

QUONOCHONTAUG HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Oral History

JOHN (JACK) B. FROST

January 21, 2002

Interviewed by Anne Schafer Doyle

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Doyle: This is Monday, January 21, 2002; and this afternoon I am speaking with Mr. Jack Frost, of Ninigret Avenue, about his memories of Quonochontaug.

Doyle: Jack, if you could just tell me your full name and when you were born and where.

Frost: My full name is John Bennett Frost. I was born in November, 20th, in the year 1910, in Brooklyn. And, as luck would have it, I got there before the doctor did.

Doyle: Is that right! [Laughter] I'll have to ask you more about that... But now Jack, I'd just like to ask you, what brought you to Quonnie?

Frost: The thing that brought us to Quonnie was that it came about around 1939 or 1940. I was then working for the Brooklyn Union Gas Company, in Brooklyn, and I had only two weeks' vacation, that is paid vacation. Other counts didn't amount to anything because they never existed. It was: you took your vacation, and you didn't take them any longer; they were glad to see you when you came back a day or two early, by error. But we had the question as to where would we spend this two weeks.

It so happened that I knew Ainsworth Crooker. We both were attending Brooklyn Polytechnic at the same time, and we were very close neighbors in Flatbush section of Brooklyn. And we recalled that Ainsworth had told us there was a place up in New England, on the shores of Rhode Island, that he had gone to as a child; and they enjoyed it so much that in

Ainsworth's teen years —he was a few years older than I was at the time—he and his brother ran a camp right near Quonochontaug; and his folks were residing for the summer in a place that was known as Sea Breeze Inn, in Quonochontaug.

But when we needed to go to Quonochontaug, it seemed like so far away that we figured well, let's see; let's run up there and see what it looks like anyway. We probably won't like it, but let's go look. Because Ainsworth's a fussy guy, and wants us to take full advantage of anything we tell him

It so happened that Ainsworth, for some reason or other, had the summer off; and he and his brother Diel (?sp), an older brother, ran a summer camp for summer residents in this area. And they taught the children in this day camp how to swim, how to boat, how to fish, how to conduct themselves in the wild, so to speak. And Ainsworth would be glad to tell us about it. As a matter of fact, he and his wife, Marian Crooker --she was also interested in Quonochontaug – but Ainsworth had a little one-room summer rental on Langworthy Road, in what they then called a cottage. A cottage then was about the size of a steamer trunk. But that was it. But Ainsworth was there, and Marian went along --she was there, I guess for the summer, too. We never asked them personally what that was all about because he wasn't married at that particular time.

But Ainsworth invited us to come up for a day and look the grounds over and go over to look at Sea Breeze Inn. Well, we came along; and when we got to Langworthy Road, we found the Ainsworth cottage. They told us where we could find Ainsworth: he'd be down in one of the meadows, on the old Route 1 A. And we got down there and found him; but then when we looked at the cottage he and Marian were staying in, we said, "No thanks, at the moment; we'll be going back to Brooklyn, but where is the Sea Breeze Inn?" Well, Ainsworth told us about Sea Breeze Inn, how he used to come here:

Long before people were coming by car, they would take the train to Westerly and they'd be met in Westerly with a horse and wagon. And the horse and wagon would drop them on the west side of the pond. And some man would put 'em in his good-sized rowboat, row 'em across the pond, and drop them off down at the foot of the east end of Quonochontaug Pond. And then somebody would come down and get their bags and haul it up to where Sea Breeze Inn was, at the road –West Beach Road. And that was our beginning.

And when we heard the story, and we saw what they had had to do; we figured there must be some value. So we let it go for that year, but the next year—there had been a nasty hurricane later that summer; and it just so happened that the next year we wanted to come here, to Quonochontaug, the Finnish people who had bought the Sea Breeze Inn

because it was really wiped out during the late fall hurricane, and they were busy, too busy to be really interested in summer rentals in that particular year. They said next year. But we looked the place over and it looked great: swings for the children, and near enough to the beach so that we could walk to the beach. Oddly enough that wasn't bothering us too much 'til a couple of years later when we had gasoline rationing. Nobody'd think of taking the car to the beach. You'd walk to the beach; and if you had youngsters, you'd put 'em on your shoulder and walk the youngsters to the beach, too.

Doyle: Now what beach did you go to?

