mrs. Tompkins' home. And if I remember correctly, both girls were expelled. Mrs. Bushnell was what you might call a benevolent martinet. My understanding was that the educational system in Virginia had been a very poor thing and suddenly as the population grew and public education came into its own, they had to have teachers. So they formed four teachers colleges in Virginia. Maybe I'm talking too much about this. Anyway, these girls would come in from country homes and poor homes, and were probably lacking in some of the social graces, we could say, and Mrs. Bushnell wanted to teach them the social graces, which they could pass on to their students, I suppose. And also teach them how to

teach. So she was very, very strict, and I mean unrelentingly strict: she would just, well, when you committed a wrong, that was wrong and you left. Anyway, I was put on the blacklist: I could have nothing to do with any social events at Mary Washington College. Not that there were very many in those days. My friend Skeeter went to Mrs. Bushnell, and although he didn't tell me I can imagine that he got down on his knees and prayed for her forgiveness. And she let him back into the fold. Took him back in the fold. [The interviewer is convulsed with laughter] I couldn't bring myself to do that, so I was blacklisted for almost twenty years, and finally -- I can't remember, 20 years later at least – a student at the college, a local girl, Virginia Elmer, wanted to ask me to take her to one of the college dances. And she put my name on the list for Mrs. Bushnell's perusal, and Virginia was notified that Warren Farmer was on the blacklist and had been on the blacklist for a long time. So Virginia went to Mrs. Bushnell and said something like this, or words to the effect, "Mrs. Bushnell, Warren had been on the blacklist for 20 years. Don't you think it's time you might put him back on the white list or whatever you call it?" [laughter] And Mrs. Bushnell did relent, and I took Virginia to the dance. I never had an opportunity to thank Mrs. Bushnell, nor did she have an opportunity to show me how graceful and understanding she was.

Interviewer: Doubtless you were the perfect gentleman.

Mr. Farmer: Yes. But I had another experience at the college, which Mrs. Bushnell did not find out about. Fredericksburg High School in those days did not have a gymnasium. For basketball we were allowed to use the college gymnasium one night a week. And the group of us would get together and walk from our homes, or meet somewhere, and go out to the college and practice basketball, and walk back. Well, it couldn't have been but so much of a basketball team, but anyway we were one.

Interviewer: Where did you play your games?

Mr. Farmer: In the college.

Interviewer: And you only practiced one night a week?

Mr. Farmer: One night a week, yes. They didn't build a gym at James Monroe until many years after that. I was working for the Free Lance-Star when that gym was built. I'm talking about the mid- 1920s. Anyway, among the outstanding athletes -- and a good-looking young lady -- at Mary Washington College was a girl named Jessie Squire,

from Hampton, Virginia. I always admired her from a distance. She was a senior and I was a senior in high school. Anyway, on the night before graduation and I can't remember the year, a friend of mine named Val Daniel, came to me and said, "I want to invite you to go out with me tonight. I've been asked by a college girl to bring you along." So we drove to the back of the dormitory off Sunken Road, the first off-campus dormitory. Can't remember the name now. Anyway, we drove up into the back, and the two girls jumped out of the window in the back. Now remember these girls were going to receive their diploma the next day.

Interviewer: And could have been expelled.

Mr. Farmer: And would have been expelled. Anyway, we went off on a little smooching expedition, that's all it was, a smooching expedition. And Mrs. Bushnell never heard of that, nor did I tell her of that, either. [Laughter] Mary Washington College has always been a very important part of Fredericksburg life. I've known a great many of the people. But it was the same situation With Mary Washington as it was in most small towns, I think: the town and gown did not quite merge. You would think it would, I have never quite known why it except that I think that it is possible -- it could be in my case, too -- that people are a little self-conscious in the presence of professors who are so expert or have such expertise in certain things. You don't know how to talk to them, you know, you're a little self-conscious about it. Of course, they are just human beings, you can talk to them about anything, but you don't think about that. Anyway, I've had a great deal to do with Mary Washington College. They used to give the girls a ride back and forth to downtown, and finally that had to stop because some of them were not simply going from downtown to the college: they were going from downtown to some other place. [Laughter] And so the college did something about that. And then there was a time when they used to walk downtown by themselves. Later, after the girls began to misbehave a little bit, they had to go in pairs, no less than a pair or in a small group. And then several places nearby -- well, the boys would take them to places and restaurants and get beer and things like that. And these places were off-limits. I can't remember the names of some of them. Well ...

