

**Postcards from Falmouth Oral History Transcript**

Recorded: August 19, 2021

Oral Historian: Mark Pearson

Interviewer: Troy Clarkson

Topic: College Light Opera Company (CLOC)

Note: The right column references postcards by identifiers searchable in the Digital Commonwealth online collection.

00:00	[Music]	
00:44	Mark	
00:45	welcome we're so glad that you're here	
00:47	and Falmouth has	
00:49	a thriving artistic community and	
00:52	certainly a rich	
00:53	artistic history in the College Light	#cloc
00:55	Opera Company is and has been an	
00:57	important part of that so	
00:59	talk to us your postcard was of course	
01:02	the facility in West Falmouth that is	#westfalmouth
01:04	the home	
01:05	the heart and soul of CLOC as it's	
01:07	known right so tell us about the history	
01:10	of the College Light Opera Company and	
01:11	also	
01:12	the site there in West Falmouth where	
01:14	it's it's been housed sure well first	
01:17	very happy to be here thanks for	
01:18	reaching out uh yeah so College Light	
01:20	Opera Company was founded in 1969	#1969

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01:25	and it grew out of the	
01:28	defunct Oberlin Gilbert and Sullivan	#oberlin #gilbertandsullivanplayers
01:30	Players who had been in Falmouth for	
01:32	just under a decade so that was a summer	
01:35	program operated by Oberlin Conservatory	
01:39	designed to provide their students with	
01:42	a summer performance opportunity that	
01:45	was something very typical	
01:47	at that time in America especially in	
01:50	resort towns like Falmouth	
01:53	you'd have you know any number of	
01:55	college organizations and they would	
01:57	just put on a different show every week	
01:59	and that would be your summer	
02:01	entertainment for the summer you know	
02:03	folks would have uh season tickets so	
02:06	for example CLOC	
02:07	and at the time orbiting G&S they did	
02:10	nine shows uh in nine weeks the same	
02:13	program basically that we continue this	
02:15	to today so families would come down	
02:17	they'd have you know Tuesday night	
02:19	tickets Wednesday night tickets and that	
02:21	would be their regular thing for uh for	
02:23	the summer and that was known as	
02:26	Summer stock theater and it was very very	#summerstocktheater
02:29	typical um	

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02:31	it's died out significantly	
02:33	there are very few organizations left	
02:35	that do it in that similar	
02:38	fashion	
02:39	CLOC is one of the one of the remaining	
02:41	ones uh on the arts landscape	
02:44	and I think that's just as as a starting	
02:47	point that's a really important	
02:50	piece of information to say about the	
02:52	organization and its place in the sort	
02:54	of national landscape it's sort of	
02:57	holding a torch for	
02:59	summer stock which was	
03:01	at one time a very very important part	
03:03	of American	
03:05	summer entertainment and very	
03:06	specifically American it doesn't really	
03:08	happen in many other countries that way	
03:11	so that's sort of what CLOC is as I say	
03:13	grew out of Oberlin Gilbert & Sullivan	
03:15	Players who themselves sort of grew out	
03:18	of an older organization called the	
03:20	University Players which goes back to	
03:22	the 1940s I believe and again that's	
03:26	just the sort of tradition of	
03:28	a group of college kids getting together	
03:30	for the summer to perform	

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03:33	the original intent was more	
03:34	entertainment but our mission has sort	
03:37	of shifted over the years as we became	
03:40	a	
03:41	one of the last remaining organizations	
03:43	to do this to really focus on the	
03:45	educational aspect of that experience	
03:48	the educational side of it was sort of a	
03:50	side note in the old days I was like	
03:51	well yeah you're going to learn how to	
03:52	do it because you've got to do it	
03:55	and then	
03:56	it sort of became clear that hey this is	
03:58	actually	
03:59	a big part of what's important about	
04:01	this organization so	
04:02	that's why in our mission education is	
04:05	equally important as the entertainment	
04:07	that we do	
04:09	you mentioned our our campus in West	
04:11	Falmouth	
04:13	which is where we	
04:14	live and work we perform at the	
04:16	Highfield Theater	#highfieldtheater
04:18	which is	
04:19	as many folks know I think	
04:23	was once the stables for Highfield Hall	#highfieldhall