Frost: We went to West Beach, as a usual thing. But of course once in a while, we'd get a little frisky and walk all the way down to East Beach along the shore. But where we would stay was in the West Beach, itself.

And when we saw the Finnish people who had acquired Sea Breeze Inn after the hurricane, they were cleaning the place up and really hosing the mud out of the entryway, the lobby, and those rooms that had been damaged by the storm. And the Finnish people were very outgoing, but *very, very* diligent: they worked all the time and worked with a purpose, and the purpose was to get the place cleaned up so it could be used for summer rentals. But we told 'em we'd be back, and the following year we started to return as we did year after year thereafter.

Doyle: That was a two-week period, then?

Frost: That was a two-week period. That was the entire vacation we had, and then we had to get back. That was it, though. But we found a lot of things out by having to have gasoline rationing; you probably enjoyed the beach a lot more because you had to walk to it, and then when you got back you'd have completed really a day's outing. But as the time went by, whether we were walking, or later in cars, as the population of our family increased, there were more and more youngsters to see to it that they got to the beach. And instead of having to walk and carry them, in later years why they could pile in the car, and we could take maybe even two cars to the beach.

Doyle: And you were still going down to West Beach, though, the whole time you were at Sea Breeze?

Frost: We went to Central Beach.

Doyle: Oh, to Central Beach.

Frost: Yes. But then East Beach was out of the question because it was too far away.

Doyle: Now, when you first went there, how many children did you have? When was Jack born?

Frost: Jack was born, I think, in '39.

Doyle: All right, '39. So when you first had a glimpse of it, that first time you went over there, it was before the hurricane.

Frost: That's right.

Doyle: And that was the Kenyon House at that time.

Frost: That's right. But we just got a glimpse of what it was, but we were not in the building at all. But the lady—as we got to know the building and the oddities about the building, and the efforts that not only the owners but the help—the guests would always jump in and help out. We had one night in later years when it was halfway snowing, and Mr. Nurmi had set up with newspapers and one thing and another, and he put them in the fireplace in the little card room in about the first-floor center of the house. And sure enough, those newspapers caught fire very nicely for him. But they landed on the roof in flames, so we started a fire brigade with several of the other men there, walking up to the third floor and up through the roof. And dousing it down, but we passed a bucket brigade—and uh—

Doyle: And you were successful in putting it out?

Frost: We were successful in putting it out. But it was quite a thrill. But the biggest blow they had in the early years was the fact that the place had been inundated by the hurricane the preceding year.

Doyle: I'd like to talk a little bit about the Inn itself. And you were saying that after the hurricane, they were really trying to do a lot of renovations and that kind of thing.

Frost: That's right.

Doyle: Do you remember anything in particular about what it was like inside?

Frost: Well, the building was a typical late 1800-early 1900 summer place. There was no provision for central heating or room-by-room water service. The first floor had a ceiling that might have been a 14-foot ceiling, but the entrance to the building, as a guest would use, was around the front where the yards were; and there was a ping pong table set up

there, and there was also a croquet set there, and a couple of swings. Some of those trees may still be there.

Doyle: Now that was not facing the – that was kind of on the side, wasn't it?

Frost: The main entrance? Well, in appearance, the main entrance faced to the south. But as you drove and approached the building, you approached it from the north; so that put you –so you stopped your car at the back of the building and walked through a passageway into the main lobby area. In which people would sit around and enjoy company with one another, play cards. But there wasn't any receptionist, there wasn't any reception office or anything like that.

Doyle: Just the two Nurmis were in charge, then –

Frost: Just Mr. Nurmi was in charge, but then I guess his wife was in charge of the building and the kitchen. And Mr. Nurmi was quite likely to be around [to be] the greeter. But they did have one girl who had a leg difficulty, and she couldn't move around very well; but she would be there to greet you. But she was usually someplace else when new arrivals-- So one other guest would step up as the new—visitor—came through the back door and into the lobby area. The lobby area might have been an area that was, maybe, thirty by forty feet, open; and the staircase came down into it.

But off to the east side of that lobby so to speak, there were three bedrooms; and as luck would have it, why one of the bedrooms we had had been used as a kitchen. And we had a very nice sink, and we had running water with hot and cold running water at the tap. And that's where some of our youngsters got their first baths at Sea Breeze, was in the "kitchen" sink.

