An interview with Robert Hartford Cram, who lived on Cumberland Foreside

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An Interview With Robert Cram
who lived on Cumberland Foreside from 1904 – 1919
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Interviewed by Alice Mary Pierce on October 15, 1986

Photographs compiled and added by Yolande E. Bennett
This is Alice Mary Pierce speaking and I am interviewing Robert Cram
October 15, 1986 at the home of the late Miss Margaret Payson,
in Falmouth Foreside, Maine.

AP: Good morning, I guess we’re on tape now.
How about starting out with where you were born?
RC: I was born in Portland.
AP: In Portland? In a hospital?
RC: Yes, Maine General.
AP: What year?
RC: April 20, 1904.
AP: And how many were in your family?
RC: Four. Two other brothers and one sister.
AP: Where did you live?
RC: We lived in Cumberland where Phillips Payson lives now.
AP: Oh, right on the Payson property?
RC: Yes, we went to school on the Tuttle Road school and we walked to school. Two miles each way. We lived there until 1919, then moved to Yarmouth.
AP: On the Phillips Payson property, was yours the only house?
RC: Yes, just the one house. The old house that had been there for a couple of hundred years I guess, one of the oldest houses. Course they took it down when they built their house, around in the forties I think it was.
AP: And so you moved to Yarmouth?
RC: Yes, and we stayed there until we built our house down in Falmouth. We used to come down there, it must have been in 1924 I guess, something like that.
AP: What was Yarmouth like?
RC: Well, a small town. I didn't go to school in Yarmouth. When we left Cumberland, they had a Greely Institute but that was way up in Cumberland Center so I started to go to Portland High School. So from Yarmouth I took the old trolley to Portland for four years, back and forth.
AP: Where did the trolley go?
RC: From Yarmouth in those days to Portland. Of course, it went on from Yarmouth to Freeport. I am not sure whether it went to Brunswick or not, but anyway it went over to the old Casino in Freeport, Casco Castle.
AP: What was school like?
RC: Well, it was a one room school.
AP: Not Portland High School?
RC: No, the Tuttle Road School. It was one room, nine grades, one teacher, two stoves, one in each end of the building, wood stoves, and we went across the street to get a pail of water and that was about the luxury we had.
AP: Who brought in the wood?
RC: I was sort of a janitor. I got 25 cents a week for sweeping the school and bringing in the wood and bringing in the water. I thought that was quite a nice job in those days.
AP: 25 cents I guess was a lot of money.
RC: 25 cents a week, I guess it was.
AP: What could you buy with 25 cents?
RC: You could buy quite a lot. I guess I saved it. I don’t remember spending it. I went there until 1919 I guess it was, yes cause I went to school in Portland that fall and that’s when we left Cumberland and went to Yarmouth.
AP: And took the trolley to school?
RC: Every day, back and forth. We had to have school tickets, they cost $2.00 a week, and that was round trip for five days.
AP: How long did it take?
RC: About an hour. And they picked up, well everybody. Falmouth didn’t have any high school so they picked up the Falmouth kids. Falmouth could go — I guess the Town paid the Falmouth students. I had to pay my own because I lived in a town where a school was.
AP: But you wanted to go to Portland High School?
RC: Well, I had already enrolled there, so I kept on going.
AP: What did you study in high school?
RC: Nothing special. I took the regular courses and drafting. I was always interested in drafting to I took that. Not an extra subject but the one I liked best.
AP: Good student I’ll bet you were.
RC: No.
AP: What did your father do?
RC: Well, he worked just around. He didn’t do anything very special, just a regular worker. That was about all he did.
AP: Did you have gardens? any animals?
RC: Yes, we had all kinds of animals, and big gardens. Sort of self-sufficient. You had to be in those days. So we had all the animals on the farm and it was nice, no money but a good living.
Everybody seemed to be strong and healthy and well-fed.
AP: And comfortable.
RC: Comfortable. It was an old house as they had in those days with no telephones and no lights and no — anything.
AP: What about the water?
RC: There was a pump outside between the house and the barn.
AP: Nice barn?
RC: Yes, a big barn with all kinds of animals — chickens and so forth.
[10 milking cows, baby calfs every spring, sold the heifers and kept the lassies]
AP: That’s a good life, isn’t it?
RC: Oh, I think it is. I think the kids today miss an awful lot because they don’t understand — because they don’t have those things. All the kids could play in the woods and they didn’t have anybody to play with, but didn’t have to play, you had plenty of chore to do.
AP: How close was your neighbor?
RC: The nearest one was probably half a mile, out at the end of the road where the Kimballs live, someone lived there and then there was another house beyond there and another house about the same distance, Mr. Davis’ house, was between those two, so it was about half a mile between each place probably.
AP: So lots of space.
RC: Yes.
AP: Cram, what about your grandparents?
RC: They lived in West Baldwin, Maine. We didn’t see them very often because they had to come in a horse and wagon. My grandfather had a long white beard and my grandmother was sort of a little small woman. We didn’t see them very much.
AP: Where did they come from?
RC: They was old settlers, they was here for two or three hundred years I guess because they had that genealogy. I always wanted to get it, but it got burned in that fire we had in 1947. You know, when the fire come down from Fryeburg, it burned all those houses up through there.
