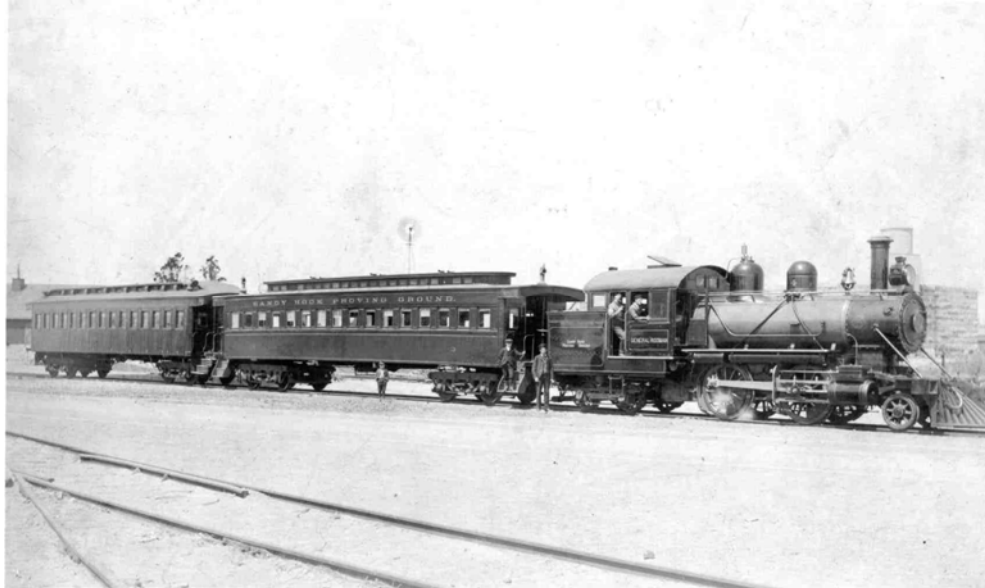


Sandy Hook, Gateway NRA, NPS
An Oral History Interview with F. Lee Feakes
Sandy Hook Proving Ground Employee
1918 – 1919
Fort Hancock Employee
1920 – 1925
Interviewed by Elaine Harmon, NPS
March 27, 1982
Transcribed by Jo Anne Carlson, NPS Volunteer, 2008
Edited by Mary Rasa, 2011



Sandy Hook Proving Ground Administration Building where Mr. Feakes worked. Officers' Club, known then as the "Brick House" is in background. View is looking south.



Sandy Hook Proving Ground train which transported civilian employees between the Highland Beach Station and Sandy Hook.



Quartermaster Building 32 pictured in 1940.

Images in interview are courtesy of NPS/Gateway NRA

Editor's notes in parenthesis ()

EH: This is Elaine Harmon of the Sandy Hook Museum and I have the privilege of interviewing Mr. F. Lee Feakes, F-E-A-K-E-S who is just now 89 years old and lives at 50 Locust Avenue in Red Bank. We happen to have the good fortune of knowing of Mr. Feakes through Mr. Cliff Hepburn of Oceanport, who happened to wander into the Visitor Center on Christmas Day of 1981 and announced that he knew a very wonderful person who could remember Sandy Hook from as far back as 1910. So, he is here at the Museum today, which is March 27, 1982. And he began to introduce some of his recollections using a photograph of a church group, a Ladies Aid gathering of Oceanport Ladies and some of the Life-Saving Service staff outside of a building which is labeled properly, the U.S. Life-Saving Station. The photo dates from about 1910. So, in addition to having this delightful gentleman, we also have a very historic photo to add to the Museum Collections. Can you describe for us, some of your earliest memories of coming to Sandy Hook? How you happened to come out here? Give us some of your recollections which you have been telling me now for awhile.

FF: Well, just as a picnic with a group.

EH: You said you were associated, how you came to Sandy Hook originally was through the Price family and you said around 1910. This family was associated with Sandy Hook because the father was a surfman at Spermaceti Cove Station. And so that's how you were originally associated with here was by coming out here several times. What was that like, tell us?

FF: Lots of fun. (laughter)

EH: You were how old then do you think as a child?

FF: Around perhaps, thirteen-fourteen.

EH: And basically what would happen? Would they gather up all the children and say let's have an outing at Sandy Hook? How would it happen?

FF: No, these ladies would come and ...(phone rings, tape stops)

EH: The Ladies Aid? It was a church group? And were they some of the more prominent people of Oceanport? More or less at those times?

FF: Well, yes.

EH: And they would arrange for a ...

FF: A picnic

EH: A picnic in the summer time, would it be?

FF: No, fall.

EH: In autumn.

FF: Early autumn, latter part of September or beginning of August, after the season was over.

EH: And they would invite other families?

FF: No, just this group.

EH: So, it was a circle of friends which was the Prices, the Riddles, and the Laytons and the Haywards and the Wilcox, and the Bordens, more or less.

FF: Yes.

EH: And you were related, these were your aunt's? Was that basically it?

FF: Yes.

EH: Who specifically was your aunt? You gave me a list of people here, the Haywards?

FF: Hayward, right. Eva Hayward.

EH: And how were they related to you specifically?

FF: My aunt.

EH: Yeah, your mother's....

FF: My mother's brother's wife.

EH: So, it was your mother's brother's wives, more or less, were related to you. And you were about how old at the time?

FF: This? Around 12-14 in through there.

EH: What was the team of people like, the U.S. Life-Saving Service? You said that you didn't recall that they had uniforms, except for the Keeper?

FF: That's the only one I recall having a uniform on at that time.

EH: And the Keeper, you said, wore a hat and a dark blue jacket?

FF: Mmm hmm.

EH: But nothing else distinguishing the other men?

FF: No.

EH: Not at all.

FF: Not as I can remember.

