

Postcards from Falmouth Oral History Transcript

Recorded: July 30, 2021

Oral Historian: Joel Peterson

Interviewer: Troy Clarkson

Topic: The Dome Restaurant

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

00:00	[Music]	
00:45	Joel welcome glad to have you here today	
00:47	thank you so we're here to talk about	
00:49	one of Falmouth's most iconic spots	
00:52	the Dome in Woods Hole and throughout	#thedome Gunning_WoodsHole_Bldg_0607 and 0608
00:55	your life you've had an involvement with	
00:58	that so take us first through the	
01:00	history of how the Dome came to be	
01:02	and then we'll talk about how it was a	
01:05	community gathering place for so many	
01:07	years	
01:08	well my father was an architect in	#egunnarpeterson
01:11	Falmouth	
01:13	fairly controversial one unfortunately	
01:16	because his architecture was what they	
01:18	called contemporary or modern	
01:21	which	
01:22	Falmouth didn't think was that great	
01:26	and	

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01:27	so that went on for a while and then he	
01:29	decided that he thought it would be a	
01:32	good idea to	
01:33	build a hotel	#nautilusmotorinn
01:36	and then building a hotel maybe we'd	
01:38	have a restaurant with it and of course	
01:40	it had to be different	
01:42	you know and it had to	
01:44	there was a lot of controversy when we	
01:47	were building it	
01:49	I at the time it was 1953	#1953
01:52	I was 12 years old	
01:54	but I do remember it very well	
01:57	the Dome was the most controversial	
02:00	most of the people in Woods Hole and	
02:03	you're familiar with the	
02:07	ethos if that's the word of Woods Hole	
02:10	um we're	
02:12	vehemently against it	
02:14	in	
02:16	all of the stuff that you see now about	
02:19	“save the Dome” it's going to go down it's	
02:23	was the exact opposite if it goes up	
02:25	it's going to ruin life as we know it	
02:27	and	
02:29	and	
02:31	it's very amusing that probably the	

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02:34	grandchildren of the people that were	
02:36	fighting it going up are now fighting it	
02:39	going down yeah	
02:41	but uh anyway my father	
02:44	Bucky Fuller R. Buckminster Fuller was	#buckminsterfuller
02:47	the	
02:49	inventor if that's the word the father	
02:51	of the Dome	
02:53	and uh	
02:55	my father thought it would be fun to	
02:57	have	
02:58	that as a restaurant	
03:00	so he got in touch with Bucky who who	
03:03	was quite a guy in his own right I mean	
03:05	he was on a stamp and you know I mean he	
03:08	was Bucky was quite a guy	
03:11	and	
03:12	personally he was like a grandfather to	
03:14	me	
03:16	as I say I was 12. he and his wife came	
03:18	and lived at our house	
03:20	for the summer of 1953	
03:24	and lived with our family	
03:26	while the Dome was being built	
03:29	in the Dome um	
03:32	is an interesting structure in that it's	
03:35	very lightweight and it can span large	

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03:38	areas like a baseball field for instance	
03:41	you know but	
03:42	but at that time	
03:44	he had only built one commercially he	
03:47	built one in Dearborn Michigan for the	
03:49	Ford Motor Company	
03:52	and when he got through with that job he	
03:54	came to Woods Hole	
03:56	the Woods Hole Dome is wood	
03:59	and all the wood was pre-cut	
04:02	at MIT and was brought down on a couple	
04:05	of trucks	
04:07	the dome structure itself is is uh he	
04:11	called it dynamic he used he made up the	
04:14	word geodesic which	#geodesicdome
04:16	describes the construction but	
04:18	dynamic being that	
04:20	there are multiple panels	
04:23	all	
04:24	engineered and fit together	
04:27	and what enables a large space to be	
04:31	to be	
04:33	constructed without	
04:36	without falling down and without any	
04:38	supports	
04:40	is that one piece was pushing on the	
04:42	other	

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04:43	so the building is always moving and if	
04:47	you're in there	
04:48	and there's no people or nothing	
04:51	you can hear it it's cracking all the	
04:53	time	
04:54	and it's not just wind it's just it just	
04:57	does that	
04:59	of course that makes	
05:01	the outside rather tough because you've	
05:04	got a solid outside in the insides	
05:07	moving	
05:09	so consequently it leaked a lot	
05:12	that was really the hardest part	
05:15	and we were working on that all the time	
05:18	a guy named Dave Gardner was the	
05:21	was the roofer and he tried everything	
05:24	in the world you know that he could find	
05:26	uh elastomeric you know to keep to seal	
05:30	the joints	
05:31	it was originally covered in Mylar	
05:36	in	
05:36	1953	
05:38	Mylar is a clear plastic	
05:42	it was glued on	
05:44	to each panel	
05:46	and	
05:49	that	