AP: In West Baldwin?
RC: In Baldwin, Hiram, and all that section down through there and the genealogy got burned and they’d worked on it for years and years.
AP: Isn’t that a shame?
RC: And it went a way back to, as I understand it, their farm was in New York down by Wall Street somewheres. They had a big farm down there. You know the first settlers.
AP: You mean your ancestors?
RC: Yes.
AP: Wonder what brought them to Maine?
RC: I don’t know.
AP: Did they have a farm in Baldwin?
RC: They had a big farm, the same as most people did in those days and I think my grandfather was supervisor in one of the woollen mills up there. In Limerick I think it was. In those days, I can’t remember just what it was, but he seemed to have quite an important job or we thought he did anyway.
AP: And your father came to Portland?
RC: Yes, he come to Portland. I think his brother was in the painting business on Brackett Street and I think he worked for them, with the painting contractors. So he had two other brothers and I think he worked with them most of the time.
AP: And then ran a farm also. Cram, what about your own brothers and sisters?
RC: I had two brothers and one sister. And my two brothers were killed in 1945, only one was in January and one was in April.
AP: And they were killed?
RC: Yes. Down on the Foreside Road. One was down by Johnson’s house and one was on the bridge, the same year. Cars hit the both of them. That was in the shipyard time, you know, and there was no — the last trolley, the last bus used to come to the Marine Hospital and then they walked home from there. And they both got hit, one on the bridge and one on the road. It was dark. They both were were accidents, there was no question about that. One was a dark, rainy night and one was a cold, slippery night. Two different times.
AP: Isn’t that something? Two in one year. And did you have a sister?
RC: Yes, she lived in New York for a long while. Her husband was a, worked for these different people, he was I think they called it a herdsman but with these Jersey cows. He worked for Kellogg, the Ambassador and the Governor of Connecticut in those kinds of places, another one up in New York. They was away all the time.
AP: So you didn’t see her as much.
RC: No, we didn’t see them very much.
AP: What was — I am getting back now to then you were at home as kids. Did you play games? What did you do for fun? You were busy with the farm.
RC: I can’t remember doing anything just for fun. I think we had to weed the garden, do something. I can’t remember of ever just playing.
AP: What about church? Was that big in your life?
RC: We went to the nearest one. Sometimes we went down in Cumberland. They had that one in Cumberland and Falmouth, you know that community one up here. And that was, have you ever been in that church?
AP: In Falmouth?
RC: In Cumberland and Falmouth, right on the line.
AP: Yes, I have been in that church.
RC: Half of it was in Cumberland and half in Falmouth, so the Minister stood one foot in each town. And I suppose it’s the same way now, I don’t know. We used to go there the most. Sometimes…
AP: How did you get there?
RC: Walk.
AP: That’s quite a way.
RC: Quite a little ways, [] was the nearest.
AP: Did you have a horse?
RC: Yes, we did. I don’t ever remember taking him to church.
AP: Maybe he was used more on the farm.
RC: I think so, yes. I don’t think we ever used him for pleasure. I don’t remember going anywhere.
AP: Not gallivanting anywhere. When did telephones come in?
RC: Oh, we didn’t have really a telephone until — we didn’t have any in Yarmouth. We probably didn’t have any until we built the house down here, around probably 1927, well we didn’t even have it then because it must have been the 1940’s or so before we had a telephone. I mean of our own. We never had one in any house we lived in until I built this house. And then we didn’t have it at first, it cost too much.
AP: In the beginning. Well, people weren’t used to them either. You didn’t know you needed one.
RC: No, you never needed it and if you did, you’d go to a neighbor.
AP: What about running water? You didn’t have that in…
RC: We didn’t have that in Cumberland. We had it in Yarmouth. Cold water, we didn’t have any hot water. Heated it on the stove.
AP: And what would you do to take a bath, heat it up and dump it in the bathtub?
RC: Yes.
AP: Things are different.
RC: Yes.
AP: After you got out of high school what did you do then?
RC: Well, I started working in the summer, and then…
AP: Doing?
RC: Garden work. And then later on I went to a landscape school.
AP: Did you? Where was that?
RC: In Newark, New York. It was connected with Jackson Perkins, the nursery.
AP: The rose place.
RC: Yes, and I went there two or three winters.
[1924 for 6 months during the winter]
RC: It was one of those programs that you could work in the summer and when you had time. I learned Landscape architecture and landscape gardening.
AP: Oh, that explains why you have this great ability. You had the ability but that helps.
RC: It was nice, you know, they taught you these things we didn’t know.
AP: So how did you get down there?
RC: I went on the train. Went to New York and then went out to Newark, near Albany. And then you just stayed there. They had their own rooms in the school.
AP: So you stayed in a dormitory?
RC: Yes, so you could stay there, and stay there as long as you wanted to. Usually in April or so then I’d go back to work out in these places.
AP: Where did you work around here?
RC: First of it I did landscape work for myself. I worked for everybody, just about everybody on the Foreside, over to the Cape, on Cushing Island, and then I built myself a greenhouse.
AP: Well now how did you get around?
RC: By that time I had a little Ford.
AP: Model T?
An Interview With Robert Cram