EH: Describe the boat? You mentioned how the boat came and gathered you up. What was that like?

FF: It was a regular lifesaving boat.

EH: It was a surfboat.

FF: With oars, no motor, of course.

EH: And was it a big white, wooden boat?

FF: Yes.

EH: And you remembered they were numbered, you told me.

FF: Serial numbers.

EH: Do you recall how many were in the station, itself?

FF: No.

EH: That doesn't stand out in your mind. Were you in the building itself, the Life-Saving Service Station?

FF: Yes.

EH: Do you remember much about it?

FF: Spotless.

EH: Do you remember if there was like a porch? How was the entrance.....

FF: There was a porch as you went in the entrance side.

EH: Facing the ocean side?

FF: No, side. The ocean is here. It would be on this side.

EH: Side entrance, okay. And as you went in, do you remember what was beyond the porch? Was it like a kitchen area?

FF: Mmm hmm. Kitchen and then Mess Hall.

EH: Was there a parlor, do you recall, in the building?

FF: I don't recall.

EH: Were there upstairs bedrooms, do you remember?

FF: Must have been.

EH: Must have been, that's what I've been told.

FF: Dormitories.

EH: Did the Keeper live in this house, actually?

FF: Well, he was, I don't think family was there. He was there just by himself.

EH: Did the building have a prominent sign, "U.S. Life-Saving Station?"

FF: Yes.

EH: According to this photograph, the sign appears above the boat doors.

FF: Where the boats were stored.

EH: And there would have been a tower on the building? A lookout tower?

FF: Yes, I guess so. Never was up there, but I think so.

EH: Right. Do you remember if the exterior was painted white?

FF: I can't, all white I think.

EH: Because that was classic for the Jersey Shore.

FF: (inaudible)

EH: So, how did you arrive here? What was the typical outing? How would you get here? What was your transportation?

FF: Launch, boat, motor boat. Big motor boat.

EH: They brought you here by boat?

FF: Pleasure boat, you know, took fishing parties out into the ocean for fishing.

EH: I see.

FF: It was a big boat with all of us on it.

EH: And you said you recall seeing a drill actually performed, a beach apparatus drill. What was that like? Can you remember much of it? You said you rode in the breeches buoy yourself.

FF: Oh yes.

EH: As a child outside of the Spermaceti Cove Station. What can you, can you reconstruct the technique? Carrying out the Lyle gun, little cannon?

FF: The little cannon was shot off and as you got out here the ropes would go over the four arms of the tower and that's where we kids could go up and get into the breeches buoy and come down.

EH: As a child, did you know what it all meant?

FF: Oh, yes.

EH: Or was it just like a thrill type of ...

FF: Well, it was a thrill, but we knew what it was all about, what it meant.

EH: Were they putting this on to more or less, entertain you?

FF: To entertain us, yes.

EH: Right. And this was connected to those picnics?

FF: Uh, huh.

EH: Do you remember the names of any of those people, beside the Price family?

FF: Only that one, Mr. Price.

EH: Were there any outstanding things like what Sandy Hook looked to you? I'm sure it was a total wilderness at the time.

FF: Oh, yes. Of course, the beach plums would be ripening at the time and the holly trees would be getting a little bit red, berries. Everything was spotless around at that time. Well kept. (inaudible)

EH: Do you remember much about the geological features back of Sandy Hook at that time whether it was wide or narrow? Do you remember very much about that?

FF: About like now. Certain sections would be narrow. Sometimes, I can remember when I was working here when there was a bad storm from the ocean side, you couldn't sit on that side of the train because of the break in the waves coming over.

EH: That close.

FF: Possibly could break the windows or something.

EH: Do you remember much about the railroad? That's a good question for you. What was the route of the railroad at the time?

FF: Well, from Highland Beach, that's before you go across the bridge, there was a station there and that was our terminal. And then we, the train rode from there on down to the Administration Building and all freight came in that way.

EH: Were there certain names to the locomotives?

FF: No. No. Not to my memory. It made three return trips during the day, morning, noon and evening.

EH: And also there was we were talking about other transportation. There was horse-drawn....

FF: Horse drawn and motor and boat to Governors Island, which was our Headquarters. A major general was stationed up there.

EH: Right. That was a main focus of attention there. That I have heard from several people. Governors Island was considered very, very strategic and very important. Back to the railroad, I'm just curious, was that a big adventure, I guess to be traveling by railroad?

FF: No, not so much so. (laughter)

EH: Maybe because it was common in a way.

FF: Yes.

EH: Was it like ten cents or something for a long distance? Do you remember what the price was?

FF: It didn't cost us. The government operated it.

EH: Oh, that's right, that's right. It was the government operated so there was no fee involved.

FF: Yes. And then the freight cars would come pull in to the same switch and had to keep track of the various charges and all that. I had a messenger that rode back and forth. He used to bring papers from the station master at Highlands.

EH: This is you're talking about your later years.

FF: Yes.

EH: At Sandy Hook which we haven't arrived at yet. Incidentally, Mr. Feakes told me that he was connected here after his early childhood years he returned here in February of 1918 to be connected with the Proving Ground. I'm very interested in that because those buildings are no longer standing, most of the wooden structures, the early wooden structures. And you were giving me a location of the buildings which is good for our tape recording. Where was the office that you were at?

FF: Just before you went to the spur to the dock.

EH: The end of the railroad spur, just almost to the actual boat dock. So, that puts it up in the Coast Guard area. It's the north end.

FF: Well, just before you got there.

EH: Right. Exactly.

FF: That was the last building before you went in.

EH: And was it positioned on the Bay, very close to the Bay or....?

FF: Well, not too far.

EH: And what was it technically called? Finance Office?

FF: No, it was Ordnance Headquarters.

EH: Ordnance Headquarters.