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05:50	first year we were open we opened in	
05:52	1954	#1954
05:55	and	
05:56	those of you of my age remember that in	
05:58	1954 Hurricane Carol	#hurricane #hurricanecarol
06:01	came through at the end of August	
06:05	and while you could walk on	
06:08	on the Mylar it was strong enough to	
06:11	hold you if you had something sharp that	
06:14	was a different story and it got pierced	
06:16	and the whole thing got ruined	
06:19	so one year after it was up	
06:22	it was gone	
06:24	the structure was fine but the covering	
06:26	was gone so then it was covered with	
06:29	what it is covered with now which were	
06:31	sheets of fiberglass	
06:33	and fiberglass was brand new at that	
06:35	time as I recall there was a company in	
06:38	New Bedford that made it that made these	
06:40	panels	
06:42	and	
06:43	the panels at that time were pink and	
06:46	green you know preppy stuff	
06:50	and so the whole dome	
06:53	the different uh panels were either pink	
06:56	or green and then there was a big	

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06:58	picture window behind what was the	
07:00	sunken bar	
07:02	ah let's see so	
07:05	that went on for a few years and then	
07:07	ultimately we had to start coating the	
07:09	outside so the pink and green went away	
07:13	just because it was	
07:14	not painted but essentially painted with	
07:17	this	
07:18	elastomeric stuff	
07:20	so it moved a lot it leaked a lot it was	
07:23	it was an issue	
07:25	so that that's a wonderful history that	
07:28	only someone who lived it like yourself	
07:30	could recount spent Hurricane	
07:33	Carol in the cellar of the of the	
07:36	kitchen	
07:37	wow yeah	
07:38	and that was quite a storm	
07:41	I was not alive then but I have read	
07:43	about it and heard about it I was here	
07:45	uh of course for Hurricane Bob which was	
07:48	uh that was a good one 30 something	
07:50	years later and that was a good one too	
07:53	but so after the reconstruction in 1954	
07:56	then the Dome began its run as	
07:59	one of the premier restaurants in	

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08:01	Massachusetts certainly on Cape Cod and	
08:04	over those years	
08:05	it's funny you should mention the	
08:07	leaking because I still share stories	
08:10	and I run into Cape Cod once in a while and	
08:12	we can get to him in a minute but people	
08:14	to this day tell stories about having	
08:16	large dinner parties and fun and	
08:19	food and drink	
08:20	and the roof leaking and they would just	
08:22	go right through it because that was	
08:24	part of the Dome experience part of the	
08:25	ambiance but	
08:27	we have pictures of people sitting in	
08:29	there with umbrellas though	
08:31	uh just	
08:33	you know to pull our chain little but	
08:36	but that's isn't that part of what was	
08:38	the experience because it was a local	
08:40	place right people understood that they	
08:42	expected it so it wasn't as though they	
08:44	were put out by that but it was part of	
08:46	what made it so special well that's what	
08:48	we told them anyway	
08:51	well it worked because uh and and that	
08:54	became uh you know uh	
08:56	obviously a huge part of your life for	

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08:59	many many years so tell us about the	
09:01	evolution of the restaurant and and and	
09:04	it continued uh	
09:05	uh to be such an important part not just	
09:08	of the Woods Hole village but of the	
09:10	Falmouth and the Cape Cod community	
09:12	well	
09:14	I I guess	
09:15	it was because I you know my father was	
09:18	a local boy he went to	
09:20	Lawrence High I went to Lawrence High	#lawrencehighschool Gunning_Village_Bldg_0238 through 0257 Hunt_Village_Bldg_017 through 022
09:22	you know I mean we're we're locals	
09:26	the town and back in those days was a	
09:28	lot simpler than it is now you literally	
09:30	knew everybody now I know you knew a lot	
09:32	of people and know a lot of people but	
09:35	uh	
09:36	you sort of knew everybody so when you	
09:38	were	
09:39	in the business it wasn't I'm going to	
09:42	the Dome it's I'm going to go see Joel	
09:45	you know I mean	
09:46	you know it became a	