RC: Model T. 1923. Model T. And then I built my little greenhouse and then I grew plants for all the different people.
AP: That was good, wasn’t it?
RC: Oh, I had a lot of fun. Just about everybody on the Foreside and over to the Cape. It’s a lot of fun to drive by now and see the trees we planted 50 years ago.
AP: Were you working for Miss Payson at that time?
RC: Well, I worked I guess for Mrs. Phillips first, but that was only to set out plants, but that maybe was only for a few hours, maybe a few days and then somewheres else a few days. In the first of it in the summertime I had some men helping me. We’d build lawns and gardens. Sort of fun.
AP: You really started with nothing and put the whole together.
RC: Yeah, it’s like this place. There wasn’t anything here when we started. It was all wild.
AP: Lots of trees?
RC: There was just these big trees. This little garden was the same distance on that side of it as it was on that side and that’s all the grass there was. The rest of it was wild.
AP: When did you start working for Miss Payson?
RC: I looked back in some of my old books and I first started in 1926. That was [] I think something happened to the man. that was…
AP: Well, that’s 60 years
RC: Well, that was only like a few days. I think something happened to the man who was growing the plants in the greenhouse and they didn’t have anybody to set them so I came down and I think I had something like Saturday afternoon and Sunday. And I came out and set her plants, opened her garden, both the gardens. And then probably that was all I did that year. I think it was. Can’t think of any other time. And probably by that time the man might have got well, I can’t remember. But it was just to set out seedlings. And then from there on, why a little more and a little more.
AP: Til finally it was full time. Well, there were just a lot of summer houses out here in Falmouth at that time.
RC: Mostly…Down around Town Landing they were all summer,
RC: There was some, not very many, you could almost name them. I think it was only like four from here to the bridge, four houses, year round. In fact, that was all there was from here to the bridge. There was four houses from here to the bridge.
AP: Whose were those?
RC: There was Moultons, the Audubon, and the Johnsons in the big white house, and there was a man named Libby and Whitney and the people lived on the end of the bridge in that old house. There wasn’t anything on the left-hand side.
AP: Fields?
RC: All fields from the Country Club to the bridge. There was one little house way down. I think it was — well there was a little old house down there. I think his name was Willey or somebody lived down there. I don’t know if it was year round or not. It’s still there so it may have been.
AP: And the trolley came out?
RC: Yes, they had the trolley. I don’t know what year. It must have been early, maybe 1900, somewhere around there when they had trolleys, cause they used to come out to Underwood Park and then to Freeport.
AP: Freeport.
RC: All the way to Freeport.
AP: Cram, what do you know about entertainment? Was there entertainment inside the house?
RC: I can’t remember any.
AP: Did you play cards or any of those…?
RC: No. Because we just had lamps so there was no reading, nothing to do at night really. After it got dark, you went to bed.
AP: You were up pretty early I expect?
RC: Well, we got up early, yes. We had to do so many things before we went to school.
AP: What would be a normal morning before you went to school?
RC: Well, you had to help with the animals, feed the animals, get ready for school. School started at nine and we had to leave about eight, especially in the winter time. Sometimes we’d have to go the other way, go out the road and down the roads and that was the long way. But we could most always go after the snow was gone over the hill. Shorter.
AP: Did you see much of neighbors? or friends or relations?
RC: Only the ones in school because they all lived a distance too. We didn’t have any real neighbors, children neighbors. And the relatives, they all lived far away so we seldom see those. In the summertime they probably come, maybe for a little while, but we never had them around at all.
any time.

AP: Did you do anything different on Sundays or Christmas?
RC: No, every day was just the same.

AP: You didn’t go to school?
RC: No. We had a little Christmas but not very much. We didn’t, you know in those days there wasn’t any decorations, there wasn’t any things like they have today. I think we had a Christmas tree but all we had on it was some popcorn or something.

AP: How about presents? Did you make presents?
RC: Well, the most of the presents was my mother used to make them, knitted mittens and stockings. Most of the things we got for Christmas was the things she had knitted. We had our own sheep so she made her own wool and had the yarn and she was always knitting something, making something at night. So we had plenty of nice warm clothes. That was most of our Christmas presents.

AP: What about food? You said you ate well.
RC: Well, we just had what was on the farm. We didn’t buy anything at the store. There was a country store.

AP: Oh, where was that?
RC: That was on the Tuttle Road. On our way to school. The only thing we ever bought was kerosene for the lamps and maybe some molasses. And those you traded eggs for, them. We’d take eggs to the store and get whatever we wanted and they used to keep a list of who owed who, you know, the barter system. I don’t think there was any money exchanged. I can’t remember having any. You’d just take a few dozen eggs and get a gallon of kerosene and a gallon of molasses probably.

AP: And they kept a record, a running account.
RC: Yes, and everything else was made at home, you know.