Interviewer: I have one more preservation question. Did you serve briefly on the Committee for the Jamestown Festival?

Mr. Farmer: Jamestown? No, I had nothing to with that.

Interviewer: Somewhere I thought you rode the Discovery up to Fredericksburg.

Mr. Farmer: Yes. That was the little replica of the ship. The Navy gave us a little boat, what was the name of it?

Interviewer: Discovery.

Mr. Farmer: Oh, yes! I rode that from where, Tappahannock or some place?

Interviewer: Yes.

Mr. Farmer: Yes, we got aboard at Port Royal or Tappahannock, I've forgotten which, and rode up the river. But that was about the only part I had in the Jamestown festival. We used to work with Williamsburg on promotional things. I knew a great many Williamsburg people, Colonial Williamsburg people, but I had nothing to do with it aside from bringing that up, and it was a very interesting little ship: a lot of people went to see it. Incredible to think that thing could have crossed the Atlantic Ocean, you know. I used to work on ships: I was a deck boy on freighters. And a 42, 43 ton freighter, the S.S. Hoxley [sic] out of Baltimore, which was I would say darn near a hundred times bigger than that little thing that came across! It wasn't much bigger than that sofa over there, our living room sofa. It must have bounced around like a cork.

Interviewer: Everybody just sandwiched in there.

Mr. Farmer: Yes. In those days I don't know if this would be of much interest to you, it may be a little bit -- in those days young men, like myself, could go to Baltimore and get a job on a ship for the simple reason that the unions had not tied things up so that you had to be a union member in order to get a job. I got a job first on the S.S. Hoxey [sic], and I was asked something like this, "Now if you get a job, you're not a college boy, are you?" And you'd say, "Oh, no, no. I want to go to sea as a livelihood." "Okay, because you'd be taking someone's job away from them, you know." So we'd get jobs that way, and some of the guys, William Howard, worked around the world and became an able-bodied seaman. My trips were just to the British Isles -- or my trip, I didn't really make but one trip. But another thing which goes along about that time: the Citizens Military Training Camps. After World War One, the United States realized that it had been woefully unprepared for foreign war, and so the country began to

lay the groundwork for a military force to be in some form of readiness for a future time, although they didn't know what the future would be. So they began to open in every state a Citizens Military Training Camp where high school boys of a certain age -- you didn't have to go to high school but you had to be of high school age -- could go and be trained once a month for four years. Usually the month of July, hot as bloody hell. I went to CMTC camps at Fort Eustis, Virginia, and it was a fascinating experience. I was in Company E, 34th Infantry. Company E was a machine-gun company. We had to learn how to take a machine-gun apart and put it back together again.

Interviewer: Those big old water-cooled ones?

Mr. Farmer: Yes, I discovered very quickly that the military career was not for me because I never could make up my bunk properly. I was called up before the company commander, Captain Palais, from Baltimore, I don't know how many times. He would say, "Farmer, I told you you didn't make your bunk properly again." I'd say, "Sir, my mother made up my bed every day of my life and I've never made a bed until I came here." He'd say, "Farmer, if you don't learn to make your bunk, you're never going to be a general." [Laughter] That was good training, I liked that. I made a lot of friends.

Interviewer: Did all the boys do that?

Mr. Farmer: Oh no, only a few. At that particular year a friend of mine named Landon Bolling and I went together. There may have been one or two others from Fredericksburg, but they were from all over. In my company were a lot of boys from Winchester: I remember John Quick and some others. But never highly popular with Fredericksburg boys. But they always had a full contingent down there. But they never came from Fredericksburg so much.

Interviewer: Let's talk about St. George's Church some.

