

Postcards from Falmouth Oral History Transcript

Recorded: June 30, 2021

Oral Historian: Nancy Eldridge, Camille Beale

Interviewer: Barbara Kanellopoulos

Topic: Falmouth Main Street in the 1900s

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

00:00	[Music]	
00:44	welcome to the Falmouth Public Library's	
00:47	oral history project I'm Barbara	
00:50	Kanellopoulos and with me are our oral	
00:54	historians Nancy Eldridge and Cam Beale	
00:58	who are going to tell us stories that	
01:01	along with the historic postcards will	
01:04	give us an idea of what Main Street in	#mainstreet Gunning_Village_Sts_0017 through 0041
01:07	Falmouth looked like in the mid-1900s	
01:12	Cam	
01:13	Cam you arrived here in Falmouth in the	
01:16	mid 50s and and married Falmouth	
01:19	resident	
01:21	Barry Beale whose parents owned	
01:24	the Beale's Shoe Store on Main Street and	#bealesshoestore
01:27	Nancy you came to Falmouth	
01:30	around 1940 as a child and you lived on	
01:34	Main Street in fact Main Street was your	
01:37	playground	

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01:39	so I'll turn to Cam first to tell us how	
01:42	has uh how has Main Street changed over	
01:45	the years well surprisingly Barbara it	
01:47	really hasn't changed very much	
01:50	from the mid-1900s the	
01:53	buildings around the village green and	#falmouthvillagegreen
01:55	the center of Falmouth really	
01:59	you would recognize them if you	
02:01	looked at those postcards they look	
02:02	pretty much the same as they do in the	
02:05	postcards so the buildings have not	
02:07	changed very much some of them have been	
02:10	expanded some have been downsized for	
02:13	them for	
02:15	mostly	
02:16	the town is the same	
02:18	the town hall was	#townhall
02:21	in the center of town and it was	
02:24	on the Noonan Park site	#pegnoonanpark
02:27	that we use today	
02:29	and it was	
02:32	and behind it was the police station	
02:35	and the police station overlooked	
02:37	Shiverick's Pond	#shiverickspond Gunning_Village_Pnd_0120 through 146 Hunt_Village_Pnd_128 through 135
02:39	and of course Katharine Lee Bates Road	

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02:40	wasn't there at that time	
02:43	and	
02:44	so the Shiverick's kind of	
02:47	really came up behind those buildings	
02:49	fairly close	
02:52	the story goes that	
02:56	Shiverick's used to freeze over in the	
02:58	winter time and they used it to skate on	
03:01	like three to five weeks during the	
03:03	winter	
03:05	and	
03:06	there was a policeman named White	
03:09	and he was	
03:11	quite a big man and he would go out onto	
03:13	the pond and stand on the middle	
03:16	of the ice and	
03:18	deem it safe or not safe to	
03:21	to skate on	
03:23	and	
03:24	one day my husband Barry	
03:26	eight or nine years old went out onto	
03:29	the pond	
03:30	unbeknownst to anyone	
03:32	hadn't been checked out	
03:34	and	
03:35	a policeman coming back from being on	
03:37	duty saw him and went down got him off	

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03:40	the ice called his dad at the shoe store	
03:43	his dad arrived at the police station	
03:46	and they	
03:47	read the riot act to Barry Beale yes yes	
03:50	it was a personal time people took care	
03:53	of each other yes and uh I see Nancy you	
03:56	certainly were very aware of the	
04:00	visibility of the police on Main Street	
04:04	yes indeed I was and everyone in town	
04:09	kind of knew everyone else and	
04:13	I	
04:14	um	
04:16	when I first	
04:17	know when I first learned how to drive	
04:21	I learned	
04:22	how to drive	
04:23	and I was driving very well by the time	
04:25	I was 15.	
04:27	and one day for some reason I was sent	
04:30	to do an errand while	
04:34	using the car	
04:35	at the age of 15 and I drove out on Main	
04:39	Street and	
04:41	there was the traffic policeman standing	
04:44	as they used to in a circle in the	
04:46	middle of the	
04:47	Main Street	