AP: Your mother sounds very skillful.
RC: She was. In the fall, before it got cold, before the snow come, we’d usually get a barrel of flour, and it was left at the end of the road - drive. Mr. Nickerson gave Dad a nice sled. Dad and Gram brought the barrel on the sled (196 lbs?). It spread the runners on the sled. The flour lasted all winter. They ate mostly corn meal, rolled oats. Flour was for biscuits and birthday cakes, pancakes. [] brought it home I guess, and that would probably last quite a long
while because we had other things that she made.
AP: What did she cook on?
RC: Stove, wood stove.
AP: And how did you heat the house?
RC: The same stove, one room but the bedrooms were cold.
AP: The living room?
RC: It was a great big kitchen. In those days you had a big kitchen and most everything was
done in the kitchen. There was always a couch in the kitchen so if anybody was sick, they was in
the kitchen. It was great big, well you know those old fashioned kitchens. That was the only heat
there was and that was where most people were. You’d got to bed in the cold.
AP: And the bathroom?
RC: Oh, no bathroom.
AP: Outside?
RC: Yes.
AP: Did she make your clothes?
RC: Yes, most of them, just about, yes I think, just about all of them, as I remember. We might
have… She used to knit our sweaters and stocking and caps and mittens so there wasn’t much
else. Well, all she did buy was the underthings, you know, those kinds of things, but I can remem-
ber much else we bought.
AP: Did you get into Portland at all, I mean other than, well you went to school?
RC: Not until, let’s see…. The first time I ever went to Portland alone was Armistice Day. An-
other boy and I, we took the trolly and went to
Portland. There was celebrating in there and
that’s the first time I ever went alone.
AP: Oh, you mean the real Armistice?
RC: Yes, 1918.
AP: What was that like?
RC: They had a big celebration. It was the end
of the war. And I know we got home before dark
anyway. That was a big thing, you know. I guess
we had a dime so we went to town. That was a
big day. I had been in before but not alone so you
see I was pretty old when I got
AP: And how old were you then?
RC: I must have been 14, I guess, fifteen, 1918,
fourteen. Now the kids travel all over Europe. My

Tuttle Road School children.
Back Row: Elna Larsen, Elton Peterson, Alice Sturdivent,
Andus Larsen, Farmer [?], Randall [?] Doughty,
Hannah Chapman, Robert Cram, Mrs. Staples [Teacher].
Second Row: Elton Cram, Marie Larsen, Anna Larsen, Farmer
[?], Bertha Brown, Vena Mahar, Elsie Bryden,
Laura Mahar, Verona Bryden, Lloyd Bryden.
Third Row: Grely Sturdivent, Desmond O’Conor,
Wallace Brown, Clifton O’Conor, Marshall Cram,
John Larsen, Harry Morrell, Alfred Staples, Eugene Staples.
grandchildren have been everywhere and even before they were born they were traveling.

AP: I know, it’s different, isn’t it?

RC: Isn’t it different today?

AP: It sure is.

RC: My grandchildren, like 5 or 6 years old, must have been older than that, she got on a plane and went to Florida to visit her other grandmother, waved her hand just as it she’d been a world traveler. Goodbye. Nothing to it.

AP: What about — did you have many books — I mean did you have homework?

RC: We had homework, a little bit, not very much. We didn’t have, I don’t think we read any books, we did have a newspaper, come in the mail the next day. The old Argus. I remember seeing that and I remember, you know it was a long, long time before I ever caught on what my cousins were doing to us. He [Adrian] was a little older than we were, I guess he come down in the summer sometimes and he’d say to us, “You run out and get the paper and I’ll read you the funnies.” So we’d go way out to the Mailbox and get the paper and he’d read them. I never even thought of it until one day my daughter was quite old, you know, she was and they’d left the Sunday paper out and I said if you go out and get the paper, I’ll read the funnies to you and that was years and years and that was the first time I ever thought and I said that’s what my cousins used to do to me. Isn’t that funny? After probably 40 years it just struck me like that. That was the first time I ever caught on to what he was doing.

AP: So you had a newspaper. Did you have a radio?

RC: No, we didn’t have a radio. Well, we didn’t even have a radio until - it must have been nineteen — in the forties. Somewheres in the early forties — maybe forty-two or three.

AP: During the war?

RC: Something like that — yeah.

AP: What about your wife? Where did you meet her?

RC: She lived in the house up at the end of the road.

AP: Which house was this?

RC: Where the Kimballs lived. She lived there. She used to go to Yarmouth to school, to North Yarmouth Academy. She was fourteen and I was twelve. Then she went to Boston to be a nurse — she’s a nurse — at the Peter Bent Brigham — and after a while we got married.

AP: How old were you when you got married?

RC: Quite old. Thirty, twenty-eight, something like that. After we got established. In those days you didn’t get married unless you could afford it. You didn’t have any relatives to ask for anything
so if you didn’t have it, you just didn’t have it. Nowadays it’s different.

AP: Where did you go on dates?

RC: Just around the place. We didn’t go anywheres, picking mayflowers and things like that.

AP: Did she work here as a nurse?

RC: No, she worked in Boston. She lived in Boston for years until we got married. Then after our daughter was grown up she started to work at the Maine Eye and Ear I guess it was, then she went to Maine Medical so she was there I think fifteen years or something like that.

AP: How many children do you have?

RC: Just one.

AP: Just one girl?

RC: Yes. She’s married and has two children.