Mr. Farmer: Yes, well, I noticed that one of the things you wanted to know about were the Christmas celebrations. But I've read Ralph Happel's interview and won't go into as much detail as he did, but they were very similar. There was a pageant at Christmas time. Christmas Eve in those days was entirely different from Christmas Eve today. Everything – at least in my family -- everything was done Christmas Eve night. When I went to bed, the house was just as it was; when I waked up, the Christmas tree was up and the toys were all around it. I never even saw the tree: everything was done after the kids had gone

to bed, and Santa Claus came and did all that. The toys were all under the tree, and everything. How my father did it, I don't know. There were no electric lights or anything, you know: there'd be candles on trees when I was young. That was very tricky. But anyway, we went to St. George's every Christmas Eve, and they had the pageant, and jolly old St. Nick gave bags of candy and oranges - and believe me, way back, an orange was something of a rarity because they were a perishable food, and you didn't get many of those things. We were always delighted to get an orange. The other bags were hard candies and such. But they were great fun, I enjoyed those a great deal. I was a member of St. George's all my life. I don't go very much now because I can't hear the sermons, but we keep in touch in a way. I always loved the old church: there's something comforting about sitting there and looking at all the windows, and thinking back on the days of my youth there.

Interviewer: Did any rectors particularly impress you?

Mr. Farmer: Well, I don't know that they were so impressive, but unlike most churches, as I understand it, at St. George's and in the Episcopal Church the ministers have to be called by another church or they stay forever at the one they're ministering to. My first recollection is of Dr. Lanier, who was a bearded old gentleman, and Mrs. Lanier, who was a nice lady who lived across the street from us on Caroline Street. If they didn't get a call they stayed forever until they died. Mr. Lanier died in office, so to speak; he was succeeded as I remember by Mr. Dudley Boogher, pronounced "Booker" but spelled Boogher. Mr. Boogher was succeeded by ... I can't remember his name, but anyway a young fellow who was a hall of fire, so to speak. The first time I heard him I knew he would not be with us long, and he was not: he quickly got a call and later became a bishop down in Alabama, I think. Anyway, I can't remember exactly what I'm supposed to say.

Interviewer: We're just talking about old rectors.

Mr. Farmer: Well, they just stayed on. What has always interested me about the Episcopal Church in Fredericksburg is what's happened in so many other places: it's the split between Trinity and St. George's. I was told by Mrs. Chester Goolrick -- Miss Cheney? -- that the reason for the split was a dispute over a very old rector of St. George's. Part of the congregation thought he was so old that he should be retired and shoved aside and a new man brought in. Part of the congregation said no, we're going to keep him. And that brought about the division in the church. That's what I was told; now there may have been other

reasons for it. Probably the reason -- I've never thought of it in this connection before but the cleavage in St. George's Church congregation is responsible for my being here. Well, now think of it. When the Trinity group split off and built this church they brought my great- grandfather here, and his son married my grandmother, and here I am. Isn't life something? You never know what's going to happen. I never thought of that before.

Interviewer: What were relations like between St. George's and Trinity?

Mr. Farmer: Well, as far as I was concerned they were friendly. I was never aware of it until I was a fully-grown man, and it didn't mean anything to me. I never knew--Trinity Church when I was a kid was just another Episcopal church, I mean I didn't know the reasons for the split. But I think, I got the impression that the Trinitarians felt more deeply about it than the others. That's why they left, you know, feelings were stronger, they felt stronger about it. There was one amusing little episode to mention about Trinity that I always like to tell people if a suitable occasion arises. Mrs. Goolrick's son, Chester B. Goolrick Jr., was a very cute little boy, really a cute little kid, good looking and smart. They sent him to Sunday school one day, and when he came back home his mother asked him what had happened that day, what they did in Sunday school. He said, "Well, we sang a little bit, we prayed a little bit, and we played in the sand a little bit, and that was enough for God and they let us come home." [Laughter]

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Interviewer: This is tape number two of our oral history interview with Warren Farmer, June 26, 1998. And while we were changing tapes we were talking about Matt Willis.