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04:26	so if you're familiar with Highfield	
04:27	Hall uh it's the building right next	
04:29	door that at one time housed the horses	
04:31	and now uh since the 1930s this is a a	
04:34	theater structure	
04:36	and that's about four and a half miles	
04:38	from our campus in West Falmouth	Gunning_West_Bldg_1580 through 1585, Gunning_West_Bldg_1649
04:40	it's about six acres uh right	
04:44	uh on the banks of the West Falmouth	#westfalmoutharbor
04:46	Harbor where the bridge to Chapoquoit	
04:49	Road is uh and the oldest building there	
04:52	is uh Bridgefields Hall	#bridgefieldshall
04:55	which was named uh you know because of a	
04:58	the bridge that's basically right in	
05:00	front of the building and at the time	
05:02	the fields of West Falmouth that	
05:04	stretched out beyond which now of course	
05:06	are	
05:06	lots of houses um so Bridgefields Hall	
05:10	was built in 1895	#1895
05:13	uh by a Quaker family the Scull	#quaker #scull Hunt_West_Bldg_482
05:16	Sara Scull uh so it's had a couple of	#sarascull
05:19	names over the years the Sara Scull	
05:21	House Bridgefields Hall	
05:23	the Inn at West Falmouth and simply the	#westfalmouthinn

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05:25	Inn	
05:26	and the Scull family	
05:29	built it her husband died I believe in	
05:33	1884	#1884
05:34	and	
05:36	left her a widow with two children and	
05:39	uh she built this as a summer home so	
05:42	they were based in Philadelphia and they	
05:44	would come summer in Falmouth uh as I	
05:47	mentioned they were a Quaker family and	
05:51	according to sort of urban legend and I	
05:53	can't confirm or deny this but their	
05:55	original intent was to uh to buy a	
05:58	property on the island Chapoquoit Island	#chapoquoitland Hunt_West_Bch_496 through 499 Gunning_West_Sts_1549 & 1550, Gunning_West_Har_1606 & 1607, Gunning_West_Isl_1637 through 1648
06:01	and uh	
06:02	I as I understand it Quakers were not	
06:05	particularly welcome on the island so uh	
06:09	as sort of a well I'll show you	
06:11	they bought the large lot right at the	
06:14	entrance to the island so everyone going	
06:15	to the island would have to drive past	

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06:17	their estate to get to their summer	
06:20	state uh it was designed by	
06:23	J. Williams Beal a Boston	#jwilliamsbeal
06:26	architect he had recently moved from New	
06:28	York to Boston he had spent some time	
06:30	abroad	
06:32	and he was commissioned to design the	
06:34	building uh it is of	
06:37	somewhat architectural interest in that	
06:39	it is a	
06:41	Queen Anne	
06:42	Tudor revival which is unusual for our	
06:45	area most houses being built at the time	
06:48	were what we would call the shingle	
06:49	style	
06:50	you know everything that standing still	
06:52	is covered with shingles and this was	
06:55	a style that was more popular for town	
06:58	houses sort of stucco half timbered	
07:00	style	
07:02	and it also has	
07:03	the	
07:04	whispers of the emerging	
07:07	early modern architectural movement in	
07:10	that was inspired by a lot of Japanese	
07:12	architecture and the sort of play	
07:14	between exterior interior spaces so if	

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07:17	you're going around the building you'll	
07:18	be in a staircase all of a sudden the	
07:20	staircase is outside that it's inside	
07:22	again	
07:23	and it has a lot of very dominant	
07:25	horizontal lines which sort of suggests	
07:29	where Frank Lloyd Wright was heading at	
07:31	the time you know fitting buildings more	
07:33	into the area that they're that they're	
07:35	set in	
07:37	so yeah the Scull family uh	
07:40	lived there for about ten years	
07:41	uh Sara Scull died in 1910	#1910
07:45	uh at which time it was uh sold and	
07:48	converted to an inn in 1912	#1912
07:51	and it basically served as an inn	
07:54	and restaurant uh until 1975	#1975
07:58	when it closed and CLOC moved in in 75.	
08:02	I mentioned earlier CLOC was founded in	
08:03	1969.	
08:05	so the question is well what was	
08:06	happening at that time uh well Oberlin	
08:09	before CLOC and then CLOC were	
08:11	originally in residence at what was	
08:13	known as Tanglewood House	#tanglewood Gunning_Village_Bldg_0473
08:15	which if you're familiar with the	