AP: And lives?

RC: In the next house to us. They lived in Illinois, Springfield, Illinois, and he worked in a bank out there and then my wife, she had open the heart surgery and three bypasses and a the valve and I guess they thought we were getting too old to live alone so they decided to come home so I had the house that my mother had lived in, so I gave that to them and they built another storey on it so they got a nice big house there now and they live right next house, so we feel more comfortable.

AP: That’s good. And they have how many kids?

RC: Two. I think they’re thirteen and fifteen, something like that. It’s the girl’s first year in high school and the boy’s two years younger.

AP: So they’re getting to be teenagers.

RC: Oh, the boy is bigger than I am. If you run into him, it’s like running into a stone wall. No puny boy.

AP: Oh, Cram, tell me about that Christmas bit again, that was nice.

RC: The Christmas presents we used to get?

AP: Well, and you said about the oranges. and the presents, too.

RC: Yes, at Christmastime. I was quite old when I realized that oranges come all the time and not just at Christmastime. We used to get an orange at Christmas once in a while and I thought they only grew at Christmas. You know in the old stores they didn’t have any vegetables - they had

Tuttle Road School children.


Third Row: Desmond O’Conor, Marshall Cram, Harry Morrell, Clifton O’Connor, Elton Cram.
the vegetables that we had in the summer, they didn’t have the [] vegetables we have today.
AP: So what would be the vegetables in your cellar?
RC: Well, it would be just potatoes and carrots and beets and squash and those would be the ones
you’d buy in the store. There wouldn’t be any of this — there was no fruit. I can’t remember any
fruit in the stores until quite late.
AP: Except oranges at Christmas?
RC: Once in a while. They must have had them but I never see one.
AP: Do you look back on those as being the good old days?
RC: I think so. I like to think about them, because they were nice healthy days. And all the
children that used to go to school with us was all healthy children. I can’t remember anyone who
wasn’t. In these days they all lived on farms and they all lived the same and I think it was a nice
life. You learned about the animals and the birds and the trees and the flowers and the things that
— brought you quite close to the earth. I think that maybe I have funny ideas, but I think that
being outdoors and under trees and having your own feeling about different things is probably
better than being too pious sometimes. I think it’s nice to go around and see the trees and wonder
why a little acorn grows to be a big tree and try to figure it out. City kids today they don’t know
any of those things. A lot of them don’t see grass, they don’t even know what anything does, do
they? It’s too bad. I think sometimes when we’re down home and you see these great big beauti-
ful sunsets and like today, so beautiful, and you think of those people who live in New York City
that never see all this. Haven’t they missed an awful lot? They’ve missed half of their life, maybe
more than their life because some of them never really see it, do they? And you know it’s funny,
sometimes somebody don’t even see it. I had an aunt one time and we’d go out looking, you know
in the fall, at the trees, and she never saw a pretty tree — she never did. Isn’t that funny? People
have different ideas, don’t they?
AP: Different minds, the way they work.
RC: That’s right.
AP: What do you think are the biggest changes
from when you were growing up to …
RC: Today? I think all these electronic things, as
in all these space ships and all this computers.
I know they have to have them, but they don’t
seem real. In the old days, when we used to take
a pencil and add up a column of figures… today,
the children have those little computers. I don’t
know why but I think if the electricity went off
in a store, you’d never get your groceries, would
you?
AP: No, I don’t think you would, they couldn’t handle it.
RC: They couldn’t add it up, and it sort of frightens me sometimes. What is the younger generation going to do if all at once the electricity should give out?
AP: I don’t know, I know what you mean though, I don’t know.
RC: No television, no computers, no lights and they’d be absolutely stalled still, wouldn’t they?
AP: What advice would you give young people today?
RC: It’s hard to tell. They don’t take advice very well. But I’d ask them, I think to get out and see things and realize what’s growing and what’s out there is more important than the people sometimes — Not more important but — I don’t know just the right word for it, but that goes on forever, don’t you think so? Just think of this now. All this was appreciated by everybody — it’s appreciated now but not in the same way. I mean different ideas, different ways, different feelings. When you do it yourself it’s like your own children, you plant a tree and it’s like your child. It grows up nice and straight and healthy, strong. Don’t you think so? And that is why I feel so sorry sometimes for people in New York and these towns and see these people that don’t see that. I’d love to take them out and show them.
AP: Show them your world. Well, you’ve been successful in your world, Cram, very.
RC: Well, I don’t know if I was very successful, but it’s been a lot of fun.
AP: Well, think what you’ve done.
RC: I can’t think of anything I’d rather do. So many people… sometimes, when I go along the Turnpike and see somebody in a toll booth, I think how dull that must be. I shouldn’t say that because it is Important, but I suppose they do some good, of course they do.
AP: You’d do it the same way?
RC: Oh, I suppose there’s a good many things in your life you’d change I mean in your personal life, but I wouldn’t change my professional life, I don’t think. It’s been nice, it’s been fun, and it’s been creative probably a little bit and it really has been considered a nice life.
AP: And you’ve been good at it.
RC: I don’t know about that.
AP: Well, I think so, the proof of the pudding is right out here.
RC: It’s been nice. It was a lot of hard work, but it’s fun work. I always enjoyed work. I don’t know what I’d do if I didn’t. I don’t know what I’d do, I’d probably go out and get another job. Ever since the first day, I can’t ever remember Tuttle Road School children.
Robert Cram: Back row, second from left.
not working and I can’t ever remember looking for a job. If I was working for one person, somebody else would ask me, you know. That’s the way it’s gone, all the time. I never really asked anybody in my whole life for a job. anywhere.