Mr. Farmer: Matt Willis. Marion"Matt" Willis. Matt was his Hollywood name: they felt, as Ralph said, they felt that Manion was not suitable – he was a big, brawny guy -- and they felt Matt was more brawny than Marion. Anyway, Marion went to New York and studied acting at one of the schools there, I don't know which one it was, and he was thrown in with some of the guys like -- not that I knew them very well, but he was of that group: Jimmy Stewart, and Henry Fonda, and that crowd. They were all in New York together I think at that time. Incidentally, remind me to tell you another story of an actor when I finish with this. Marion then, after some experience on the stage and I don't know how much he had, he went to Hollywood and the only picture that saw him

in was Tobacco Road, and he had a pretty good size part in that. But then he starred in I don't know how many monster pictures. I used to see those things on midnight movies on TV, you know, when they're trying to scare the hell out of kids. But evidently he and his wife Anne lived next door, or close to, the Gregory Pecks, because Mrs. Willis, Marion's mother, used to come back and talk about the Pecks. Anyway, Marion gave up his Hollywood work and came back, and bought a home on River Road in Spotsylvania County and lived there until he died. He was a comparatively young fellow when he died. I remember once a group of us were going up to pay them a visit, several carloads of us, and we got up to the house and Marion and Anne were gone. So there was this beautiful asparagus growing everywhere, and we thought it was wild asparagus. So we got out and just picked barrels, bushels of asparagus. And we found out later that it wasn't wild asparagus: that it had been planted, and we had just relieved the Willis's of all of their asparagus. [Laughter] Well, they never knew, nobody in the crowd of visitors ever told them that we were the thieves, no. One other thing about an actor: the Smith family lived in the Mary Washington House for many, many years. Mrs. Smith was the custodian and conducted visitors for I don't know how many years. And she had two sons and a daughter. Are you familiar with them at all? No, okay. Mrs. Smith told Mary Washing-ton's story so many times that she said she felt she was Mary Washington, that she actually felt she was the lady herself. One of Mrs. Smith's sons, Archie, became an actor. He also studied in New York, and when I was going back and forth to New York in the late 1940s for ear operations that I had at the Lempert Institute. I had two ear operations there which restored my hearing, at least for some time. I went into a restaurant on Lexington Avenue known as the Russian Bear. It was rather a dark place, I wasn't paying much attention, and this waiter came and put the plates down before me and all. And I looked up, and the waiter was Archie Smith from Fredericksburg, the actor! Well, Archie, like many of them I understood from him, had to supplement their income by doing other work, and waiting was one of his. And not long after that Archie landed a job with Helen Hays in Victoria Regina, and starred in that for a long, long time. He did very well. Last I heard of him he was living in Oregon, but I don't think he was ever in the movies. But he did very well on the stage for a while, and why he left I do not know. There must have been some lure in Oregon, maybe a female or something like that, I don't know. But I have never heard of him since. His older brother Winfred became an Episcopal minister and taught at St. John's in Annapolis, and married the daughter of the humorous writer ... what's his name? S.J. Perelman. And Winfred died; I don't know what the cause of his death was. But I was amazed that

he had married her: he was a very thin, pale, almost a consumptive looking individual. But I understand he was very, very bright. The girl, the Smith daughter, married Peter Lauck, of the Laucks who lived at Lauck's Island. I don't know where they live today. But that was an interesting story of his about the Island and the Hunter family.

Interviewer: Well, speaking of these entertainment types, Levin Houston Jr. roomed with Johnny Mercer in New York City.

Mr. Farmer: I'm sure he did. A lot of those people, they were all in the same trade, you know.

Interviewer: You knew Lem very well, but did you know Levin?

Mr. Farmer: Well, I knew Levin, of course, but not as intimately as Lem because Lem and I were in the same office, with desks adjoining almost, for years and years and years. They were two entirely different people, and Lem said he never got know his brother very well; and I can understand it: they were nothing at all alike. Well, that's nothing unusual, brothers being unlike one another. Levin used to amuse me: he reviewed books for the Free Lance-Star. Levin was what we used to call a "Renaissance man", you know, I think Lem mentions that. He was a musician, an artist, a writer: he shot the works, he could do almost anything. I don't know how well he did it, but he did it well enough to please Fredericksburg. I've often wondered about book reviewers, whether they really read the books that they review. Well, I found out from Levin that books did not get thorough readings before they were reviewed: they would get spot-checks, jump around, etc. He had a beautiful library; I've often wondered what became of it after he died. His wife Betsy and I went to school together from the first grade to the last grade. She was the valedictorian of our class.