FF: Because it wasn't only finance, it was testing, recording of the tests, chronograph room, as well as, watched operations. Two stories.

EH: Two stories.

FF: Two stories.

EH: Wooden structure?

FF: Wooden structure.

EH: Was it painted white on the outside?

FF: No. It was yellow.

EH: Yellow building. In talking about the Ordnance Headquarters building, you mentioned various rooms. The Chronograph room is the one that intrigues me the most because you were more personally connected. What was that like? Chronograph meaning, it's a recording room. So describe to me again. You were more or less a clerk at the time and what was it you said there was a contract that came in?

FF: Yes, a contract of the shells from the manufacturer. The shells had to be tested and the velocity of the speed through each screen, three screens all together.

EH: So, there were like three targets?

FF: Three different screens that they would go through. Then the shell itself would land into a bulkhead of I don't know what they called it.

EH: A bulkhead?

FF: Filled with sand it was a light railroad ties was the foundation and then filled with the sand. And then after the test, that sand was, all the screened. Taken out and the shell itself what was left, was photographed you see.

EH: Photographed, huh?

FF: How many pieces it was broken into and things of that sort.

EH: Who photographed it? Do you recall?

FF: I don't remember that.

EH: Was it a Post Photographer?

FF: It must have been a Post Photographer.

EH: That's very interesting. So, it was actually recorded.

FF: Oh, yes.

EH: In photos as well as written.

FF: As a record with the written message.

EH: Did you witness any of the tests at all?

FF: No. We weren't allowed.

EH: You didn't. Was that regarded as top secret?

FF: Oh, yes.

EH: Very highly confidential.

FF: Yes.

EH: That's interesting. For, what period of time are you talking about? Your connection was February 1918 to May of 1919?

FF: That would be after I came back from overseas. That would be in 1919. End of February 1919.

EH: Did you know what the materials were made of?

FF: No.

EH: Like the targets, the screens you were talking about?

FF: No.

EH: And you never did see them yourself.

FF: No only photographs.

EH: Because you were not allowed to see them.

FF: No. That was confidential.

EH: How would you be measuring velocity? Did you have instruments?

FF: Instruments. Special instruments.

EH: Could you describe that in any detail?

FF: No, not too much anymore.

EH: It was a wooden building with wood floors, probably. The old type of office?

FF: Like an office, yes.

EH: What were the instruments called? Was there certain names for them?

FF: Not that I recall. Technical names I can't remember and I wasn't there too long.

EH: Right. Do you recall the names of people you worked with in that building?

FF: No, because in that room, they were mostly enlisted personnel and one officer in charge. It was as they were discharging the enlisted personnel that I went in and filled in and I took a transfer.

EH: So you were really a temporary person is that...?

FF: In there.

EH: More or less because that was unusual that a civilian happened to be in there.

FF: Yes. It was to relieve the enlisted men so they could be discharged.

EH: Do you remember the concussion of the guns? I mean you were fairly close. So was the building shaking?

FF: Sometimes. It depended on the strength of the load and so forth.

EH: So, you can actually say you felt the building.....

FF: You'd have to go through and open the windows.

EH: You had to open the windows to prepare for it, right. That's amazing.

FF: That's about all that I know.

EH: Well, that's quite a lot. No one has... What were the other rooms like? You began to rattle them off? What were those other rooms?

FF: Well, general office rooms, science section, and our commanding officer, his private office.

EH: And he was the Commanding Officer then of the Ordnance Headquarters, more or less, okay.

FF: Proving Ground.

EH: What was it, how often was this test firing? Was it every day you had a contract? How frequent?

FF: Most every day,

EH: Really? Every day.

FF: Tests or re-tests.

EH: And basically, wasn't it a broad spectrum of things. It was ordnance was tested here, guns, carriages, powders.

FF: Mmm hmm.

EH: So, it wasn't just you know projectiles alone.

FF: No.

EH: I have read that it involved many, many types of ordnance, very comprehensive.

FF: It was isolated from the main Post, you see. Fort Hancock, this Proving Ground.

EH: How did you get back and forth to work? What was your normal day? Was it railroad? You arrived in the morning on the railroad....

FF: Arrived in the morning and the public railroad from Long Branch to Highland Beach and then transferred to the government train.

EH: How long was that trip involved as far as getting out here?

FF: From Long Branch?

EH: Yeah.

FF: Oh, it was almost three quarters of an hour to an hour.

EH: Amazing, for something that would take maybe twenty minutes today, took you maybe three quarters of an hour. How amazing? You didn't wear a uniform as a civilian, did you? Were you expected to wear a shirt and tie?

FF: No. In those days everyone dressed to go to work. They didn't come in work clothes.

EH: Were you issued an ID card?

FF: Oh yes.

EH: Right and did it say Sandy Hook Proving Ground on it?

FF: Yes.

EH: You know we have one in our Museum Collection.

FF: Have you?

EH: In fact, I'll have to show it to you because it was like sort of a pass that proved that you are genuine.

FF: You had to show it as you got on the government train at Highland Beach.

EH: And were you stopped anywhere else?

FF: No.

EH: To make sure you were here for legitimate business?

FF: No. I would judge at the time that I worked here, in the heyday, there must have been 250 people.

EH: As civilians?

FF: Hmm.

EH: That is a large...

FF: It was a good crowd.

RH: It was a large amount of people. What was the general impression of Fort Hancock? Was it considered the elite place to be stationed at the time?

FF: Mmm hmm. Oh yes.

EH: It was considered the high class military reservation to be stationed. That's what everyone has told me.

FF: The officers' line was like 5th Avenue.

EH: It was like 5th Avenue (Laughter) or Park Avenue, whichever. No kidding? I'm just curious was the local population of Monmouth County, was it regarded with like mystery of Sandy Hook?

FF: Oh, yes, it was shsh business.