Doyle: Now did the Nurmis stay there though, or was the whole Inn used for guests?

Frost: No; in the beginning, the Nurmis stayed in the building, but they were up on the third floor, over the kitchen area. As were the –I think they had three little waitresses: two of them I think then came from Finland. But the help was always most considerate of the guests. And you never could ask for too much from them. They'd always respond with a smile and be very, very pleasant.

And on the west of the ground floor, there was a big dining room; where two adjoining rooms had been separated by a partition. And Mr. Nurmi removed the partition so it became a fairly good sized –maybe about a forty-foot square—open space.

Doyle: Did everybody eat at the same time?

Frost: Everybody ate at the same time, and you always ate at the same place. You had your own table, and you had your own waitress; and we got to know one another very very well. The little Finnish girls were very very helpful.

Doyle: What might you have for breakfast in the morning, when you got up?

Frost: Oh, we'd have a full breakfast of fruit and hot or cold cereals and eggs any way we'd like them – you could never ask for too much. Mrs. Nurmi won the hearts of most of the mothers there because she insisted on feeding the children first. So if there were a number of children around, they always – by that I meant ten children or something of the sort. But if it was a question of having the babies upstairs, let them have the bottle prepared, so she made the formula for the babies. And all of this went on before regular dinner, while she's preparing dinner in the kitchen. And they were great cooks, and they could never do enough in their attempt to try to please people.

Doyle: What was her personality like?

Frost: She was warm and outgoing; well, she paid attention to her business. And so did Mr. Nurmi. But if you stopped to talk to either one of them, they would just talk and talk and talk until they figured you wanted to move along. But they appreciated the business; and as I recall, I'm not sure whether we paid all of \$18 a week for room and board. But it was some ridiculous figure....

Doyle: Did your children live in the same living quarters you did, or did they have separate rooms?

Frost: No; you engaged the room. And if it was a room for four, like two beds-- two individual beds-- and a master bed --there's two of the four, and if you go in there with two children, you'd all be in the same room. And we were fortunate in the west end of the building, because we also had a bathroom.

Doyle: Your own bathroom?

Frost: We had our own bathroom upstairs.

Doyle: Upstairs?

Frost: Yes, but there was also one in the quarters we occupied in subsequent years, downstairs. So we enjoyed the fact that, having children and getting back from the beach and that sort of thing -- get them changed and what-not –

Doyle: Were there outdoor showers?

Frost: There were outdoor showers, but there was no dressing area whatsoever. The dressing area I guess everybody just took their shower outside and dried off and ran up through the building.

Doyle: Did the other guests have to share a bathroom?

Frost: Yes; you'd just knock on the door and see if there was anybody in the bathrooms that were on the floor. I think there were two common bathrooms on the second and third floor.

Doyle: OK. So there were also guests that lived on the third floor.

Frost: Yes. But not very many. And they weren't people with children. They tried to see to it that people with children had the preference, all the way through. They were wonderful hosts, and very good business people, too, I understand.

Doyle: Now did they pack lunches for you when you went down to the beach? Did you stay down there the whole day?

Frost: No, we didn't. We'd always come back because there was nap time involved, as well. But we'd be back. Sometimes in the morning we wouldn't go swimming. It might be a bad day, and we would walk elsewhere, and walk around the neighborhood and try to get acquainted. One thing we actually did enjoy doing was going down to the breachway. There wasn't any improvement in the opening of the breachway, as in later years; and they could waddle almost all the way across if it was low tide. And that was quite a thrill to be on the other side.

Doyle: Now, wasn't there access to the pond directly from Sea Breeze Inn , as well? So you could just get up and walk down to the pond?

Frost: Yeah. Mr. Nurmi – we would go out the kitchen door, and down the path headed out toward the western end of the area. And there was a path from there that took you right down to the little dock that Mr. Nurmi had; he had a boat there, a Finnish-made boat that you were allowed to take out, that would take about four people to handle.

Doyle: A rowboat --. Xxxx

Frost: Yes. Like a rowboat. But there was no such thing as a motor or anything like that around.

Doyle: So that's where your kids got their experience.

Frost: Yeah. Right on the dock, and they had their boats and one thing and another. But in subsequent years, where the pump was, at the pond, --

Doyle: Pump?