Interviewer: Oh, was she?

Mr. Farmer: Yes, they were a very bright, amusing couple.

Interviewer: Did you listen to the band very much?

Mr. Farmer: Oh, I danced to it. That's another thing I wanted to tell you about: the dances they used to have. I'm speaking of from the 1930s on until World War II. Fredericksburg was a very gay town. Fredericksburg was a dull and dreary place prior to the Depression; after the Depression things began to pick up a little bit: the country club was opened up, and I don't know, there was a much more lively

crowd of young people here, and I was one of them. At Christmas time there was an occasional public dance, a subscription dance, but most parties were given -- well, it was sort of like debs making their debut, girls being introduced to society. Such as it was. But the parents gave dances for them. And very expensive dances: hire the band, and the food, and all that sort of thing. They were very frequent in those days. And wearing a tuxedo was absolutely required: you didn't dare go to the dance without one. I had a tuxedo and I had to wear it everywhere I went. But there were also subscription dances, dances given by organizations such as clubs: Virginia reel and things like that. I was one of the charter members of the Virginia reel.

Interviewer: Oh, really?

Mr. Farmer: Yes. Well, anyway it was very gay. At one Christmastime there were nine dances in seven days.

Interviewer: Really?

Mr. Farmer: Two of them were tea dances. That is on Sunday afternoon they would have a tea dance at the country dub beginning at 4. But one of the tragic experiences during one of those Christmas seasons was - well, so many people wanted to give dances, give parties, that they might overlap. So on this occasion the two groups giving the dances didn't know that the other had selected that night, so two sisters, who taught at Mary Washington College, Marianne Chauncey, who lived in the Heflin Apartments, and her sister, another teacher, gave a dance at the country club. And somebody else whose name I can't remember gave a dance at the Mount Vernon -- it was then the Mount Vernon, the General Washington Inn now. No, it was General Washington Inn. Well, I was invited to take Ellen Knox to both of them. So we thought, "Well, we'll go to the Chauncey's first", and we checked in at the country club. Oh God, it was awful. Two other couples came, and three couples came to that dance. With the band. And we didn't dare leave: we couldn't leave. Everybody else went to that other dance. I can't remember why that was, but the other dance was crowded. But just three couples went to this one. And the sisters stood at the door waiting and waiting and waiting. It was a miserable experience. Oh dear, but those were gay old times...

Interviewer: You mentioned, you talked a little bit about Christmas with the dances and the children. What about Thanksgiving or Fourth of July or any of the others?

Mr. Farmer: Well, I don't remember that they were great occasions. I don't think they were. My best Fourth of July times -- well, most of the time when I was in my young manhood, there was no public celebration or fireworks display. In those days. We would just buy firecrackers and explode them. But when I was much younger I would frequently went to Washington: I had two aunts living in Washington, and spent a lot of time there. We'd go to the White House on Fourth of July. There was no great fireworks display on the Monument grounds, just the White House was open where kids would come and bring their things and all that sort of thing. That was another time I got lost: I got away from my family, and they didn't know where I was, and they went home somewhere in Northwest, and I was down at the White House and I couldn't find it. But I got back somehow, but no great things. Mainly Thanksgiving was the turkey dinner, you know, the usual. As well as I recall, until recent years. There was actually until recent years not many public events in Fredericksburg, very few. The old Bowering's Band used to play in the park, and that would get people together, and the Chautauqua, and I mean I'm going way back now, back in the '20s. There was very little to do in way of amusement in those days in Fredericksburg. Kids just ran around and played, and always found something to do: you could always hear somebody say, "Fredericksburg has nothing for the children to do." Well, we always found something to do. It doesn't take much to entertain a child. The imagination does most of the work for you anyway. I wanted to say one other thing about Christmastime in Fredericksburg: every year for I don't know how many years I worked at the Post Office during Christmas. My earliest recollection of working there was -- and I carried, I delivered mail in those days, Christmas mail -- was that there was one delivery on Christmas Day. Some people didn't want their Christmas cards to reach the receiver until Christmas Day! So they would post them Christmas Eve night, and we'd deliver them the next day, on Christmas Day. Now that ended very early: but my first recollection of it is that I carried mail on Christmas Day. I remember one person who was sort of a highbrow -- this is not a "City", but he would write "this is so-and-so, Town" [laughter]

Interviewer: Right, I've seen old ones where they say, "So-and-so, City."