EH: Hush, hush, as far as confidential yeah and also the military prestige.

FF: And, of course, having batteries here, as well, to guard the harbor. And Fort Tilden was then being activated to screen the harbor.

EH: Were you allowed to walk around the Post? Did you go directly to your building and then directly back on the train?

FF: We could walk just, we only had a short time; I think a half hour for lunch and, of course, you didn't have much time to be around.

EH: You were just telling me about a custom at Christmas time of giving each civilian employee a bouquet of holly? What was that like? Tell me about that.

FF: Well, it was a nice size bouquet and they would present you with that and a little pass so that you could take it off the Post.

EH: Otherwise you were not cut it.

FF: No.

EH: And today it's protected and you cannot cut it. Where was it gathered? Who gathered it, do you know?

FF: It was from the Commandant, you know, detail allowed to cut so many pieces.

EH: They would send out soldiers to cut so much?

FF: Mmm hmm.

EH: From any specific areas?

FF: I suppose.

EH: On Sandy Hook, that's incredible. That is really amazing. You mentioned to me that in May of 1918 you no longer were here. Tell me then what happened? How you left Fort Hancock temporarily.

FF: I left here to go into civilian employment and then it wasn't until '43, April of '43 that I went back into civil service. I had to register and, of course, they saw that I had been in the civil service. So, they commandeered me. They said that my employment at that time was not, I was a secretary. My employment at that time was not absolutely necessary and the government needed help. They made me give up my job and come back into civil service. Then I went down to Shark River Hills in Signal (Corps).

EH: You said in February 1919 you returned with the Ordnance Department and later to the Quartermasters for a total of eight years...

FF: Eight years.

EH: More or less. So you were here at the tail end of the Proving Ground, is that correct?

FF: Ummm. I shipped to the Proving Ground in Aberdeen.

EH: You personally...

FF: Well, being transportation clerk, you see. I had to do all of it. See that all the shipments were made.

EH: So you were actually transferring the property to Aberdeen, Maryland, at the time. What did that involve?

FF: Everything.

EH: How long did that take? What was the stages?

FF: It was being done when I went away to War. It was then that they were establishing Aberdeen at that time and it continued on until, it must have been '20, 1920 or so when it was completed. I didn't want to go, but at the last minute, I was going to go and at the

last minute they transferred the transportation to the Quartermaster Corps (at Fort Hancock.)

EH: I see.

FF: So then I just walked across the tracks.

EH: So, you attempted to go to the Aberdeen Proving Ground and then at the last moment you decided....

FF: My department was being transferred here so I was going to stay here. So, I was automatically transferred to Fort Hancock.

EH: Quartermaster Corps, was that the big yellow brick building down the end?

FF: Yeah.

EH: Okay. That we know is next to the bakery. Is that correct?

FF: Yes.

EH: That should be Building 32, if I'm not mistaken. So, you were at the final chapter of the Proving Ground and you personally did in fact, transfer records and packed up...?

FF: Had to make out the labels and all that kind of shipping documents.

EH: Were things put onto the railroad cars and then sent down? Was that the procedure?

FF: Mmm hmm. They were put in the warehouse, you see. (inaudible) I can't remember Mr.-- Walter's last name.

EH: We might come across it.

FF: His father was Lighthouse Keeper here. And it was he and a brother, one brother that I know of and a sister were all born here. His father was the lighthouse keeper.

EH: When did the Army know, well, not the Army when did the Proving Ground realize that they were going to be leaving here? You said that it was actually in the process around 1914? Much earlier....

FF: No, no, I would judge 19..., well they were in the process of moving in '18 when I came here. In 1918, so it must have been formulated in '17, I guess, '16 or '17. Because they were in the process of gradually transferring. You see, you couldn't go out on the beach here until I think it was between 12 and 1 because that's when the shelled.

EH: Was that the main time that was established, 12 o'clock?

FF: Twelve to one the beach was free but you couldn't go on before that or after.

EH: Or after. You remember, he remembers a great deal. It's really astounding. What was the Quartermaster Department like as you transferred over?

FF: Well, typical of Army.

EH: And did you have a title there?

FF: Only Clerk, Transportation Clerk. I was the only one I think that was civilian. There was a man that was an assistant, I think.

EH: And what was your responsibility?

FF: Making out all documents for transfers, shipping, boat and bills of lading and things of that sort. Making requisitions for supplies. Regular operations of a (inaudible).

EH: Interesting. Were there any outstanding events in that period of eight years with the Quartermaster? Did anything significant happen: any accidents, or any tremendous storms....

FF: No. Well, we had a couple of bad storms that we couldn't come in on the train. We had to go to Atlantic Highlands and they sent the boat over for us because our train couldn't go out in that narrow section. They were afraid of making an island as you mentioned.

EH: You mentioned that the railroad would get sprayed actually get the ocean beating.

FF: Big waves, you know, would flow in and the winds. Cold here.

EH: That's for sure.

FF: We had double windows in the office and the sand used to come in between.

EH: The sand manages to find its way through all cracks we have found. How big was the staff of the Quartermasters' Department?

FF: Not many.

EH: Roughly how many people were working with you at the time?

FF: I would judge we only had around maybe eight or ten civilians at the time.

EH: Do you know any of their names by chance?

FF: There was one boy, Ed Hennessey, who lived in Highlands. I think he's dead now. And there was a boy by the name of Burns from Long Branch. Don't know if he's alive or not. Carhardt, Phil Carhardt from Monmouth Beach.

EH: Carhardt?

FF: Carhardt. That's about all I can remember.

EH: Are any of those people still have any contact with?

FF: No.

EH: No.