Frost: --a physical pump, so that if you wanted water to wash off, or needed a drink, or anything of the sort --how drinkable it was, I don't recall-- but it worked fine. But in subsequent years Mr. Nurmi built a bathhouse over that pump.

Doyle: I was going to ask you about that, because somebody else mentioned that there was a sauna.

Frost: A sauna, yes. And Mr. Nurmi, apparently he came from Westerly, I guess originally from Finland-- but in Westerly he had the Finnish baths, public baths. So he realized the value of having running water around and whatnot—

Doyle: Was it warmed up and everything?

Frost: Well you just go to an open pump and pump it yourself. And the water comes spilling out. And if you want to, you take a kid's pail and get a pail full of water and throw it on somebody.

Doyle: That's what they would call a sauna?

Frost: No.

Doyle: Oh.

Frost: That's just the pump stand.

Doyle: The pump stand. OK.

Frost: But then in subsequent years, maybe two or three years after we were there, Mr. Nurmi, in his spare winter time, built a little house over it. And this became the bathhouse

Doyle: What did it look like?

Frost: It looked like -- one story, no windows -- I guess they *did* have two windows—

Doyle: How many people could go in at one time?

Frost: Well, he had it set up – there was a fireplace, a stone fireplace. And you fed the fire from the outside, rather than inside. But inside, where all the stone was, these stones would get hotter than brick, very hot. It would be nice that you could come up off the water a little cool, [and] you run into the pump house there. And there was one area where people could put their suits on and take them off and just hang them on a hook there. And another area, on the other side of the fireplace (and it was partitioned off) it looked like a hen roost. There were three or four rows of benches, stacked one behind another. But you'd look down at the outside of this fireplace. And of course, the fire burning in there all day long, those stones got pretty hot. And what the Finnish people taught us was how to take a Finnish steam bath.

Doyle: How did you do that?

Frost: Well, you get down there and –we never had couples in it— but you're supposed to be there without a suit –

Doyle: Yes, I thought usually it was –

Frost: Usually, yes, but then it got so that the boys would go at one time and the girls would go at another time. Unless it happened to be the family, and even then men's suits got briefer so it didn't make much sense to put them on or take them off. It was nicely done, and people respected what was intended. But you'd sit there, and you don't see the fireplace; all you see is the pile of stones in the bathing area. But in the other area, the changing area, you also got another side of this pile of brick. And that had a couple of good-sized windows in it, so that if it got too hot, in the changing room, why you'd just open the windows.

Doyle: Did anybody ever keel over, in the heat?

Frost: Not to our knowledge, no. But what we did find out was that a lot of people were introduced to this Finnish steam bath, which was such that you strip and you'd sit on one of these benches, depending upon the tier, whether you're in the ground tier or the second or the third or the fourth one, and dependent upon how much heat you could take, in this Finnish steam bath. Because if you were a newcomer, you sat on the bottom rung. If you were an old-timer, had lots of whatever it took, you could sit on the top. And that's where the heat was.

Doyle: Now did they have to pour water over the stones?

Frost: They did. They always had a bucket of water there. And it would only take like maybe a half a glassful, and you're just—you're sitting there waiting for things to happen, and they'd throw it on the xxxxx. And puff—just as fast as that, why, it was all steam. You couldn't see it, but you could feel the heat go up, of course to the ceiling, and come down and hit you right across the shoulders. And you couldn't take too much, if you were sitting at the top. If you were sitting at the bottom, why you could sit there for 45 minutes or so.

Doyle: Did they have that available every day? I mean, they'd have to go heat the rocks.

Frost: Or, if there was any doubt and the place wasn't being used, you could say "Do you mind if I have a fire?"

Doyle: Oh, so you could start your own fire --?

Frost: You could start your own fire, or if they knew beforehand, they'd have the fire going before you ever left dinner at suppertime. Usually-- the Finnish bath was usually taken at night, or in the evening 'cause in the summertime—

Doyle: Was that the custom in Finland? Is that what they would do?

Frost: I gathered that was it. But Mr. Nurmi –his real profession was running the Finnish steam baths in Westerly. That was a real Westerly business; he had a business –

Doyle: Oh – he had a business in there?

Frost: He had a business as well as running this place.

Doyle: I didn't know that – so where was that located?

Frost: I'm not sure.

Doyle: Did you ever go down there?

Frost: No, actually, I didn't.