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08:16	history of the Beebe family	#beebe
08:19	here in Falmouth they actually built two	
08:22	mansions up on the hill there was	
08:24	Highfield Hall which is uh	
08:28	Queen Anne but again leaning a little	
08:29	bit more Shingle style and then there	
08:31	was an iconically Queen Anne house which	
08:34	was called Tanglewood and they were	
08:36	built for the brothers and they shared	
08:38	the barn and the stables	
08:41	and Tanglewood was the longtime	
08:43	dormitory for	
08:45	both Oberlin and College Light Opera	
08:48	now when the property was given to the	
08:51	Cape	#capeconservatory #capesymphony
08:52	Conservatory they were uh unable to keep	
08:56	up all of the buildings that were on the	
08:58	property and the first one that really	
09:00	had to go was Tanglewood so it was	
09:01	announced in	
09:03	uh 74 that they would be razing	
09:06	Tanglewood and there was not enough time	
09:08	for	
09:09	the sort of uh	
09:10	you know grassroots movement that ended	
09:12	up saving	
09:13	Highfield	

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09:14	several years later so Tanglewood fell	
09:17	to the wrecking ball and CLOC was left	
09:20	presumably homeless um but uh	
09:23	J. K. Lilly	#lilly #josiahklilly
09:25	uh stepped forward at that time and he	
09:27	had he and his wife had recently	
09:29	acquired the West Falmouth Inn and he	
09:31	said you know what I'm going to do is	
09:33	let's have y'all move over to West	
09:35	Falmouth	
09:36	we'll rent the property to you for a	
09:37	dollar a year until you get back on your	
09:39	feet figure out	
09:41	a better solution so the Company moved	
09:44	sort of lock stock and barrel to west	
09:46	Falmouth in 1975	
09:49	B Haslun one of the original founders of	#haslun #roberthaslun
09:51	the organization and his wife Ursula uh	#ursulahaslun
09:54	got married and had their wedding	
09:56	reception uh a week before the Company	
09:59	arrived in 75 and then the first thing	
10:01	the company the 75 Company did was they	
10:03	went up to Tanglewood salvaged	
10:05	everything they could and trucked it	
10:07	over to West Falmouth and we've been	
10:10	there ever since	
10:11	um about five years after that so we're	

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10:16	into	
10:17	77 78 ish	
10:20	uh	
10:21	the Lillys decided that	
10:23	they didn't really want to be landlords	
10:25	for this property and uh the best	
10:28	best use of the facility would be to	
10:30	demolish all the structures uh	
10:33	four struc— uh five structures at the	
10:35	time	
10:37	to make a public park	
10:39	and uh so there was a big effort to find	
10:42	CLOC another home	
10:44	in the uh in the area	
10:46	and uh that kept coming up with no	
10:50	no viable	
10:52	alternatives and then finally the uh the	
10:55	Board of Trustees struck a deal with the	
10:58	Lillys which was to buy the property for	
11:01	the cost of tearing it down and turning	
11:03	into a park	
11:04	so they were able to	
11:06	get a mortgage raise some funds and then	
11:08	I think by 79 or 80 they had paid off	
11:10	the full mortgage	
11:12	and the property was was CLOC's um as I	
11:16	mentioned there's the there's the inn uh	

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11:18	which was built in 1895 which is the	
11:20	most iconic building on the property	
11:23	then there are four outbuildings so	
11:25	there are two twin cottages which we	
11:27	call Cottage One and Two on the harbor	
11:29	that were built in the 30s to uh	
11:33	as the inn as the West Falmouth Inn was	
11:35	expanding those were sort of uh you	
11:37	could bring your family and rent a	
11:39	cottage but you would dine in the inn	
11:42	and then Cottages Three and Four which	
11:44	were added in the sixties uh Cottage	
11:46	Three which is out behind the property	
11:48	was a caretaker cottage Cottage Four	
11:50	which is right next to the bike path uh	
11:53	was built as a staff house also in the	
11:56	mid 60s	
11:58	they dug a pond so we have about an acre	
12:02	man-made pond right in the center of the	
12:05	property	
12:07	and yeah so the West Falmouth campus is	
12:10	where we do obviously	
12:12	we live all	
12:13	those buildings are all dormitory	
12:15	buildings	
12:16	and we also have our dining facility it	
12:17	was fortunate that it was an inn so it	