Mr. Farmer: Yes, yes. Then later I worked inside, and we had to separate the mail: there were great big bags in front of us, you know. You'd stand in a little slot, with a bag here and a bag there and another bag and there are bags all over the place, and you'd throw the letters into the different bags, mainly for the Northern Neck counties.

This post office distributed mail; I think a truck took it everyday, except Saturday and Sunday, down to the Northern Neck, and also to Tappahannock.

Interviewer: Well, as we're closing down, I just had a couple of people whom you may or may not remember, they were fairly prominent in Fredericksburg a long time ago. And the first is Captain M.B. Rowe?

Mr. Farmer: Well, I used to see him, but I didn't know him. No, I didn't know him. He lived at Brompton. Yes. No, I saw him, but I knew his brothers, Carter Rowe's father Mr. Alvin Rowe, and of course Josiah's father and your grandfather's father Prescott Rowe. But I didn't know Captain M.B. Rowe. I got to know one of his sons, Mossy, and the other one: he had one who went in the Navy? He was away for many, many years? He came back and lived at Brompton.

Interviewer: I don't know off the top of my head. I've got some lists.

Mr. Farmer: I can't remember his first name: he had two daughters, and I used to date one of his daughters. She later married a man named Frazier Sheets. And they were divorced, I'm pretty sure. But I never heard of him until he came back: he was in the Navy from when he was a young man until he retired. I've got his name on the edge of my tongue, but I can't think of what it is.

Interviewer: What about Judge A. Wellington Wallace?

Mr. Farmer: Well, no, I wouldn't have known him. Of course, I'd seen the judge, he wore a skullcap. He would sit in St. George's Church with the most proprietary aspect you've ever seen in your life. He would never get up: in the Episcopal Church you get down you getup you get down -- well, he would never get up. He didn't think the Lord deserved it: in fact, I think he thought the Lord was going to come and get up for him! [Laughter] I can remember him so well in the church! And then -- still with his skullcap - he would go for a walk with his, I think it was his brother. Yes, Lewis. Lewis Wallace. The old judge was president of the bank, the National Bank, and he was succeeded by his brother Lewis. They used to take a walk around the block, and Lewis was a much younger man. I had to do it, and I think he hated it: the judge would just shuffle, you know, he'd just take slow steps, and Lewis would always be a little bit in front of him. And Lewis Wallace, after the judge died, went for a Hide. He had a chauffeur, a black man named Washington -- Happy Washington I think he was called. No, he was Happy's brother. They'd go all around: you'd see them on Skyline

Drive or someplace or like that. But here's a story that was told me by a member of the Wallace family, who shall remain unnamed. I don't know, this probably was, most people probably knew about it. Judge Wallace, as a young man, married--and many people thought he married her for her money, I don't know -- a wealthy Philadelphia woman. And she was insane. I don't know whether she was on the edge of it before they married, but very soon after that she had lost her mind. And I was told by a member of the Wallace family that her bedroom and his bedroom adjoined, and that he barred the door at night, and also slept with a gun in his bed! [Laughter] But I used to see her -- she died when I was a kid -- but I used to see her being walked around by one of the servants around the porch: they lived at the corner of, in that row by the Presbyterian Church, in the corner building. And across from that lived Mr . ... no, he didn't. No, I won't go into that, I can't remember his name. Peter somebody, an old man with a beard, he used to wave to us children as we went by. There was a man who looked very much like him going to Lafayette School -- it was not Lafayette School in my day, now the library. I used to pass a house in the block just before you get to the library on the library side of Caroline Street, a gentleman who used to sit on the porch: I never saw him in any position except sitting. And evidently he had been sitting so long that everybody caught on, and they referred to him as -- his name was Bulk -- and they referred to him as "Sitting Bulk." [Laughter] That was one block above Ralph Happel's house. My first day in school I remember the teacher said something that has always been with me. I don't know why I should have remembered it, but I did. She said this: If a task is once begun, never leave it till it's done. Be the labor great or small, Do it well, or not at all. And that thing has hung in my mind since I was seven years old. [Chuckling] In those days, you know, if you didn't pass all of your courses, you stayed in the grade you were in. I mean, you had to pass, they didn't just move you along just because of your age and all that sort of thing, as apparently is done today in some cases. I got along perfectly fine, I never had any trouble in school. I got to high school, and as Ralph Happel was telling in his experience at the University of Virginia With math: that was my downfall.