AP: You were recommended.

RC: Yes.

AP: From one person to another.

RC: I didn’t have time to finish one when I had another. But that’s been the fun of it. In the old days of course when we used to — until dark. If I didn’t work here until five o’clock, I’d go somewhere else until dark.

AP: You were paid sort of on an hourly basis, I suppose.

RC: Yes.

End of Side 1 -

Side Number 2 - of an Interview for the Victoria Society. I am Alice Mary Pierce and I am interviewing Robert Cram, October 15, 1986. Cram was just telling me about wages and how long you worked, right? We’re back on target.

RC: In those days, we worked til dark usually, different places probably, and in the beginning I think it was a dollar and a half a day and I think the first summer probably I was out of school, not out of school but grammar school and then one time that first year they gave me two dollars a day, and that was a big raise you know. That was wonderful, I was really making money then. After that, it was more or less by the hour because I worked in different places at different times so I didn’t have a day, if I did have a whole day it was just a number of hours cause it might be four or five hours here and two or three hours somewhere else just filling in. especially when you’re setting plants for different people. I’d go down to Cushing Island, set all the plants down there for everybody, go down on the old boat, you know, the Admiral, was it?

AP: Yes.

RC: And I’d take all my plants. Did you know Mrs. Tenney, Mrs. Hay, the Thaxters?

AP: I knew the Thaxters and the Hales.

RC: That was fun. And then get the admiral back again that night. I’d try to do that all in one day, because it was only a matter of setting plants for each person, that I’d been growing.

AP: You grew the plants?

RC: Yes, in my greenhouse. Usually it was the seeds they’d sent me from wherever they’d happened to be or whatever they wanted. So I’d just take those down and plant them.
AP: That was fun wasn’t it?
RC: That was a lot of fun. Sometimes I’d have to go two days, but I tried to do it, at least finish it up the time I was there.
AP: And then would you go back and take care of them?
RC: No, I’d just set them. I grew them and set them. Sometimes in the fall they might call me down to see what they wanted for next year, something like that. But they was all such nice people. It was a lot of fun. They was the same around here and the same as over to the Cape.
AP: Who did you set plant for over at the Cape?
RC: I did the most for the Earnshaws. They had a big place in Deland Park. Did you know them?
AP: No, I didn’t.
RC: They only was there in the summertime so I did a lot of work for them. They didn’t have much at the time. I was working up at Falmouth, in Cumberland, and I used to see this big car stop outside the fence every once in a while, every day or so I guess they used to take a ride and I was making a big lawn up there and then one day the chauffeur come over and asked me, to come over and they asked me if I’d come out and see them so I did. I built them a big rose garden, a nice rose garden, in fact we used to win a lot of prizes, rock garden, and a pool. They had a nice place out there. I guess they must have been a friend of Miss Payson’s cause they asked me to come over and help her one day. That’s the time when I set the plants. They was awfully nice. I stayed there off on until they died, the both of them. They lived on Deering Street in the Wintertime and went to Florida, after Christmas, I guess, until April or May and then they come back to the Cape. So that was nice cause they was all such nice people. Did you know Mrs. Schlotterbeck?
AP: Of Schlotterbeck and Foss?
RC: Yes.
AP: No I didn’t.
RC: She was blind and she was the nicest woman. She lived on Deering Street and she asked me if I would grow her some wild flowers one time. They are quite pretty. She said I haven’t seen any of those for years and I wish you’d grow me some. So I grew her some and planted them in her garden and she was blind, she couldn’t see anything, and, oh, she was so pleased and told me how beautiful they were. I think that’s one of the nicest things I ever did. She just loved it. She said out they’re just absolutely beautiful and she’d never seen them. But she knew they was
there. Isn’t that funny?
AP: Yeah, that’s nice, isn’t it?
RC: It’s a nice memory. Other people had failed at things they wanted. Sometimes they couldn’t
buy them in the store so I’d grow them for them.
AP: Where did you buy roses, for example?
RC: We got most of ours from Jackson & Perkins because I had been there and I knew them and
it was good stock, and of course other places, too, but that was the main thing. There wasn’t any
local places to buy them anything — no nurseries. Allen Sterling had a little seed store on Ex-
change Street but no plants. I can’t even remem-
ber the greenhouses used to grow tomatoes and
cabbage and things but I don’t think they grew
many flowers. I don’t remember them having
any plants and no markets for any of these places
out here. Skillins only grew lillies and things in
their house. So that’s about the only way, unless
the planted their own seeds that they would get.
So that’s what I did most of my life — grew
things for people — and it seemed to end up that
way.
AP: You must have had a pretty big greenhouse?
RC: I had a nice little greenhouse down here where I live now.
AP: Where do you live now?
RC: On Hartford Avenue. Do you know where Dr. Taylor’s office is? On that street, at the end of
the street, way down, down near the water. We have a nice water view there and beautiful sun-
sets. Very nice.
AP: Is that looking out over the marshes?
RC: Yes, the marshes and the Audubon. So nobody can ever build in front of us there. We have
a whole big long shore line, way up to the next street and all the Audubon. And you can see way
into Portland. At night, we can see the lights at the airport and we can see the tower at Blackstrap
so we can get a long distance. Nice location, lovely location.
AP: Nice location, lovely location.
RC: It’s nice down there. We was the first one when they opened up that land in 1921. I wasn’t
old enough to sift my own papers. I bought a lot, I was so proud. I was a landowner.
AP: Were you married then?
RC: No. I was only 17 or something like that. But I thought I was rich.
AP: And you bought the lot even before you were out of school?
An Interview With Robert Cram