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12:21	came with a large industrial kitchen and	
12:23	the dining rooms are perfectly appointed	
12:25	for uh for the Company	
12:28	as well as our costume shop is housed in	
12:30	the former Pony Room which was the uh	
12:33	the bar and lounge of the West Falmouth	
12:35	Inn	
12:37	and we recently just actually	
12:40	minutes ago	
12:41	completed a new facility on on the	
12:44	property which is called Lucas Hall	#lucashall
12:48	which is a	
12:50	is the first new structure since the 60s	
12:53	on the property and it's a large	
12:56	rehearsal and office facility and the	
12:58	purpose	
12:59	for that is to	
13:01	take the stress off of	
13:03	Bridgefields Hall which has sort of	
13:05	served	
13:06	as a catch-all space so it's been our	
13:09	main rehearsal space our dining space	
13:11	we've carved office spaces out of common	
13:14	areas	
13:15	uh and so this is an opportunity to	
13:17	actually create	
13:19	a building designed and intended for its	

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13:23	purpose which is to	
13:25	do all of the rehearsal of the	
13:27	preparation for the shows that we do up	
13:29	at Highfield Theater as well as provide	
13:31	office spaces for our summer staff but	
13:34	also for our year-round staff	
13:36	none of the other buildings on campus	
13:37	are winterized or heated so as soon as	
13:40	you have to shut the water off you have	
13:41	to shut the water off	
13:43	but this building	
13:44	is insulated and will have	
13:46	year-round use which is which is a big	
13:49	uh	
13:50	big change for us and very exciting	
13:52	wonderful well thank you for that	
13:54	detailed history because it	
13:57	both the property and the organization	
13:59	are richly woven uh through the the	
14:03	really the soul of our community so	
14:04	thanks for that	
14:06	that virtual tour with us that gives uh	
14:08	our viewers a sense of of the history	
14:11	before the camera went on we were	
14:13	talking about the role that uh the	
14:15	College Light Opera Company plays in so	
14:17	many lives not just in the performers	

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14:20	but in people that have enjoyed the	
14:22	shows or people feel a connection uh to	
14:25	the organization and so	
14:27	as we record this the Woods Hole Film	#woodsholefilmfestival
14:29	Festival is about to open in Woods Hole	
14:31	and as I told you I interviewed someone	
14:34	this week	
14:35	who is one of the filmmakers that has a	
14:37	film	
14:38	his connection to Falmouth began in 1990	
14:41	or 91 when he was a performer with the	
14:43	College Light Opera Company and	
14:45	that sort of lifetime connection to the	
14:47	organization has happened thousands and	
14:50	thousands of times because over the	
14:51	course of more than 50 years	
14:54	uh	
14:56	you know you've had so many lives that	
14:59	have been impacted and enriched by the	
15:01	organization yeah it's	
15:02	the a couple of things I always try to	
15:05	hit when I'm talking about CLOC you	
15:07	know one of which is uh if you're in	
15:10	Falmouth if you live here and you know	
15:12	the CLOC is here	
15:14	you may be	
15:16	permitted to make the mistake to think	

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15:18	oh every community must have one of	
15:20	these but this is a	
15:22	truly unique organization and it is	
15:26	something that	
15:28	uh is uniquely	
15:30	situated your Falmouth is uniquely	
15:33	situated to support this kind of an	
15:35	organization um you couldn't do this	
15:37	just anywhere and this organization	
15:39	couldn't have survived in just any	
15:41	community you need a good base of of	
15:44	folks who	
15:45	appreciate the performing arts who will	
15:48	not only attend but will support the	
15:50	performing arts and	
15:52	a certain uh continuity	
15:54	which I think Falmouth provides and	
15:57	in uh on the other aspect is what you	
16:00	mentioned um this sort of networking you	
16:03	know we do	
16:04	provide the students with a sort of	
16:06	educational experience but the	
16:08	experience is more learning by doing	
16:10	they've all been to university they've	
16:12	all been studying their craft we don't	
16:15	provide classes we don't provide	
16:17	lectures we simply say okay you've	



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16:21	you've been studying this	
16:24	now do it and do it	
16:26	repeat it for nine nine weeks	
16:29	and uh in a very intense environment and	
16:32	what	
16:33	one learns in that environment is a is	
16:35	this what I want to do with my life	
16:37	because if	
16:38	if you get through that uh really 11	
16:41	weeks when you count the pre-season time	
16:43	get through those 11 weeks and you're	
16:44	like I never want to do that again then	
16:46	you probably don't want to have a career	
16:47	because your career is going to be that	
16:49	you know if you're actually paying the	
16:50	bills with performing arts your career	
16:52	is going to be that hectic so that's	
16:54	thing one and then thing two you you	
16:57	realize how to streamline your own work	
17:00	um and be more efficient which is also	
17:02	important when it's a question of	
17:04	economics and trying to pay the bills	
17:06	it's great if you're a wonderful	
17:07	designer but you can only design one	
17:09	show and it takes you six months well	
17:10	that's not gonna pay your rent uh but	
17:13	then thirdly and most importantly it's	