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09:48	personality thing I think and uh	
09:51	heck if I ever took a night off	
09:54	you know I'd run into somebody you know	
09:56	say like you downtown and say hey I was	
09:59	there the other night where the hell	
10:00	were you you know	
10:02	you know	
10:03	you know you got that a lot so	
10:05	you know it was a	
10:07	it was a	
10:09	summer	
10:11	tourist place	
10:13	but the locals went there	
10:15	for sure I mean I grew up uh off of	
10:17	Davisville in East Falmouth and	
10:20	uh you know the opportunity to to travel	
10:23	to Woods Hole in general but you know on	
10:26	a very special occasion we would go	
10:28	there and that was always a highlight	
10:30	for the family and that's those memories	
10:33	uh you know last a lifetime and so your	
10:36	place has been part of	
10:38	uh so many memories for thousands of	
10:40	people and that's what I still get you	
10:41	know I still run into people at you know	
10:44	the hardware store or whatever who'll	
10:46	say just that you know God I remember	

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10:48	coming there on Mother's Day I remember	
10:50	there's some you know	
10:52	different things of course weddings and	
10:55	I just had it out in the hallway here	
10:57	your previous	
10:59	guest	
11:01	was telling me stories about a wedding	
11:03	he went to there and	
11:05	and talking about Cape Cod and yeah I mean	
11:08	so it goes on all the time oh absolutely	
11:11	and Cape Cod was a big big big part of it	
11:14	so for those watching this Arne of	
11:15	course is Arne Grepstad who was	#arnegrepstad
11:18	uh	
11:19	general manager was his title or manager	
11:21	or but he was part of the heart and soul	
11:23	of that place and certainly the	
11:24	personality Arne Grepstad was was a uh	
11:28	an exchange student	
11:30	at at	
11:31	Lawrence High	
11:33	I don't know if it was Falmouth High	
11:34	then no it's still Lawrence High then I	
11:36	think and uh	
11:38	and	
11:41	for some unknown reason they asked me to	
11:44	be one of his advisors	

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11:47	and I wasn't that much older than him	
11:48	and he was very well adjusted and didn't	
11:51	seem to be having any problems so I	
11:53	would take him to Red Sox games and you	
11:55	know I mean we just did stuff and	
11:58	and became friends so when his year was	
12:00	up	
12:02	I said	
12:03	you know what are you going to do I'm	
12:05	going back to know yeah but what are you	
12:06	going to do	
12:07	and	
12:08	and he didn't really know	
12:11	so one thing and another I went to the	
12:13	Cornell Hotel School and so we got him	#cornellhotelschool
12:16	into the Cornell Hotel School	
12:20	and then he started working summers for	
12:22	me and then when he got through I said	
12:25	what are you gonna do and I said well	
12:27	why don't you come here and he just came	
12:29	and never left and uh	
12:31	you know he	
12:33	as we like to say he's like a rash you	
12:35	know you get	
12:36	it of him	
12:38	Arne's the best no question about it	
12:41	and uh absolutely he's a	

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12:43	bit of a character but uh	
12:46	I could tell you Arne's stories for a	
12:49	long long time	
12:50	but that's what makes places like the	
12:52	dome so special because as you just	
12:55	experienced people identify	
12:58	their life story by people places and	
13:01	things and the Dome had all of those it	
13:03	was this amazing thing in the middle of	
13:05	the village a special place and had	
13:08	people like you and Arne that made it	
13:10	an experience it wasn't going to Anyplace	
13:12	USA to you know for a ham sandwich	
13:15	it was going to the Dome	
13:17	for that whole experience and uh and so	
13:19	people still very much identify with	
13:21	that as	
13:22	as you know uh Phil Stone is my stepdad	
13:25	and uh is one of your contemporaries and	
13:27	you know to to this day he tells stories	
13:30	about	
13:31	the Dome and about Woods Hole	
13:33	oh sure Phil and Dick	
13:34	yeah oh yeah and and but that's I think	
13:37	places like the Dome are woven through	
13:39	the fret of the thread of the community	
13:41	and make it really the special place	

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13:44	Quarterdeck today is that kind of a	#quarterdeck
13:47	place you go absolutely you know it's	
13:50	all	
13:51	people I know for the most part you know	
13:53	it's	
13:54	it's home you know it's Falmouth like	
13:57	Cheers where everybody knows your name	
13:58	right exactly	
14:00	exactly so so	
14:01	if you could pick out just a couple of	
14:03	uh memorable stories from the Dome uh	
14:07	famous people that dine in there or	
14:09	experiences that that happen are there	
14:11	any that stand out	
14:13	well you're a baseball fan yes of course	
14:16	my favorite player	
14:18	was Jackie Jensen	#jackiejensen
14:21	right fielder	
14:22	the outfield of Williams Piersall and	
14:25	Jensen Pearsall of course lived in	
14:27	Hyannis and	
14:30	Ted Williams needs no introduction	
14:33	Jackie Jensen played right field	
14:36	and	
14:37	if you're a trivia buff	
14:39	which I'm sure you are and you would	
14:40	know that Jackie Jensen is the only	