Doyle: Did you ever go into Westerly very often? Or – once you were at the Inn, you were there—

Frost: Once in a while, you'd go in – If anybody was going to Westerly, the whole house knew, because it was “Going to Westerly, can I get you anything?” And the thing that most of them got was a camera or film. They'd bring back a roll of this, that, or the other film.

But the Finnish steam baths were a great success. And the people --once they got used to the first bite of that hot steam coming, they could take it. And some of them, at the end of the evening, before they turned in for the night, would go down and take a Finnish steam bath and go back to bed knowing they were fully cleaned, externally, internally and very very much relaxed. And, of course, it would be nice if there was a little chill in the air – you'd take this Finnish steam bath, expose your body to a beating in taking the blast of the hot steam as it came off the rocks. And you didn't douse the rocks, you didn't really pour it on. Like a half a cupful would give you plenty of steam.

Doyle: What happened to it? Do you know?

Frost: I really don't know. But the whole Finnish steam bath was no bigger than this room--if it was quite this big. But with an understanding that right about in the middle of the floor here was the stack of stones, and the fire is inside and fed from the outside.

Doyle: The fire--how was it fed from the outside? When you say it was fed from the outside, how did they do that?

Frost: Well, this was an enclosure they had made for the fire; and they had these bricks all around. They were set in cement all around it. But there was a big fire chamber, I guess you'd take an ordinary fireplace and uh—

Doyle: And this --was it vented in by . . . the heat?

Frost: The heat was conducted . . . In other words, all -- if this is the fireplace, and you have a section here to feed it, you didn't feed it all the way around. It's all enclosed with rocks here, and there was “food” stacked all around. And half of this fireplace is exposed to one room, where the [steam] bathers are; and the other half is in the dressing area.

Doyle: Oh, I see.

Frost: You could feed the fire in, from the dressing area, but not from the—

Doyle: But then the rocks, how are the rocks heated from that? That's what I'm --

Frost: Because the fire's inside, but the rocks go all the way around the whole business. Not very clear.

Doyle: No, no; that's a very good description. I have never heard anybody describe it to me –

Frost: A lot of different opinions about it, and it kind of hurt when in later years they had a fire and they lost the building.

Doyle: Oh, I know; I'm going to get into that in a while. Now, the other –after a while, they (*the Nurmis*) lived somewhere else, right? Did they live in a house nearby?

Frost: Well, in the beginning, they lived in the central part, upstairs. But then Mr. Nurmi, a couple of years later he needed a garage, and he needed a place for the people to go in the evening; so he built what is now the Dance Hall. And the Dance Hall that you see there now was constructed by Mr. Nurmi; he built it. And in the evenings, if it wasn't too cold or too rough outside, pouring rain or something of the sort, he had put a music box in there.

Doyle: Like a jukebox?

Frost: Jukebox. And –

Doyle: So that was built after you first started going to the Inn?

Frost: It was a few years before we found it. And he had built it. And what he wanted, he wanted storage space for his lawn equipment, his boat equipment and whatnot; and that was built with a slope of the land in mind that you went up two steps and you'd be in the Dance Hall. And if you went around to the back of the building, which faced the water, the west end of the building, the big swinging doors – I guess they were probably eight-foot square or so—but the whole bottom would open up. But he used that for storing his equipment and xxx and whatnot.

Doyle: I heard that, before it was Sea Breeze Inn when it was the Kenyon House, that they had a place-- I don't know whether it was in the same location-- but there was a bowling alley and a place to dance. Is that – You didn't probably notice that when you first went, before it became Sea Breeze Inn–

Frost: I can't tie that in, actually, about the early – But the Nurmis did live in this building and –

Doyle: They lived right there, in that particular building, then –

Frost: No, I think there was another building, further to the north, where the Nurmis lived; an old farmhouse: they were in there.

Doyle: Oh, OK. Now what kind of things did you do in that Dance Hall? Did they have dances like on weekends, or—

Frost: A bellydance? They had, actually--Saturday night and Friday night were [dance] nights – but if it were rainy, and no place to go or nothing to do, why he'd go over there and build a fire and they had a nice big fireplace; and people would congregate. He liked to see people have a good time.

Doyle: He knew how to have a good time.

Frost: He knew how to have a good time. As a matter of fact, if he saw that people were going to be over there, it would be not unusual for him to come over with a great big aluminum pitcher, about this big around and this high, and go all around the Dance Hall feeding people his little Finnish concoction. Which was pretty strong!