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04:49	that	
04:51	and of course as I	
04:53	tootled on by driving my car at 15	
04:58	uh the policeman	
05:00	was it uh Elmer Wright by any chance now	
05:03	Elmer White that was what I thank you	
05:06	for reminding me that was it Elmer White	
05:08	yelled	
05:09	hey what are you doing driving that car	
05:12	you're only 15 of course he knew	
05:14	exactly how old I was he knew who I was	
05:19	yes	
05:20	but that was as far as it went I waved	
05:23	and smiled and	
05:25	yes yes	
05:26	and	
05:27	so and the high school was right there I	
05:30	understand and that was the high school	
05:32	you went to	
05:33	I did indeed the red wood shingled	
05:37	building with the belfry in the top was	
05:39	my high school	
05:41	we were	
05:43	supposed to be the first class to	
05:47	graduate from the new high school which	
05:49	was being built across Shiverick's Pond	
05:52	which is now the middle school	#lawrenceschool

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05:55	but the truth	
05:57	like all buildings it didn't get	
05:59	finished in time so we were the last	
06:01	class	
06:02	to graduate from the old wood shingle	
06:05	building on	
06:07	right on Main Street and it was	
06:11	it was an	
06:12	interesting building yes I understand	
06:15	there's a plaque on Main Street next to	
06:18	a stone that commemorates that that's	
06:21	where the old high school was	
06:23	and um	
06:25	and so Main Street then um	
06:28	had had	
06:30	markets markets for food shops	
06:32	yeah they did there were three markets	
06:34	that I remember when I came to town one	
06:37	of them was the A&P	
06:39	that was in the center of town	
06:41	the other was the First National and	
06:43	that was across the street from what is	
06:46	now Barbo's but it was W.C. Davis at that	
06:49	time it was furniture store	
06:52	and the third one was a specialty shop	
06:56	it was	
06:58	called Ten Acre	#tenacre

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06:59	and it catered to the summer people oh	
07:02	yes yeah	
07:03	Hollis Lovell owned it	
07:05	and he hired a number of high school and	
07:08	college students to work summers	
07:10	and they have I'm sure	
07:12	a lot of happy memories doing that	
07:14	um also my memory is of the donut	
07:17	machine in the window or in the front I	
07:20	can't remember whether it was in the	
07:21	window or the front of the store but	
07:23	anyway every they wheeled it out every	
07:26	uh Saturday	
07:27	and it made those you know plain greasy	
07:30	donuts	
07:32	they put the mixture in it would plop	
07:34	the donuts down into the grease they'd	
07:36	bob around and turn around when they	
07:39	were cooked it would automatically lift	
07:41	them out and drain the grease from them	
07:43	and then somebody would pick them up	
07:45	through the donut holes and put them	
07:47	into a bag yummy plain donuts	
07:51	greasy yes delicious it sounds like	
07:54	just watching this machine must have	
07:56	been entertainment for the town yeah	
07:59	right line up right	

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08:01	and	
08:03	entertainment	
08:05	makes me think of	
08:06	Nancy you remember a movie house on Main	
08:10	Street oh I certainly do I remember both	
08:12	of them but the there was a	
08:15	um the Elizabeth Theater which was right	#elizabeththeater Gunning_Village_Sts_0025
08:18	on Main Street and is now the	
08:20	location from I believe Maxwells	
08:23	department store or	
08:25	clothing store	
08:27	and	
08:29	they ran movies every single day and	
08:32	evening	
08:34	and I lived right next door to it so I	
08:36	always knew what movie was playing and I	
08:39	saw many of them but	
08:42	they always had a cowboy movie on	
08:45	Saturdays	
08:47	and	
08:48	good first run movies that ran on	
08:51	Sundays and Mondays and double features	
08:54	on Tuesday Wednesday Thursday	
08:57	don't remember what was on Friday but	
08:59	always a cowboy movie on Saturday yes	
09:02	and do you remember how much	