FF: I haven't heard anything from Hennessey. When I went back into over at the Post at Fort Hancock, or at the Signal Corps, Fort Monmouth, one of our girls in our office there took me one day to another building. She said, "I've got someone that I want you to know." She introduced me to this Mrs. Hennessey and it was Ed's wife. I didn't know Ed was married.

EH: Was there a man in charge of the building? Do you remember if there was one particular chief of the Department?

FF: Not at the Quartermaster. We all came underneath the, we all came under the Quartermaster.

EH: And do you know the name of that person at the time?

FF: No.

EH: Can you describe the interior of the building, the yellow brick building?

FF: The yellow brick building? The Quartermaster building?

EH: Right.

FF: Well, typical of all these yellow buildings, elongated type you know. We had one office in it.

EH: You had one part of it, right. Was it a two story brick structure?

FF: I think it was just one story as I recall.

EH: It's two story now but if you look carefully it looks like there was an addition put onto it. I'll show you. Was it like an office interior, basically, wood floors and wood desk?

FF: Yes.

EH: Nothing distinguishing.

FF: No. No.

EH: More or less. Where did you have lunch and you know, ordinary things like that?

FF: You had to bring it with you. Otherwise you...

EH: You did. In other words you had no privileges to use any mess halls or anything, right?

FF: No, no.

EH: Were you at that point allowed to roam around? Were you confined to that building or...?

FF: We could go out and around.

EH: Did you explore Sandy Hook?

FF: Not very far, no, because you only had a half hour.

EH: Yeah. And you had to catch the train back. You wouldn't be allowed to come back on a weekend.

FF: No.

EH: And have any other reason to be here.

FF: No.

EH: Was it regarded still as top secret?

FF: Not so much so then. Not so much so.

EH: But still a pretty prestigious place.

FF: You had to have a pass though, to get in. The Guardhouse was down at the end.

EH: At the very south end?

FF: At the north end. Down at Highlands, Highland Beach.

EH: Right. And you'd have to be confronted there.

FF: Oh yes.

EH: Whether you had official business or not.

FF: You had to have a pass to get in and out.

EH: We have, I'll show you one Proving Ground pass. Identification card pass, it's interesting. Did you have any specific recollections of that eight years?

FF: No, nothing. It was quite routine, you know, regular.

EH: Did you notice where the Life-Saving Service Station, because it was moved several times, where it had moved, or other buildings like the Western Union Telegraph towers moved.

FF: That was down at the point.

EH: Could you describe actually, the north end? What was the...?

FF: I had very little access to that end except if I went on the boat. I'd have to go into New York once in awhile. I had to go into Governors Island sometimes.

EH: You did?

FF: Special reports and things of that sort take the trip. See we worked until 12 noon toward the last. And I could take a boat into New York and go into a matinee or something of that sort, you see, and come home by regular train.

EH: What was it like to live in Oceanport and Red Bank in Monmouth County area at that time? Can you describe the lifestyle for us?

FF: About the same as it is now. It hasn't changed too much.

EH: A little more elegant, wasn't it though?

FF: No, I wouldn't say so.

EH: A little more style? Wasn't it a little more fashionable to be in some of the better communities nearby at the time?

FF: Well, I don't know. I think the traffic here is quite a bit. They have a boat dock down in Oceanport where you could take boats to the... I don't remember it, but I know they had one boat called *The Little Silver* that ran from Oceanport to New York. My father had stock in the boat. The dock was there at the foot of Pemberton Avenue. In

later years we used to fish, crab off of that dock. I can't remember the boats. I was too young.

EH: Tell me about Sir Thomas Lipton as you were describing before and his famous yacht.

FF: *Shamrock*? Well, he parked it right off here off the point, in that little cove.

EH: Horseshoe Cove or Spermaceti?

FF: Whatever it is called out here. And then his private yacht would be there too. He lived on the yacht.

EH: Was the yacht called the *Shamrock*?

FF: The racing yacht was called *Shamrock First* or *Shamrock Second* or whatever it was. And then he had the privileges, all the courtesies of the Post here. The Officers, of course, would entertain him, the Commanding Officer, and he would reciprocate on his private yacht.

EH: My goodness.

FF: I have a couple of photographs of him that I took but I can't locate them. I was going to bring them down to you.

EH: We do have a small snapshot of Thomas Lipton in Building #1 showing with the special cup race that was going on here.

FF: A couple of times while I was here.

EH: Were you a spectator?

FF: No, no. (inaudible)

EH: Was there a lot of fanfare connected to his arrival here?

FF: No. No.

EH: Not really.

FF: Very plain typically of those pictures. Always wore a yachting cap and a blazer. Very nautical in his appearance. As I say, his secretary put on more legs than he did. He stayed, when he was in New York, of course, he would stay at the Waldorf or one of the big hotels and his limousine would bring him over to Hoboken every morning and his secretary would drive him in of course because Sir Thomas was very (inaudible). We had the little Scot who used to work with us in one of the departments and his daughter

worked for Lipton Tea. Every time Sir Thomas came over, he always would hunt her up because she was born in Scotland and he would check on her. She was in charge of some department. He would inquire, ask her, if she was happy and if she was treated properly and so forth and so on and of course, with their breaks they would have a tea and do you have a time for tea and so forth mostly all the time.

EH: Was he British by birth?

FF: Yes, by birth. Tall, thin man with a goatee.

EH: And he had a very of English nature.

FF: Kind of an English-Irish mixture but a very charming man.

EH: Do you remember any other celebrities coming to Sandy Hook any other famous people?

FF: No.

EH: Because we've had a long list of them.

FF: Oh yes.

EH: He's just one, in fact, and I just wondering if you knew of others.

FF: No.

EH: For example we know that F.D.R. was here. We know that Lana Turner was here, Bob Hope. The New York Dodgers and the Yankees were here and incredible famous groups. So, I just wondered if you knew anybody. Do you have any like outstanding anecdotes? Thing that happened?