Doyle: Aha! I've heard something about that piece of him that was interesting.

Frost: But he worked hard to make living—vacationing here-- a pleasure. There wasn't any formality about who's in charge or who this that or the other thing. But he loved it, and he worked on the grounds; and his wife I guess really learned the house and the kitchens. But it was a wonderful experience for somebody like myself. We didn't have much money, but we had children keep coming along, and it made a nice place. And they've all been there and remember the Dance Hall.

-- This is a picture (*of Jack's son, Bob*) that used to hang in the Dance Hall—

Doyle: Oh, is that right?

Frost: Yeah, and Bob has—

Doyle: I know he has a sign –

Frost: Yes, he's got a sign. Have you ever been in Bob's house?

Doyle: Oh yes, I have. He showed me the sign.

Frost: Up under the staircase?

Doyle: Yes. That's beautiful, absolutely beautiful. I mean, so you really became friends, didn't you; not only with the Nurmis but obviously with the people that stayed there. Lifelong friends.

Frost: The guests and the two little waitresses that waited on us all the time, why Aila and –I’ve forgotten the sister’s name. They were little blondes – Finnish blondes; but they were very, very nice.

And also, in back of the Dance Hall, Mr. Nurmi had a vegetable garden.

Doyle: I was going to ask you if he had a garden.

Frost: Oh, he had a garden all right. And frequently you knew very well where the [rhubarb] came from. It came from his –I don’t know how he fed his garden. But he actually worked it as a vegetable garden, and all those vegetables went on the table. And [they were] pretty good size. One other thing that most impressed us was that at breakfast you always had juice – red juice –no not cranberry – raspberry juice. And they were out picking the raspberries to make the raspberry juice –

Doyle: How did they have time to do all this?

Frost: Well, that was it. But they raised them all. And many of the vegetables [*were great*] -- But the raspberry juice was the thing that really got us at first notion. And any time we wanted, why if the children wanted seconds, we’d just ask the waitress, could I have some more juice? And you’d know very well that somebody had to be out there picking, to get it. One of the other things they did that was rather unique was that Friday night was fish night. But it usually ended up as lobster night. And he’d have a lobster fest for everybody, outside, one lobster for each guest. And the whole deal was that you came to dinner, but they had racked up these tables outside. So we’d be walking around and –

Doyle: Did they get the lobsters from the pond, or locally, or what?

Frost: I don’t know where they got the lobsters, but I know that Mrs. Nurmi’s daughter – was her name Selma – that’s not quite right; but she had a daughter that worked there, very hard, too, and she apparently was good at handling this big rowboat. The rowboat must have been 16 feet long; it was a good-sized boat that he had brought over from Finland. And he and the girl would go out fishing, for fish if it was going to be a fish night. And they’d really come in with fish. As a matter of fact, Ann’s father on a couple of occasions went along fishing with them and saw how they fished; and they were always productive. And there was never a limit of how “You can only have this, you can only have that, or you’re over your” Even ice cream on Sundays. Sunday was always ice cream—Lonnie Rowe –Have you gotten a hold of Lonnie yet?

Doyle: Not yet, to talk to. I’ve wanted to but I’m trying. He wants to talk to me, it’s just a matter of making it happen. Was he there too, then? The Rowes?

Frost: No. Yes and No. Lonnie had a cottage (*at the corner of Old West Beach Road and West Beach Road opposite the historic cemetery*) where it is now. And his mother and father would spend the summer in this cottage. And I think, his grandfather and grandmother. I know there were a couple of ladies with gray hair. But they would always come up there (*the Inn*) for Sunday dinner if they were not a guest of the house—

Doyle: And you said they would allow other people to come in, just for dinner –

Frost: By special arrangement, you could go there. But the Rows were always there for Sunday dinner, all-season long. But the rest of the time, they were in their own cottage, in the location where it is now.

Doyle: Now, your friends the Crookers.....did they continue to go to the Inn when you were there?

Frost: No. No; they were never there when we were there. Ainsworth Crooker apparently found that becoming an engineer wasn't exactly whatever it had been like being a professional school teacher, because a school teacher had so much off time. But Ainsworth had difficulty in hearing, and he found that to try to teach in public schools with a hearing deficiency, he couldn't control the classes that he had. So, he had to give up being a teacher and went back to Brooklyn Polytechnic where Ray Bennett and myself and xxx Dryer and those fellows all had gone to school as well.