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09:04	admission	
09:06	well as a child up till 12	
09:10	and actually I got past 12 because I	
09:12	wasn't very tall and didn't look 12.	
09:15	I paid 10 cents plus 2 cents tax and I	
09:20	think the the adult	
09:22	um	
09:23	charge was under a dollar	
09:26	it must have been a place where all the	
09:29	children went uh while their parents	
09:31	were shopping on me	
09:33	I would go shopping at the First	
09:35	National and then I would come back and	
09:38	say to the ticket lady I'm going to go	
09:39	in and check on my children and she'd	
09:41	say oh go ahead and tell the usher and	
09:44	he'd let you go down talk to the kids	
09:46	are you doing okay yeah fine all right	
09:48	see you at the end and uh yeah for sure	
09:51	it was yes yes yes it seems uh	
09:54	that Main Street was just so homey it	
09:58	seems at that at that time	
10:00	and uh	
10:02	of course there was um sometimes	
10:04	entertainment even in the businesses how	
10:07	about uh	
10:09	the place called Harvey's	#harveyshardware

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10:11	somebody asked me about Harvey's the	
10:13	other day	
10:15	we were at a I don't know where we were	
10:17	but she said do you remember Harvey's and	
10:19	the animals and I said oh yes	
10:22	Harvey had a monkey there he had that	
10:24	monkey there all year long and it was	
10:26	inside	
10:28	and he had a Christmas time for at least	
10:31	a couple of years I don't know how long	
10:33	it went on but he had reindeer and sheep	
10:36	now I can't remember whether they were	
10:38	penned inside or whether they were	
10:40	penned outside but it was a whole	
10:42	different time it was an innocent time	
10:44	and people and he used it crowds came	
10:47	look at the reindeer it was yes and in	
10:50	addition to looking it was a hardware	
10:52	store it was a hardware store and Harvey	
10:55	Martin owned it and he'd bring some of	
10:57	his farm animals in from Hatchville	
11:00	right and off and on throughout the year	
11:02	but the one I remember the most is the	
11:04	reindeer and Christmas yes yes	
11:07	and	
11:08	Nancy I understand that we had a five and	
11:11	dime that you're quite familiar with	

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11:14	um yes well it was almost across the	
11:18	street from where I lived	
11:21	and	
11:22	it was called Newberry's and	#jjnewberrys Gunning_Village_Sts_0025
11:25	it really did have things that were	
11:29	5 and 10 cents um	
11:32	if you can imagine it most of them were	
11:34	a dollar or under	
11:36	and actually when I was a teenager at	
11:39	Christmas time	
11:42	I actually got a job working there for a	
11:45	couple of weeks to earn Christmas money	
11:48	which was a treat for me and one of my	
11:51	first jobs	
11:53	now as I recall five and dimes used to	
11:57	have lunch counters too it did have a	
12:00	lunch counter and um	
12:03	I think that a lot of people would come	
12:06	in to have their lunch there are	
12:08	merchants who were working on Main	
12:11	Street	
12:12	and that was consisted of	
12:14	maybe a hot dog or something exactly	
12:17	they were very	
12:20	uh you know lunches under a dollar right	
12:24	I see I see	

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12:26	can I just tell you about one store that	
12:28	was kind of interesting yes yes on the	
12:31	corner of Walker	
12:33	there were you know where the ice cream	
12:35	place is now	
12:36	there was a store called the Store of	#storeofthreewonders
12:38	Three Wonders	
12:39	and if you go to those postcards you'll	
12:42	see that store	
12:44	and you will see white sheets of paper	
12:46	in the window because he used to put the	
12:48	sale items	
12:49	on the	
12:51	white sheets of paper and post them I	
12:53	see sort of handwritten signs	
12:55	and it the three wonders were “you wonder	
12:58	if I have it	
13:00	I wonder where it is	
13:02	and everybody wonders how I found it”	
13:06	and it was kind of a precursor to Job	
13:08	Lot I think because he had kind of	
13:11	you know the tail end of inventories	
13:14	that he had purchased I suspected	
13:16	anything you needed in a hurry you could	
13:18	probably find there yes yes yeah right	
13:21	that that's that's charming then they	
13:23	were also um	