Interviewer: Mine too.

Mr. Farmer: I had to repeat my senior year in high school because I lacked one credit: and it was math that I failed. And I attribute some of that to the -- I won't lay all the blame on the teacher, but partially because he was a retired Army colonel who would write on the board in figures and say, "Okay, how about that?" very quickly, and then

move on and say, "Okay, how about that?” And slow as I was in math, I never could catch algebra or geometry.

Interviewer: That was my weak link as well.

Mr. Farmer: His name, the teacher's name was ... oh, heavens, it's awful to get old and can't remember things.

Interviewer: See, you'll remember as soon as I drive out of the driveway.

Mr. Farmer: Yes, yes. Colonel Polk Payne.

Interviewer: Well that was easy. Any of the Paynes around here?

Mr. Farmer: Yes, I think he was. But what I don't know. And he had a son named Asher: Asher Payne. And Asher was one of our crowd, and I was then in my teens. In high school or just out of high school, I don't remember, but we were probably 17 or 18 years old: we went to a dance one night, and Asher drank too much, and walked out of the dance hall, and laid down in the body of a truck across the street from the dance hall. And we missed him, and knew what had happened, so we thought we better look for him, and we found him. It was bitterly cold: if we hadn't gone out there he would have had a very serious problem. So we took him home, quietly, to the Heflin Apartments, went down into the furnace room where he could warm up, and sober up, before we delivered him to his mother and father. Mrs. Payne heard, and came down, and ripped us apart for getting her son drunk. And never spoke to us again. We never had much occasion to speak to her, but she was finished with us. I didn't force Asher to take his drink: in fact, I think we may have saved his life. I don't think she ever knew that. Her son wouldn't do anything like that. There must have been some compulsion used, I think. Then, of course, the other teacher in the high school who I remember very well was Catesby Willis. You ever hear of Catesby Willis?

Interviewer: I think so.

Mr. Farmer: She was Marion Willis's cousin. First cousin, I believe. It was my repeat year, my last year, in high school. I had to take more than one course of math, I had to take something else, so I took physics.

Interviewer: Oh that was smart.

Mr. Farmer: Something easy, right? Well, it turned out to be very easy because apparently the physics teacher they had hired couldn't come, and so they appointed Catesby Willis the physics teacher. Catesby had never had a physics course in her life -- she was a classical student -- so there was very little physics going on in our class. We used to meet and have a talk, and then we'd have field trips: we went out for field trips three or four times a week. And always down to Feuerherd's Store to get a drink, you know, a Coca-Cola or something like that. We never, I really don't know, that was the most ridiculous class I've ever been in. [Laughter] I can't even remember that we did anything!

Interviewer: You may have dropped an apple or something.

Mr. Farmer: The only thing I remember about that is "if a body immersed in a liquid will replace its own weight in the liquid." I remember that much.

Interviewer: I'm out of notes, but I don't know whether you have things that you might want to say.