Doyle: Where was their camp that you talked about; you said they had a day camp near Weekapaug, or where was it?

Frost: Well, you know where the golf course is on the north side of the road?

Doyle: Are you talking about Shore Road?

Frost: Yeah.

Doyle: Yeah. Yeah.

Frost: Is that Weekapaug or Winnapaug?

Doyle: I think it's Winnapaug.

Frost: Whichever it is, their summer camp was located-- part of it-- for stuff they do, playing volleyball and things like in the fields: they had a big field. Now you ride by and say "That's somebody's hay field." And on the other side of the pond, the south side of the pond on the ocean, they had property there, so they could conduct their summer day camp there. And

if they wanted, if the kids were sick and tired of being on a sailboat, they wanted something else, why they'd load them into a couple of cars and take them down below and they'd play volleyball and that sort of thing.

Doyle: Now, when were you married, Jack, what was the year?

Frost: When was I married? January 4th, in '36.

Doyle: '36. OK, now. So, you mentioned Ann's folks coming here.

Frost: Ann's father. Her mother wasn't living.

Doyle: ...her father. Were your parents living at the time?

Frost: My mother was living; but she was upstate with my sister, in Suffern, New York. I think she may have come by once or twice, but she was never what we would call a steady customer.

Doyle: Now, as far as friends that you made at the Inn, who were some of the other people that were there at the same time? Did you all go every year at the same time? Or you didn't necessarily see the same people every year?

Frost: Generally speaking, we tried to go the same time the others had. Do you know Jacqui Schmidt?

Doyle: I have briefly talked to her. I don't know her.

Frost: Good. Good. 'Cause she and her husband Irv arrived one night, and they thought they were going to be staying at a fancy place. And they walked in the main hall, or the entryway, about a little after dark on a Friday saying, "Where's the registration desk?" And we were all laughing like crazy: "What's registration?" or "I'll take you to .." or "I'll register you if you want." Then: "We have reservations –" "Oh, you have reservations? Well, what do you know!" We kidded them along and that sort of thing. And in the beginning, they were astonished; and they wanted to leave right away. [*But*] then her husband Irv said, "No, no, we've paid for it. Let's stay for one night anyway, and we'll leave."

But Henry Johnson, our immediate neighbor in New York, the Johnson kids and the Frost kids knew one another –

Doyle: Oh, I see. But in New York you were friends?

Frost: Sure. They lived just down the block from us as well.

Doyle: I didn't know that.

Frost: So, we had company at first, and they asked us where we were going to spend the summer. And we told them. And after a while we got the Bennetts coming up here, too.

Doyle: Well, the Bennetts -- Which Bennetts? I know there are two Bennett families--

Frost: Ray and Anita.

Doyle: Anita.

Frost: Anita Bennett. You know Anita.

Doyle: She just sold her house. (*At the corner of Central Street and Oceanview*)

Frost: Yes. And Ray was her husband; they had two children, a boy and a girl. I don't think they ever stayed at the Inn. But they liked it up here, so they rented--

Doyle: When I talked to Ellie Prior, a few years ago, she mentioned, also, *that* when she rented her cottage she would stay at the Inn. So, you knew Ellie?

Frost: That's right. And the boys. That kid was always bouncing on top of the waves. He was the friskiest little thing.

Doyle: Who was that?

Frost: George. I think was his name. And it must be --(*Lonnie Rowe*) you mentioned his name before. Lonnie and his grandmother all came for Sunday dinners.

Doyle: Oh, the Rowes?

Frost: The Rowes. And the Rowes' boy-- he was another light-weighted youngster. But he was always being thrown from one wave to another. The kids had a wonderful time. I must have, oh, hundreds of slides of these kids. Would you like me to run through some of them?

Doyle: You know, I would love to do that at some point. I don't know if I can do that today, but I would love it.

Frost: I couldn't find them today; it would take a lot of looking.

Doyle: I would love that.

Frost: You would?

Doyle: Yeah.

Frost: OK. I'll just turn them over to you, and I will only give you those that are related to this particular location.

Doyle: What I've usually done if people have offered me to see some of their photos or slides is have them copied and then give them back to you. That's what I've been doing. That's how I've been spending some of the money that we've made from the book, on doing that.