RC: Yes. That was when the old trolley… I didn’t have a car, the old trolley was there and I come out from school, I guess… Can’t remember now… But anyway, I come by and I see a sign down there that said Lots for Sale. I went to Yarmouth and I said guess I’ll go back and I went down and there the lot was.

AP: What did your family think of this?
RC: My mother thought it was wonderful. Because she always liked it. A dollar down and a dollar a week.

AP: What did your father say?
RC: Oh, he didn’t like it at all. In those days, I guess that was the way everybody bought anything because nobody had any money.

AP: How much do you suppose it cost?
RC: Oh, I think the lot was $100. Something like that. That was an awful lot of money but I was so tickled, you know.

AP: To be a landowner.
RC: I was a landowner. When I got it paid for, and I guess I probably saved all my money and paid for it as soon as I could. I remember, they all had an office by Union Station on Congress Street and I went down and I guess by that time I’d bought two lots and the whole thing was $200. And I went down to the bank and you know in those days they had great big bills, great big money bills, and I had two $100 dollar bills. Oh, boy, all kinds of money - and I went down and walked from Middle Street to St. John Street and I got my deed. I was walking on air all the way home and I went right straight down to the courthouse and had it recorded. That was the happiest day of my life, I was a millionaire. I had all kinds of money, I was a landowner. In the old days you know, nobody had anything, and you know anybody who owned anything was pretty special. I didn’t know anybody who owned anything. Nobody did, you know. When we went to live at Phillips Payson’s place, my mother could have bought that whole farm for $1,800. They offered it to her for $1,800 — 110 acres and the old house. But that was way — you never could think of getting that much money in your whole life.

AP: So you rented that house?
RC: I think in the old days, I think the people that owned it, they had a little cottage down where the big house is now and I think that before my mother was married, she must have worked for these people. He was minister. They owned that place and they owned the Kimball house, too. And I think they used to come out in the summer and also used to take care of them more or less, two old maids.

AP: What were their names? Do you know?
RC: Dalton. And I think we used to pay the taxes fax or something. There was some deal like that. There wasn’t any money in it, I don’t think, as I remember it now. Course I don’t remember
exactly but there was some sort of...I think we lived there to keep the farm going and probably did whatever they did in the summer because I remember when I was young, I used to sleep down there at night. Edith Dalton was my Godmother so I think she worked for them. A nice little old lady. And so I used to sleep down there at night. Have to go down on our hands and knees at six o’clock in the summertime, say our prayers and go to bed. Can you imagine that? Where I used to sleep there was a little window that went out on the roof. I’d go to bed, open the window, go out on the roof, and go down one of those little birch trees — there was a little birch tree right beside the window so I’d go down. Then I’d climb back in there so I’d be there in the morning.

AP: Where’d you spend the night?
RC: Oh, I always slept there all night. It was just too early to go to bed. I had to get out at night until it got dark. Oh, I was always back before dark. I really did sleep there but it’s hard to make a kid go to bed at six o’clock in the middle of the summer. They was awful nice people and they only come there for a while in the summertime. And then they sold that house, the Kimball house, to the Merritts and then they sold where we lived in 1919 to Mrs. Herbert Brown.

AP: She owned it before the Paysons?
RC: Well, Mrs. Phillips Payson is her daughter. I think she gave it to her. At least, it’s in the family.

AP: But Mr. Payson didn’t buy it?
RC: No, I think it was Mrs. Brown brought it.

Anyway, it was a long time ago. I don’t have any bad memories, I don’t think.

AP: You don’t sound as if you do. You sound as if they’re all good. It sounds nice, too.
RC: You know there was bad days. It wasn’t living in the Waldorf, but it was — the kids miss a lot.

AP: A good living.
RC: Yes, a good living. Cold in the winter, nice in the summer. But you were always nice and warm. We was always nice and warm even though the bedroom was cold. They had plenty of nice warm blankets and will clothes. And I don’t remember any of us ever being sick, maybe a little cold once in a while, but I don’t remember any of us ever being sick.