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13:26	what did people do about clothing uh	
13:29	well there were no malls no no no no	
13:32	malls and there were clothing stores	
13:34	where you could buy adult clothing	
13:37	Malchman's was mostly women's clothes	
13:40	they did have some men but mostly women	
13:42	Isaacson's	
13:45	was a clothing store for mostly men's	
13:48	clothing	
13:49	and Butner's carried clothing they	
13:52	carried	
13:53	all kinds of things curtains they were	
13:55	more of a department store they had	
13:58	collectibles	
13:59	but	
14:00	a lot of people who wanted to buy	
14:02	clothing for their youngsters	
14:04	would get the ferry	#ferry
14:06	in Woods Hole and go over to New Bedford	
14:10	and they would purchase their	
14:12	maybe school clothing for September yes	
14:15	from	
14:16	Cherry & Webb	
14:18	and the story goes that Mrs. Beale Ruth	
14:22	took Barry over one day	
14:24	got the ferry went to New Bedford picked	
14:27	out school clothing he wasn't feeling so	

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14:30	great they got back on the ferry to come	
14:32	home and by the time he got off he had	
14:35	chickenpox and of course two days later	
14:38	he was an item in the Enterprise	
14:41	you know that he had gotten the	
14:42	chickenpox on his his trip to New	
14:45	Bedford for school clothing	
14:47	I remember making that school that was	
14:50	school shopping	
14:52	yes	
14:54	and perhaps Cherry & Webb was a bit	
14:56	more economical indeed it was yes	
14:59	and had a greater selection yes yes yes	
15:02	that's true	
15:04	and um	
15:05	and so we have um	
15:08	interesting that	
15:10	that the stores reflected what people	
15:12	needed and what people were doing at the	
15:14	time for example the you spoke of a	
15:18	linen store that had embroidery	
15:21	and	
15:22	the kinds of things that women who were	
15:24	doing handcrafts	
15:26	could go to for supplies exactly and my	
15:30	mother was one of their best customers	
15:32	because she was never without needlework	

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15:36	she	
15:36	knitted and crocheted constantly	
15:40	had did it so well that she could	
15:43	read a book while doing it and	
15:47	that so as I say she was Jane Russell's	
15:50	best customer yes yes I remember buying	
15:53	my gloves there for when I was married	
15:58	and I went in and she had all these	
16:00	boxes with gloves in it and then she	
16:03	took out one short long medium which one	
16:06	do you want	
16:07	took them out I got the short ones she	
16:09	put them out on the counter	
16:11	you know laid them out lovely and I	
16:14	purchased my gloves I wore the short	
16:16	gloves so that's so interesting because	
16:19	there was a time when gloves were	
16:22	important items in a woman's wardrobe	
16:24	and hats and hats as well right gloves	
16:27	and hats you always had to have a pair	
16:29	of white gloves	
16:31	wear to church yes yes interesting	
16:33	interesting and then there was um your	
16:37	uh	
16:38	in-laws shoe store right at the Beale Shoe	
16:42	Store right Granny Beale	#granvillebeale
16:44	Granny right he was called Granny	

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16:46	because his name was Granville and	
16:48	everybody in town called him Granny	
16:50	Beale	
16:51	he was on the Board of Trade which is	
16:54	now the Chamber of Commerce	
16:56	he was	
16:57	on the board of the Salvation Army and	
16:59	he was quite active in town and	
17:02	and in politics yes um he	
17:06	is however the shoe store is really	
17:08	quite well known for	
17:10	the x-ray machine an x-ray machine oh	
17:13	yes	
17:14	it was uh	
17:16	considered really a babysitter of the	
17:19	day because people would go into Mrs.	
17:22	Weeks' shop which was next door and send	
17:24	their children in to gaze down through	
17:27	the x-ray machine to see the bones in	
17:29	their feet	
17:30	I'm not sure that that would be	
17:32	appropriate today no	
17:35	uh so that was uh	
17:38	the interesting part of that and Nancy	
17:40	you have a really interesting story	
17:42	about uh Granny yeah yes um yes I	
17:47	lived	

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17:48	in an old apartment building that is no	
17:51	longer there now right behind the shoe	
17:54	store	
17:56	by the back entrance of the shoe store	
17:59	I'm sure you used to have fun	
18:01	with the x-ray machine	
18:04	I did but it didn't come along until I	
18:07	was older it wasn't there when I was a	
18:10	young child it was more like when I was	
18:12	a teenager but I did use it a lot and	
18:15	play with it nevertheless what it	
18:18	faceted fascinated me as a teenager so	
18:21	yes um so I'm sure that I had my	
18:25	good dose of x-ray	
18:28	and	
18:29	but I	
18:30	was	
18:32	very fortunate in	
18:35	Granny Beale was a very kind and gentle	
18:37	and wonderful man and and I would bop in	
18:41	and out the back door of the shoe store	
18:45	often I bopped in and out of	
18:48	many of the Main Street stores because I	
18:51	lived right there	
18:53	near them or by them or behind them	
18:55	right next to them	
18:57	and	