FF: No, it was quite normal with us here. (laughter)

EH: You're actually a gold mine of information. I can't believe how much you remember. Do you remember much about early local history? The surrounding area?

FF: No. Only as a kid.

EH: And you grew up exactly where specifically?

FF: I was born in Oceanport, but my father was a race horse trainer. He was born in England. And of course, we traveled a great deal. I had of course in Oceanport. We had our own home there.

EH: Where was that? What street was that?

FF: Branch Avenue.

EH: Is that house still there?

FF: Yes, but it looks rather deplorable now. Some guests, some friends of mine took me out to lunch on my birthday and we drove around that way coming home and it made me sad to look at the place.

Unknown male voice: You mentioned that you lived in Oceanport when you worked for at Fort Hancock.

FF: Mmm hmm.

Unknown male voice: You took a train from Long Branch to Highland Beach and then you took the government train over here. How did you get from Oceanport to Long Branch?

FF: By trolley. In those days we had trolley cars that ran from Red Bank to Long Branch, Second Avenue.

Unknown male voice: So where did you get the train in Long Branch?

FF: Sometimes, at one time, we got it in Branchport Station.

Unknown male voice: Branchport Station which isn't there anymore.

FF: And then, I think toward the last we had to go to East Long Branch Station. That's no longer there either because of the Southern Division. This Jersey Central that ran all through here. That was the terminal down there in Long Branch.

EH: So, you would be taking a trolley from Oceanport to Long Branch?

FF: Oceanport to Long Branch.

EH: Which would be how long of a ride?

FF: Oh, about fifteen, twenty minutes.

EH: What would you pay for the trolley? Do you remember?

FF: I don't know. It was ten or fifteen cents I think.

EH: And then you'd be on the train which was the Jersey Central.

FF: Central train.

EH: Railroad to Long Branch to Highland Beach.

FF: Highland Beach.

EH: And then at the Highland Beach station there would be a connecting train. You didn't go any distance.

FF: No. The government train would be waiting right there for us. Then toward the last with the Quartermaster here, they discontinued the train, government train, only for freight, and they took us out by light delivery.

EH: Light Delivery?

FF: Cars, automobile, you know, one of those light delivery.

EH: Describe that.

Unknown male voice: It wasn't a bus.

FF: No. No. It wasn't a bus. Like you haul things in. They put seats in it.

EH: Was it an open wagon or?

FF: No, covered.

Unknown male voice: Like a van or a station wagon?

FF: Station wagon with a tarpaulin. I remember once going out and we landed in a ditch. It was a stormy slippery day and we went off the concrete road into the sand.

EH: Good grief. How did you get back?

FF: We didn't, we had to walk the rest of the way out to the highway.

EH: You abandoned the

FF: Well, they had an enlisted man driving it so I don't know how he got back.

EH: Poor guy. (laughter)

FF: That was our only mishap.

EH: So it was called light delivery. You are talking about some sort of vehicle, automobile?

FF: Almost like a station wagon, you know.

EH: And that was in the 1920's you were talking about? 1920's? And that was after the government railroad was ...

FF: They did away with passenger trains ...and just used the engines for freight hauling freight cars and so forth.

EH: So, actually the trip between the trolley and the railroads was at least an hour getting here.

FF: It took about an hour.

EH: In all kinds of weather too, no less.

FF: A couple of times I remember we couldn't get in here by train. We had to take the train to Atlantic Highlands.

(tape stops and then restarts)

EH: We're standing here at our present day Visitor Center which is the U.S. Lifesaving Service Station at Spermaceti Cove 1894 building and Mr. Feakes is re-constructing the interior for us. As we entered the usual entrance of the Visitor Center which is now an enclosed porch, this at one time, was an open wooden porch as we have historic photos to tell us that much. But then beyond it we have a left hand door which Mr. Feakes said lead into the station kitchen. And there was a coal stove which was for cooking, is that right?

FF: Yes.

EH: And cupboard?

FF: Cupboards.

EH: Wooden floors? Were they wide plank or oak floors?

FF: I couldn't remember that.

EH: Behind that on the southwest corner of the building would have been the dining area. And was it a long basic table with several chairs? You were never upstairs, which probably was the bedrooms.

FF: Dormitory.

EH: Dormitory style bedrooms for the Station surfmen. Right. And then to our right is our exhibit area which was the boat room area, the actual boat room area. We have on our tape earlier that you were in one of the surfboats as a child.

FF: The motorboats were used to come down from Oceanport. They would anchor out in the Cove, Spermaceti Cove and they couldn't come near shore. Then one of the big boats would come out and get all the food and the passengers.

EH: So, you were in the surfboats.

FF: They always had a drill for us. I can remember as a kid riding down in the breeches buoy.

EH: He was part of the beach apparatus drill. It would be like a practice session. Let's go into the boat room and see if its anything that is familiar to you.

FF: That I wouldn't remember too well.

EH: Well, let's just take a quick look. Was this in the Price family for years? Is that was an established family.

FF: Yes. They catered to Lillian Russell and all those Bon Tons in their day.

EH: Is that true wow? Can you describe the Hotel?

FF: No. Only the regular dinner, you know, two story or more hotel, frame building but the dining was the main outstanding.. .

EH: Is it still there now?

FF: That I couldn't tell you.

Unknown male voice: The hotel itself was at the foot of the Pleasure Bay Bridge in Long Branch right on the river which would be Patten Avenue. There's now a development there (inaudible)

EH: So this hotel was run by the Price family more or less?

FF: Hartshorne, I think Hartshorne Price was the founder of it.

EH: Actually the whole Jersey Shore was a very fancy area at one time and you know notable.