Mr. Farmer: Well, I did, but I think I've touched on most of them. Let me look. Oh, going back to the Depression days: I was at the groundbreaking of the Sylvania plant, which was the economic lifesaver of Fredericksburg, you know. I was at the groundbreaking of that, and Dr. Frank Reichel, who later was manager of the plant for many, many years: I heard Dr. Reichel say, "Someday, this plant may employ as many as five hundred people." Well, actually, it eventually employed 2,700 people. But as everybody in Fredericksburg at that time knew when the Depression came and everybody was losing their jobs, this plant moved in and absorbed anybody who could work. It was the livelihood of the town -- well, it just made the place, economically speaking. 2,700 employees in a town of 5,000. An awful lot of people. Of course, it didn't grow to that number for many, many years. But it made silk wrap, used to wrap packages of cigarettes. Some years later they were going to develop something that sounded pretty improbable at the time -- and apparently it was, although they experimented with it. They were going to make something edible in the form of a loaf of bread or something like that, from wood. And they experimented with that. And they thought that they really had it to the point where it might turn out to be a salable product, but evidently it failed, because I've never heard of it since. I'm vague about that -- but I think they were probably vague, too! No, that was a great thing for Fredericksburg. But Fredericksburg today is so, so different from Fredericksburg of old. I suppose most places are -- but

no, I don't say most places are: you can go to little towns like Culpepper and Orange which, although they've grown, they've never grown with the phenomenal growth that this community has. I mean, we've gone from 5,000 people in Fredericksburg, maybe 8,000 in Spotsylvania, and maybe 6,000 in Stafford County -- to 200,000!

Interviewer: And you've seen it all march by.

Mr. Farmer: Yes. It is really incredible. And I don't think there is any stopping it, it's just going on. I can see now, when I read the history of Manhattan Island, how it started down in the end around the Battery Park, the little fort, the little Dutch fort; and then gradually, gradually, gradually becoming this enormous city: that all that was once woods... But where we are today is surrounded by woods: I have no doubt that in your lifetime it may be ... supermarkets or something out here. I thought that John Goolrick's -- I don't know whether you read John Goolrick's column in the Free Lance-Star a few nights ago? He said something which is something which is pretty similar to what I said here in this quotation of mine you dug up.

Interviewer: Yes, you can read that into the machine if you like.

Mr. Farmer: What I said was: "HFI is dedicated to the practical purpose of keeping all we can, within reason, of what is old and of value for ourselves and others to enjoy. It is not foolish enough to try, nor does it wish, to stop progress. It merely advises, or points out, that in certain destructions or alterations we deny ourselves both beauty and financial return." Well, that's practically what John said, although I don't think he got it from this.

Interviewer: That was written in 1958 in a Free Lance-Star article.

Mr. Farmer: Yes, well, sometimes I read -- I'm strong for preservation - but sometimes I read where buildings that have been built in my lifetime, even long after, some years after I was born, are called historic. [chuckling] I'm sort of historic myself, you know. I feel that I'm an antiquity. As John said in his column, "you can't save everything, you know", I know you save what is most valuable. But I don't think -- except the people who are terribly interested in preservation -- the majority of the people have no idea what the past means to other people. We've been to Europe a number of times, in fact we spent a year and a half in Europe, and notice how Americans flock back to England just to see where they came from, you know. When I went back I felt as if I was going back home, you know. And

interest in the past, it's just perfectly natural to wonder what went before. You can get a much better idea of what went before than what's coming. [chuckling] You can be sure of what happened but not what's going to happen!

So, I'm all for it, and I can foresee a time, if it's kept pretty much as it is, that Fredericksburg could be really a remarkably important historical site in the United States, because of its age. It goes back to, what 17 whatever, and was here even before that, so ...

Interviewer: And a good part of it is still there, and the downtown-scape, if you will, is still there, remarkably intact. There's just that one building down there.

Mr. Farmer: Yes, yes. You know, I lived in several of those buildings on the 700 block of Caroline Street: they are awfully quaint to look at today, but they were awfully uncomfortable buildings: the rooms were small; the heat was insufferable in the summer, terrible for living. Now you can air condition them, you know. But oh, I can see the old ladies at night -- not old, any ladies -- sitting out on the sidewalk in the evenings, just fanning themselves, fanning, fanning, fanning, and trying to get cool. You couldn't, you couldn't get cool, there was no way of doing it, no way. But, there was no roaring traffic or anything like that. They'd sit out and gossip and talk, walk ....

Interviewer: Well, Mr. Farmer, I want to take an opportunity to thank you on the tape, and if I recall what your 7th grade teacher told you, "Do a thing well, or don't do it at all", and I think you've done it very well.

Mr. Farmer: Thank you!