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19:00	he	
19:04	I	
19:06	my mother was a single parent and I my I	
19:10	was rough on shoes and so my shoes	
19:13	didn't always	
19:14	look so good even though she tried to	
19:17	keep they always fit	
19:19	but they didn't always look pretty	
19:22	and	
19:22	um	
19:24	every	
19:25	now and then at least once a year	
19:29	um	
19:30	we would get a note	
19:32	or a message from Granny Beale	
19:35	that there was a an old gentleman who	
19:39	would like	
19:40	me to have a new pair of shoes	
19:44	and so I was to come in and choose a	
19:46	pair	
19:47	and it was always an old kind old	
19:51	gentleman	
19:52	he might we might have assumed he was	
19:55	rich	
19:56	or maybe	
19:58	that was part of his description but I	
20:00	always went in and picked out	

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20:03	any pair of shoes in the store that I	
20:05	wanted from of course it	
20:08	took	
20:09	I was out of college before I figured	
20:11	out it was Granny Beale who was the kind	
20:14	old man no no mysterious benefactor it	
20:18	was Granny Beale yeah it was um	
20:21	um yes that um	
20:24	the people it was more personal once	
20:25	it's much more personal the smaller	
20:27	population people tend to	
20:29	yes	
20:31	yes	
20:32	and then I um have heard mention of	
20:36	an exciting place in town called the	
20:38	Smith Surrey Room yeah that was quite	#smithsoldesurreyroom Gunning_Village_Bldg_0384
20:40	active during the war actually and after	
20:42	the war too and we used to go from '53 on	
20:47	but they he Dan Smith owned it	#danielsmith
20:50	and he would have a	
20:53	what they called the annual venison	
20:57	dinner	
20:58	and he would invite all his hunting	
21:01	buddies and some dignitaries from the	
21:03	town but mostly people from Main Street	
21:07	and they would go down there and have a	

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21:09	night out and enjoy	
21:11	their catch 10 more minutes	
21:15	so I just remember that and I remember	
21:18	the special	
21:20	that	
21:21	that um	
21:23	that	
21:24	he they had there and it was baked	
21:26	potato	
21:27	filet	
21:28	mignon	
21:30	I'm looking	
21:34	Barbara	
21:35	yes	
21:37	yes	
21:38	and a uh	
21:39	and canned peas	
21:41	and a free drink and an alcoholic drink	
21:45	like an alcoholic drink and it was music	
21:49	there was lots of music	
21:51	uh	
21:52	it was townies all showed up so you	
21:55	always knew someone yeah it was	
21:57	gathering place yes yes yes you're right	
22:01	one of the postcards so it's so	
22:03	interesting because it's just a plethora	Gunning_Village_Sts_0032
22:06	of signs	

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22:08	large small neon painted and	
22:12	the um	
22:13	a rifle uh showing	
22:16	guns for sale right yeah and uh tell us	
22:19	so tell us about it well I think that's	
22:21	interesting because there was	
22:24	it was an Eastman's block that that gun	#eastmanshardware
22:27	shows up as an advertisement and uh I	
22:31	think that there was upstairs there was	
22:34	Mr. Harvey who	
22:37	did	
22:38	have a	
22:39	a buy and sell antique guns	
22:42	and so that could have been from him or	
22:45	it could have been from Eastman who sold	
22:48	guns and ammunition	
22:51	and it was interesting because there's	
22:53	so much signage in that one picture that	
22:57	one postcard that you you know there was	
23:00	no signage law as there is today yes	
23:02	exactly you know and nobody questioned	
23:05	you know in fact this	
23:07	question the fact that there was a gun	
23:09	as an advertisement	
23:11	also there was a	
23:14	speaking of things that would	
23:16	would bring into thought today was there	