AP: Did you ever go to the doctor?
RC: No. No. I never was... people won’t believe it but I never went to a doctor; maybe little things like, you know I never even remember cutting my finger, but anyway I mean to a hospital until about 12 years ago. I was out on the porch trimming one of the little trees there, and it got all fuzzy and I stopped trimming and Miss Payson said, What’s the matter? and I said I didn’t now, I can’t see anything. And I had a gallstone. Not a gallstone, a kidney stone. I guess I got home. Anyway I had to go to the hospital. That was the first time I ever had to go to the hospital.

AP: Lucky.
RC: Specially living on a farm. You know most people fall off a beam or fall off a ladder or break
an arm or something. Oh, my sister did break her arm one time. When she was a little kid, she was out playing in an old wagon and fell out of it or something. That was a little break here.

AP: Did she go to the hospital?
RC: No. The doctor come and set it.

AP: At the house?
RC: Yeah. That was way back because I remember that Italian family, the woman used to take care of her. She didn’t take care of her, but she was little, and she sort of took her over as a project, you know. Isn’t that funny?

AP: What family was that?
RC: The one that built the road, the State Road. I mean when they put cement on the road out here. Probably 1914 or something like that.

AP: It had been?
RC: A dirt road, yes. I think up til then it had been just a dirt road and from the Country Club to the bridge it was all clay so you can imagine what happened there in the wintertime.

AP: Well, Cram, I think that was a wonderful interview. Is there anything you’d like to …
RC: I can’t think of anything more.

AP: Well, I think that’s great and the Victoria Society thanks you very, very much and so do I.
RC: You’re very welcome. I hope I haven’t said anything I shouldn’t, I don’t think you’ve said a thing you shouldn’t. It should be recorded. So thank you, very much.

AP: You’re very welcome.

Editor’s note: The Dalton farm property has a long history. On April 3, 1837, Cumberland voters approved the purchase of “a suitable farm on which to keep and maintain the paupers belonging to this town…” On May 10, 1837, Nathaniel, Samuel, William, Thomas and Elizabeth Scales, the adult children of Thomas and Elizabeth Scales, sold the Scales property to Joseph Sturdivant, Treasurer of Town of Cumberland, for $2,000.

On September 11th, 1837, residents voted that “the overseers of the poor cause a suitable building to be erected on the Town farm for a work-shop, which shall be 35 feet long 16 feet wide the lower story to be 7 feet in the clear the other half story 2 ½ feet high with an apartment in the same for a house of Correction and the Selectmen advertise for sealed proposals for erecting and finishing the same the Selectmen having a negative on all proposals, and the Overseers of the Poor are directed to make any repairs on the buildings now on the farm that they may deem
expedient.”

The following year, on September 10th, 1838, residents directed the selectmen “to take such measures in relation to building a Wharf on the town farm as in their opinion the interest of the town requires.”

In 1841, a committee was created to consider building a new house on the town farm, and proposals were requested to build the new structure. On January 7, 1843, the committee issued a report on their inspection of the completed structure.

The 1857 Cumberland County Atlas shows that Cumberland’s town farm was located on the Foreside, not far from the shores of Broad Cove. Close by is the Spear shipyard, which was in operation in the area from 1812 through 1859. A receipt for supplies for the town farm for the period May through December 1843 includes 1,453 lb. of oakum at six cents per pound. Oakum is loose fiber obtained by recycling old rope and cordage, and was mixed with tar and used for caulking in shipbuilding. Picking oakum was a common task in British work houses and penitentiaries, and possibly orphanages, and its presence at Cumberland’s town farm indicates that the farm’s inhabitants were engaged in work that offset the cost of maintaining the farm.

On February 26, 1866, Cumberland voters approved a measure to “sell the Town Farm and all the appurtenances thereof...” The 1865 Overseers report gives one reason for the sale, stating that in “regard to the Paupers now in the almshouse, from the large number that have been supported there for years past, death has swept them away & but one remains as a living monument to mark the house as an almshouse. On the 19th inst. Lemuel Hamilton died, he was found dead, having fallen into the fire & burned to death. Emery Gould ran away a few weeks since and has not been heard from.”

Ephraim Sturdivant and others asked the town to reconsider the vote instructing the Overseers of the Poor to sell the farm. On March 26th 1866, residents voted not to reconsider the vote to sell the farm, 29 in favor of reconsidering and 54 against reconsidering.

On May 19, 1866, Johnson M. Rideout, Charles Wyman and Ebenezer Hill, Selectmen and Overseers of Poor of Town of Cumberland, sold the town farm to Ephraim Sturdivant for $1,900. Ephraim Sturdivant’s widow, Mary T. Sturdivant, sold the farm property to Albert F. Drinkwater on November 27, 1869, for the sum of $1,800. Four years later, on September 13, 1873, Joseph M. and Albert F. Drinkwater sold the property to Maria L. Dalton for $1,100. Maria L. and Asa Dalton sold the farm to their daughter Mary L. Dalton on May 19, 1904. Mary Dalton rented out the farm to Linwood and Gertrude Cram, who lived there with their children Robert, Marshall, Elton and Lydia from 1904 to 1919. On February 17, 1912, Mary L. Dalton gave to Ernest J. Jones a five-year lease, at $1 per year, to maintain a 500 square-foot lot with cottage on the property. On August 2, 1919, sisters Maria L. Dalton and Edith L. Dalton sold the property to Herbert J. Brown.