FF: I guess when my grandparents moved here it was very nice. All along Ocean Avenue were all nice summer homes all the way down to West End and that section. They used to go out, I've been told with their Victoria horses and carriages at 4:00, 4:30,

you know, and drive along the beach before dinner hour. It was a regular parade of horses and carriages and so forth. Ladies all dressed in their beautiful gowns and parasols.

EH: Incredible.

FF: I think Lily Langtry, the famous actress...

EH: Lily Langtry?

FF: The English actress she summered here too. Lillian Russell and all those famous people....

EH: Were you ever in any other U.S. Life-Saving Service Stations along the Jersey shore? I meant to ask you that earlier?

FF: No. That was the only one.

EH: So, your one true experience was here at Spermaceti Cove.

FF: Yeah.

EH: You mentioned before that you were in the Fort Hancock hospital here as a civilian?

FF: As a civilian. I was in the office. I had boils after I came back from overseas, boils all on my face from time to time. It was from the inoculation I had in the service. And this surgeon up here, I can't remember what his name was, Major somebody, was down in our office and he saw my face. He said, "Mr. Feakes, what is the matter with your face?" I said, "I'm getting boils all over on my face," and he said, "Come on over to the Hospital and I'll have a look at it." So then he questioned me and said, "Have you been using a new tooth brush or something." I said, "It's just boils." He wanted to do this or do that to treat me. I just put gauze on it when I got home.

EH: So, you refused treatment and said it would just vanish.

FF: I just didn't think he was too good.

EH: You didn't have much faith in him then. Do you remember Officers' Row and the whole layout of Fort Hancock?

FF: Oh yes. That section, the old section.

EH: Do you remember the old walking post and the Guardhouse?

FF: No. Not that. We never got over into that section.

EH: When you talk about the old section are you referring to the north end where you were with the Quartermaster?

FF: Yes.

EH: And the Ordnance Department.... So that's like....

FF: Officers' Row, on the Bay, facing the Bay.

EH: Even up until your final years here, was it was still considered an elite place?

FF: Yes. It was never very large, as I recall. I think it was quite a prized package to be stationed here at one time. Of course, it was so accessible to New York by boat.

EH: I'm trying to think of any other details that you might have regarding either the Ordnance or the Quartermaster.

FF: No. I think I've run down....

EH: You've exhausted your repertoire of memories. I'm trying to recall your detail. Was it actually eight years with the Quartermaster?

FF: Ummm.

EH: And then you went into civil service.

FF: No. I went into private life and then I didn't come back into civil service until October of '43. And they commandeered me.

EH: Did you ever come back to Sandy Hook after that time actually?

FF: No.

EH: You really didn't had no old contacts, like old friends that were connected here.

FF: No.

EH: Did you ever go frost fishing out here and do some of the winter sports?

FF: No, no.

EH: Which were very typical in the early days.

(Tape stops and restarts out in the field)



Map of Sandy Hook Proving Ground from 1908. At far left are the docks where the current U.S. Coast Guard is located. Both roads and railroad tracks are visible on map. Tracks go from docks, eastward to the roundhouse and past the warehouses. Highlighted in blue is the Administration Building of the Proving Ground which is no longer standing. Highlighted in Green is the Officers' Club, Building 114 which was known as the "brick house." It served as housing for the officers of the Sandy Hook Proving Ground.

EH: Just north of the Officers' Club, Mr. Feakes has pointed out that he believes what was called the yellow brick house of 1878, the red "brick house" now yellow brick painted, was the actual original Ordnance Detachment Testing Ground Headquarters. (This is incorrect. The Brick House was housing for officers of the Proving Ground.) And beyond it is the housing complex which was much, much later on, the duplex houses. We're driving toward the Proving Ground area now. Do you remember Battery Potter on the right at all?

FF: (Inaudible)

EH: Right. So you were very excluded from the fortifications.

FF: Yes.

EH: Right. We're approaching the north end.

FF: Now these buildings weren't here.

EH: Right. Those were World War II barracks. So those were wooden temporary structures. But if we head out to the right here we'll see the original Proving Ground

concrete foundations just beyond this white tank. But again, you were very much restricted to your building.

FF: Oh yes, yes. We had no time to get around. The train left when office hours were over.

EH: Right. So, you were very regimented to the time schedule. Well, you wouldn't know because you hadn't seen it. You can go straight in here even though its not regular procedure. These are the foundations in that photograph in the museum where I was working on photos this morning. These are the stone steps, concrete steps that took you to the various platforms. This is just the remains of the final stages of the Proving Ground. Were you actually here seeing anything, Mr. Feakes, at any time?

FF: No.

EH: Not really. Well, now it's just crumbling concrete structures that are overgrown with vegetation.

FF: Yes. This must be bayberry, not bayberry, beach plum.

EH: Beach plum bushes are all over here, right.

FF: (inaudible)

EH: That's right. They are what are common dune bushes, beach plum. This is the North Beach area now and this is now a fishing beach, very popular fishing beach where the local fishermen have been coming here for years and they almost regard it as their own private beach for fishing. In identifying the Officers' Club, do you remember much of the interior or was it too brief, because you were there just a brief time.

FF: There were several offices on the first floor. I don't believe I ever was on the second floor.

EH: Right.

FF: The main office when I was in the (inaudible) was on the first floor to the left as you went in.

EH: Well, the (Fort Hancock) Officers' Club became, later on, a very fashionable high class place to have dinner parties for the Officers. But originally it was called the red brick house and we know that at the turn of the century, there was a period that it was directly connected to the Ordnance detachment. So, I think you were on the right track in pointing that out.

FF: There's no remains here of the railroad track.

EH: If they are, they would be buried. I have to really hunt them down. The entrance would have been the north porch facing the Nine-gun Battery.

FF: Yes.

EH: And were the rooms basically offices? That was it?