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17:14	the connections that they they make when	
17:16	they're here because they are it's a	
17:19	hyper concentration of uh	
17:22	the best of the best	
17:24	in these programs so it's those	
17:26	who really	
17:28	are	
17:29	thinking this is what I cannot do	
17:30	anything else with my life this is what	
17:32	I want to do with my life and then they	
17:34	meet	
17:35	all these other people in their age	
17:38	group who are feeling the same and they	
17:40	end up being a very tight-knit	
17:43	group within the performing arts	
17:45	community as they go on you know they	
17:47	all they go to New York or some of them	
17:48	go to Europe but they keep connections	
17:50	and they keep talking and	
17:53	it also spans generations so you go you	
17:55	know you go to	
17:56	move to New York after summer CLOC and	
17:58	you're at a cattle call audition	
18:01	and it is	
18:02	very	
18:03	likely	
18:04	if not a given that at least one person	

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18:06	behind that table has either been the	
18:08	CLOC or has a strong connection to	
18:10	CLOC because that's just how small the	
18:11	community is and then of course	
18:14	the sort of beneficial residual for	
18:16	Falmouth is they also have that deep	
18:19	emotional connection to the community	
18:21	because it you know for many people it's	
18:23	one of the most uh memorable	
18:26	summers of their lives and they spent it	
18:28	here so they do tend to come back and	
18:30	tend to	
18:31	keep connections with uh you know not	
18:34	just their company members but locals	
18:36	that they met while they were here and	
18:37	then they may end up doing something	
18:38	like the Falmouth um film festival or	
18:41	you know some of them	
18:43	have come back every year just to do the	
18:45	Road Race because they did it that one	
18:46	summer that they were playing trumpet in	
18:48	the orchestra you know so it's uh it is	
18:51	a very	
18:52	uh important	
18:54	organization	
18:56	for on the national scale but also I	
18:58	think for us in Falmouth it really you	

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19:00	know when you are talking about	
19:02	your home community and you're giving	
19:05	folks some information about it it's	
19:07	like okay well Falmouth what's Falmouth	
19:08	oh well you know Woods Hole and the	
19:10	ferries are going to the Vineyard and um	
19:12	there's WHOI and all of this great	
19:14	science going on and there's College	
19:16	Light Opera Company which is this	
19:17	incredible uh you know	
19:20	unique	
19:21	summer program for for young artists so	
19:24	I often refer to our community as a	
19:26	mosaic	
19:27	and	
19:28	CLOC is one of the shining tiles in	
19:30	that mosaic for sure and that's what uh	
19:33	in in my full-time work I work in	
19:36	government and have worked in many	
19:37	places	
19:38	and there are no other places in my	
19:41	experience that quite bring	
19:44	just such	
19:46	an array of tiles to the mosaic and the	
19:48	arts community in the scientific	
19:50	community	
19:52	and people's willingness to engage	

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19:54	in so many different ways and it really	
19:57	really	
19:57	makes this place special and and CLOC	
20:00	is certainly an important part of that	
20:03	yeah I mean I would I would absolutely	
20:04	agree I think Falmouth is so	
20:07	interesting in that it is a small town	
20:09	but it has	
20:11	large city scale	
20:13	uh	
20:14	bells and whistles to it which is so	
20:18	crazy you know that we get to live in	
20:20	this community where there are	
20:23	world-class	
20:24	everything happening around us and we	
20:26	can walk on the bike path and there are	
20:28	little villages yeah it's it really is	
20:31	that's what Falmouth is to me I I think	
20:33	you said it perfectly this amazing	
20:35	mosaic of of	
20:37	all any	
20:38	any piece of which would be incredible	
20:40	for a community but we're so spoiled you	
20:43	know to have it all here	
20:45	you bet well one of the other phrases	
20:47	that I love to use is that it takes a	
20:48	name to make a town but people to make a	

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20:51	community so Mark we thank you for	
20:52	sharing the time with us and for you	
20:55	being one of the people that really	
20:56	enriches that mosaic and and thank you	
20:59	for your leadership at CLOC and keeping	
21:00	that tradition going thank you so much	