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14:43	person	
14:44	who played in both the Rose Bowl and the	
14:48	World Series	
14:49	because he was football player	
14:51	California	
14:53	and then a baseball player in the World	
14:55	Series unfortunately not with the Red	
14:57	Sox but with the Yankees	
15:00	and	
15:01	anyway he was right fielder	
15:04	when I was about 14 years old I was	
15:07	washing dishes in the Dome	
15:09	and I was too young really to run the	
15:12	dishwasher but	
15:13	I did anyway	
15:15	until the labor people came in	
15:19	and said that this kid's too young and	
15:21	this is dangerous equipment and all that	
15:23	other stuff and told my father that	
15:27	they had to let me go	
15:28	so they did let me go until he got out	
15:31	of the driveway and then	
15:33	and then I went back but that year	
15:36	58	
15:39	was one of Jackie Jensen's best years	
15:41	and I used to write what he did every	
15:43	day on on the on the shelf down in the	

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15:47	uh cellar of the restaurant	
15:49	anyway don't know why I did it	
15:53	now come ahead	
15:55	god 20 25 years	
15:57	and this guy walks into the restaurant	
15:59	I'm standing there at the desk and I	
16:01	look and I said it's Jackie Jensen	
16:05	couldn't believe it	
16:06	I said yo Jackie Jensen he says yeah	
16:08	nobody knows anymore I said no I do	
16:11	anyway he had dinner he's taking his	
16:13	daughter to the Vineyard	
16:15	spending the night at the Nautilus	
16:17	and uh came up for dinner	
16:20	so I took him down in the cellar and	
16:22	showed him what I had done back then he	
16:25	absolutely couldn't believe it but you	
16:27	know talk about	
16:29	meeting your hero sort of you know I	
16:31	mean it was it was neat	
16:35	so that really uh exemplifies what we're	
16:37	talking about and how yeah	
16:40	places like the Dome are just special	
16:42	and I'm sure you know he remembered that	
16:44	for the rest of his days uh after his	
16:46	time in the Major Leagues was over and	
16:48	he had	

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16:51	he was one of those that	
16:53	the other thing he he was well known for	
16:55	was he wouldn't fly	
16:58	which	
16:59	you know was a problem for a ball player	
17:01	so right	
17:03	sort of like John Madden right exactly	
17:05	exactly Madden got more famous for it	
17:08	and had a bus and all that stuff you	
17:10	know Willie Nelson you know it's got his	
17:12	own bus but uh	
17:14	yeah	
17:16	so there's one um	
17:19	oh we had the president of Finland	
17:21	really yeah that was fun	
17:24	so tell us about that	
17:25	uh the president of Finland his name was	
17:28	Urho Kekkonen	#urhoekkonen
17:31	and	
17:32	he was	
17:34	obviously planning a visit to the states	
17:36	and he wanted to go to Oceanographic	#whoi
17:39	uh	
17:40	he was very interested in oceanography	
17:43	and I guess there's a lot of	
17:44	oceanography in Finland you know I mean	
17:46	that kind of stuff	

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17:48	so that's what got him to Woods Hole but	
17:50	they had to put him up for the night so	
17:54	this was	
17:56	oh my lord he had	
17:59	he had more U.S. Secret Service than his	
18:01	own he had one	
18:04	one little group of people that were	
18:06	guarding him	
18:07	and then a whole bunch of our people	
18:09	that were guarding him you know Secret	
18:11	Service guys and they had to come	
18:12	through and check out all the employees	
18:16	and we all had little pins that we were	
18:18	wearing that were okay to get close to	
18:20	them and all this sort of stuff that was	
18:22	sort of fun	
18:23	wow and	
18:25	you know we fed him and you know it was	
18:28	a good time	
18:29	he had a good time Jimmy Carter stayed	#jimmycarter
18:32	with us really yeah	
18:34	yeah he was at the National Academy of	
18:36	Sciences	
18:38	so	
18:39	his	
18:40	Secret Service guy came to me and said	
18:43	um	