FF: All offices. Except on the far end was (inaudible)

EH: On the far end, okay, on the east wing would have been the chronograph room. We're up at the Maintenance yard now for the Park Service and we're at the crossroads of the Coast Guard boundary's fence and the maintenance yard. Mr. Feakes is telling us that the red brick buildings in the maintenance area were actually referred to as, how did you call them?

FF: Warehouse.

EH: How did you call them? Ordnance warehouses? Okay, and they're long red brick buildings to our right and to the left is the Coast Guard entrance. Behind us, if we could turn around just show the front of that building. He also remembered Saint Mary's Chapel, which is the Rod and Gun Club and Building 109 which at one point, was a Fort Hancock School but he did call it Ordnance Testing Laboratory.

FF: Mmm hmm.

EH: Is that right?

FF: Yes.

EH: Were you in that building?

FF: No.

EH: Ever?

FF: No, never.

EH: Do you have any information connecting it at all?

FF: No.

EH: Okay, but we have records that lead us to suspect that it was a Laboratory Testing Building. Was that Sentry Building, next to the tree, there at the time you were here? This little Sentry Building.

FF: Sentry No.

EH: Okay, its kind of an odd structure there that doesn't...

FF: (Inaudible)

EH: Now the warehouses were where, technically, the railroad spur ended.

FF: Terminated.

EH: It was an actual terminus, okay. Should we make a left here and just see if there is anything he can add to this information? These buildings were probably here at the same time. Building 108 on the corner, which is now Coast Guard housing and this house also Building 112, all very old wooden structures. And they are right adjacent to the Officers' Club. The warehouses are Buildings 124 and beyond outside the Maintenance Yard. You said you did remember the stables here, Building 36 because you had to check on deliveries here?

FF: Yes.

EH: What were the common things?

FF: Well, especially the feed and the hay and so on...the animal feed...

EH: Horse feed, right.

FF: We didn't have too many.

EH: That building that says Auditorium was much later on.

FF: Yes. That is.

EH: Constructed so that would not be anything original. And this is the Theater Building 67, Fort Hancock Theater, and still is a stage for you know Opera Companies, a working theater. (Break in tape to change locations)

We are presently in our current day Visitor Center which was the U.S. Life-Saving Station # 2, 1894 building. And Mr. Feakes is in the boat room which is now our exhibit room and there's one panel that he would comment on best I think, because it has to do with the Life-Saving Service as the original appearance. And he was in the surfboat and he pointed to the photograph of the surfboat with the men with the oars and commented that it's very similar to what you remember as a child, you rode in.

Is any of this familiar to you, the breeches buoy actually...?

FF: No I don't remember.

EH: Remember it as a canvas pants with that, okay...or a basket type... or the cart, do you remember the cart?

FF: There was a cart.

EH: Okay.

FF: And the breeches buoy was more like a briefs, you know.

EH: Mmm hmm, because we have them reproduced in the museum as pants attached to a life ring. Were you actually in this part of the building, ever?

FF: Just to go through.

EH: Right, we're in the north side exhibit area. He did recall a coal stove in the kitchen, which is on the south end, and some built in cupboards. And then the in what would be the south end of the building, was the dining room/mess hall with a long table and many chairs for the crew of the Lifesaving Service. He's pointing to the exhibit that shows the projectile coming out of the Lyle gun, which I'm sure he remembers very well, being here in 1910. But you were here just during an actual practice. These men were doing it on the worst of conditions in terrible storms. How brave they were. The porch that we came in on at the Visitor Center entrance, you remember as an open porch then with just a plain wood floor? Was the building always white, painted white to your recollection?

FF: Mmm hmm.

EH: Okay. And it had the tower as it has.

FF: Yes.

EH: And the two gray boat doors where your photograph is taken. And most likely the second floor was the dormitory, like a bedroom type area upstairs. We're looking at the old engraving of the Monmouth Park track of 1870 and Mr. Feakes is remarking that his grandfather Hayward, which is your mother's father, was a champion jockey. And probably his most notable, one of his most notable races was the Futurity which was just when you were born in the 1890's? And then your dad was, your father, carried on the family tradition more or less was the trainer of horses at Monmouth Park.

FF: No.

EH: I'm sorry, where was that?

FF: New York, Canada...

EH: Oh, many places then.

FF: Kentucky, he won the four mile endurance race in Kentucky, twice.

EH: Mmm hmm, four mile endurance race in Kentucky.

FF: I have the two plates with the shoes.

EH: Really? When was that about?

FF: I think '12 or '13.

EH: 1912 or 1913. Do you remember much about Monmouth Park?

FF: Old Monmouth? No. No. I was too small.

EH: You were very young.

EH: Mr. Feakes was remarking how much beach there was immediately in front of the Visitor Center. It was a good ten minute walk out to the shore and now there is a narrow strip of land, how much beach we've lost. I've had people tell me there was a quarter of a mile almost or at least a quarter of a mile of beach extending out in front of the Visitor Center on the ocean side just east of the Visitor Center. And how people remark today, that there is practically nothing left of our beach, which is true. (Break in tape to change location)

Mr. Feakes is remarking where we're driving, as we reach the two Nike missiles as the road forks to the right, he is remarking that the railroad probably had its tracks right beneath the road which is on the east side of the barracks. We're approaching the double barracks, Building 74. And as the original road was between these buildings, though, it was a dirt road between the Mess Hall and the Barracks. He remarked that the railroad, actually, was on the existing main road. This building to our right, Building 77, was the laundry. Maybe you had heard of that?

FF: I've heard of it.

EH: And the stone wall in front of us is the south face of the Mortar Battery. And we have the Mess Halls on our left, Buildings 58, 57, 56 and 55. We're at the intersection, now, of the Lighthouse.

FF: Is that operated now?

EH: Yeah.

(Tape ends)

END OF INTERVIEW