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23:19	was a restaurant called the Wigwam and	
23:22	nobody questioned that at that time yes	
23:25	it was a	
23:27	a casual a more casual a more innocent	
23:30	time yes exactly now and the	
23:33	Eastman's block um	
23:36	is isn't there something about	
23:39	how they got their supplies well that's	
23:41	an interesting thing I was talking to	
23:43	Chucky Eastman young Chuck and he was	
23:47	telling me that the train brought	
23:51	a lot of their supplies and left them at	
23:53	the grain mill	
23:55	and then people from Eastman's would go	
23:57	up and pick them up from the early 1900s	
24:00	to the 50s right that a lot of their	
24:02	supplies came in through train right and	
24:05	the train would then continue down to	
24:08	Woods Hole where they'd unload and then it	
24:11	would go on the supplies would go on the	
24:13	ferry and go over to the island	
24:16	so the train was an important part we	
24:18	didn't have the the trucks the	
24:21	you know the 16 wheelers or whatever	
24:24	they call them that we have today and so	
24:27	the train was the way to get supplies to	
24:29	the merchants	

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24:31	and then the merchants on Main Street	
24:35	always had their promotions Nancy I	
24:37	think as a child you remember taking	
24:40	part in one of those promotions	
24:43	on that the Eastman's Hardware store	
24:46	carried	
24:48	oh yes um	
24:50	there was a	
24:52	it was a it was a special day that	
24:54	Falmouth used to have to I think to	
24:56	promote the businesses all up and down	
24:59	Main Street and every business would	
25:01	have	
25:01	something special to draw people in	
25:05	um	
25:06	over	
25:07	you know from maybe	
25:10	uh four to	
25:12	seven in in the evening or	
25:16	whatever I what I remember is that	
25:20	Eastman's um	
25:22	had a	
25:24	display in their	
25:26	window and	
25:28	they had a sign that said that in the	
25:31	display there were 20	
25:34	mistakes	

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25:35	or	
25:36	anomalies that	
25:38	needed to be found and it was a contest	
25:41	and if you	
25:42	found them all you or you	
25:45	found the most you would get	
25:47	ten dollars or twenty dollars I can't it	
25:49	might have been 20. okay	
25:52	um	
25:53	and	
25:54	uh so I spent a lot of time right	
25:57	writing them all down	
25:59	and um I won it you won you won the ten	
26:02	dollars I did yes	
26:05	and um I think you were also the	
26:08	Enterprise picked up on lots of stories	
26:10	like that and was reported in the paper	
26:14	that	
26:15	you won the contest	
26:17	I won the contest yes and as a matter of	
26:20	fact I found one more than 20.	
26:23	I see I see	
26:26	it was um an interesting time Main	
26:29	Street was a	
26:31	pretty busy camp well during the war it	
26:34	was a beehive of activity yes	
26:37	and uh of course Camp Edwards brought in	#campedwards

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		Gunning_Hatchville_Miltry_0557 through 0561
26:39	a lot of service people and their	
26:40	families	
26:41	oh yes and of course we rose to the	
26:43	occasion with entertainment for them	
26:45	right and it went on quite late into the	
26:48	evenings most nights yes but after the	
26:51	war it	
26:52	Main Street still was the center of	
26:54	business and social life	
26:56	and	
26:57	those stores were owned by mostly local	
27:00	people	
27:01	and people seemed to know each other	
27:04	if they didn't know each other they at	
27:06	least knew each other when they passed	
27:08	each other on the street yes they	
27:10	recognized each other so it was a small	
27:14	town still back then yes right and	
27:18	things have changed over a period of	
27:19	time and we have to adjust I guess yes	
27:22	exactly in fact you never went to the	
27:24	store without meeting someone you knew	
27:26	that's correct	
27:27	well I want to thank you so much for	
27:29	being here and telling us these stories	
27:33	and I want to thank viewers for tuning	

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27:35	in	
27:36	and for	
27:38	learning about these stories about Main	
27:40	Street that are	
27:42	along with the	
27:43	historic postcards I remind us to all of	
27:47	us that	
27:49	places everywhere Falmouth and every	
27:51	place are always constantly changing	
27:55	thank you	
27:56	[Music]	