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18:45	and he wasn't president he was past	
18:47	president when he came he wasn't	
18:48	president at the time	
18:50	and I said he he wanted to take a a jog	
18:54	he said he liked to jog a mile or two	
18:56	every morning	
18:57	which was well known you know you know	
18:59	Carter was a runner I said well you're	
19:01	in luck	
19:02	we're right on the course of the	
19:04	Falmouth Road Race	#falmouthroadrace
19:06	so he said well show me	
19:08	you know where where he where he'd go so	
19:11	I	
19:12	took the Secret Service guy and	
19:15	down Church Street around the lighthouse	#nobskalight Hunt_WoodsHole_Bch_573 through 578 & Gunning_WoodsHole_Bldg_0745 through 0773 Church of the Messiah on Church St.: Hunt_WoodsHole_Bldg_540 & Gunning_WoodsHole_Bldg_0565 through 0569
19:18	of course and you know back up through	
19:20	and then you know make the loop	
19:23	perfect he thought that was great so	

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19:25	sure enough at six o'clock the next	
19:27	morning	
19:29	there are two police cars	
19:32	two Secret Service cars	
19:34	four Secret Service agents running	
19:36	right by him and Jimmy Carter in the	
19:39	middle and they're jogging around the	
19:41	lighthouse	
19:43	at like six in the morning now if Carter	
19:45	had run all by himself	
19:48	and anyone saw him they'd say oh that	
19:50	guy looks like Jimmy Carter you know I	
19:52	mean that would have been about it but	
19:54	with the lights going and the	
19:56	police cars and you know all that uh	
20:00	it was uh	
20:02	you know what a great story so we can	
20:04	walk up everybody we can say President	
20:06	Carter ran the Falmouth Road Race right	
20:09	that's great yeah and Hugh McCartney was	
20:11	down interviewing him	
20:14	as a matter of fact so the all of the uh	
20:17	dating back over 100 years the Falmouth	
20:20	Public Library who is sponsoring this	
20:22	series also had an effort that the	
20:26	Enterprise newspapers going back more	#falmouthenterprise
20:28	than 100 years are now digitally	

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20:30	preserved and online okay so I'm going	
20:32	to go back and uh and try to find that	
20:35	story and I'm sure over the years there	
20:37	were a tremendous amount of photos and	
20:39	stories about the Dome when it was in it	
20:42	oh yeah so you can	
20:44	well now that it's archived you can	
20:47	yeah when I have some time one of these	
20:49	days I'll take a look	
20:51	well this has been tremendously	
20:52	enjoyable any anything in closing you	
20:54	want to share with us about your	
20:57	personal story related to the Dome or or	
20:59	about the facility itself well it was	
21:03	you know I	
21:04	I miss it	
21:05	um	
21:07	it's it's not a uh it's not I don't miss	
21:11	everything but you know it's a lot of	
21:13	hours so it's a lot of work the problem	
21:16	with running a restaurant is that	
21:18	everybody eats three meals a day so	
21:20	they're all experts you know yeah you go	
21:22	to the doctor and the doctor says do	
21:25	this and you do it because you're not a	
21:27	doctor and you're hurt you know but you	
21:30	go to a restaurant or actually a hotel	

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21:33	because you sleep every night right	
21:35	you're an expert	
21:37	and	
21:38	you know it's it's uh it's an	
21:40	interesting dynamic but I certainly	
21:43	enjoyed I enjoyed the people the most I	
21:45	mean what you're talking about	
21:47	the fact that people you know just like	
21:49	what happened out in the hallway here uh	
21:52	that's	
21:52	the best part you know that's just a lot	
21:54	of fun that you know you made people	
21:56	happy and uh even if it was raining on	
21:59	them	
22:00	well yeah I mean that was like as you	
22:02	very nicely pointed out that was just	
22:04	part of the experience	
22:08	it rained at Fenway too the other night	
22:10	you know	
22:11	a good point and people still had a good	
22:13	time yeah sure well thank you Joel for	
22:15	to you and your dad and Bucky Fuller	
22:18	for creating this opportunity for	
22:20	generations to have wonderful memories	
22:22	at that spot don't forget Arne and	
22:25	Arne that's right and you know what	
22:26	maybe we'll have him in here to do one	

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22:28	of these uh one of these oral histories	
22:30	too because uh	
22:32	uh you know I was thinking when you	
22:33	mentioned the President of Finland	
22:34	before we close	
22:36	is Arne Finnish	
22:37	no Arne's Norwegian okay yeah	
22:40	he wishes he was Finnish	
22:43	I will ask him that question	
22:45	that's great well thank you for sharing	
22:48	some time and your memories with us and	
22:49	helping us preserve this beautiful slice	
22:52	of history for Falmouth my pleasure	