Frost: You're a great little girl!

Doyle: Oh – well I'm having a ball! I'm just having a great time. OK, we're going to talk about some of Jack's friends at the Inn. Does anybody stand out in your mind in terms of—a character?

Frost: Well, the Nurmis themselves were all characters. Vieno [sp?], the daughter, she was a big woman, broad shoulders, very capable physically, mentally as well as far as I know. And we could also talk about her brother Gene [sp?]; most people never heard of Gene, because he had a real education and was working someplace other than in Rhode Island. And he's the last one we knew that had any title to the property there.

And --but generally speaking, the visitors were all gentlemen; there were none overly rich, and none of them real poor people, but everybody in those days was very careful with the dollar. As a matter of fact, we have a picture of Ann's father walking down to the beach. He's got his street clothes on, but he's got a kid with his bathing suit on and a bathing hat and sitting on Grandpa's shoulder, and Grandpa's walking him down to the beach. But anybody else, they'd say, why doesn't he wait and turn around? To prove it – you'd just see Grandpa walking -- that's the way they got to the beach. And people were willing to – income wasn't a big thing—except that you never had it.

TO SIDE TWO

[Some comments apparently not taped]

Frost: Section of the beach, for example. People were going to the beach—you going to the? “Oh I don't know, maybe we're going today or we may go this afternoon.” And oddly enough, once they got to the beach, most of them went to the same general area. And if it was kind of rough, you went to the nuns' beach (*to the east of the Quonochontaug Inn/Nun's Retreat Center*), where the nuns have let everybody xxxxx.

Doyle: But ordinarily, you'd go down to Central Beach.

Frost: You'd go to Central Beach.

Doyle: OK. I see.

Frost: But we liked the Nuns' beach, and it was easier to get to, too.

Doyle: What did you call it at that time, instead of the Nuns' Beach? It must have had another name.

Frost: I don't recall. But we always went where the nuns lived.

Doyle: Now, do you remember the Quonochontaug Inn? Did you go in there? . . . Um, before it became the nuns' place?

Frost: No.

Doyle: I didn't know whether the people at the Inns ever got together --

Frost: I couldn't tell you one way or another.

Doyle: We talked about the Priors, and I don't know who else was over there. Do you remember any other families?

Frost: Well -- Oh; [laughing] oh, we had one, what was his name? Oh -- We had one fellow who was a bit of a screwball, and I can't say a word about him until I'm able to recall his name. His wife was an unusual girl, too. And he went to the Inn; I--Perry Morrison was his name. Perry Morrison was a guest who lived -- oh, somewhere around New Hampshire around Connecticut; and I guess he was a school teacher there. But he and his wife would come down. His wife -- and I don't know whether it was his second wife or not-- but she was younger and more flexible, a regular mermaid in the water. As a matter of fact, she ended up—when on departure from the Inn, she was a pilot, flying planes abroad.

Doyle: Oh, that's unusual.

Frost: Yeah. She was part of the ferry service. But they lived--they left the -- I guess when the Inn finished, they bought a piece down at the East Beach. And it was the highest house and the one closest to the water. We always referred to it as --what'd I say his name was?

Doyle: Morrison

Frost: Perry – Perry’s Folly, because we were sure he was going to get blown out with the hurricane. And I think it was, ultimately, or jacked up, way up, on sticks.

Doyle: Now, how many years did you go to the Inn? I mean, up to what point did you stay there? Or, what happened next? Did you start renting?

Frost: We got married! -- And then finally we decided -- I guess there was a fire in the Inn, and the Inn wasn’t open. So then we said, well, we always thought this was such a swell place; we didn’t have to worry about what the children were doing. They’d go to the beach, and the only request: they either had somebody watching them, or they could not go in the water. If they wanted--they knew everybody on the beach—they’d go up to one of their friends at the beach and say, “Would you keep an eye on me while I go in the water?” But they knew very well they had to be watched. Because once in a while, a big one would come in.

But, Perry Morrison, he was also able to play the piano pretty well, so he would play in the Dance Hall.

Doyle: Oh, there was a piano over there --?

Frost: Yeah; there was one that was a player piano, and it didn’t take coins; it just took somebody who knew the right combination, and they could play the thing. But there was a piano, and Perry usually had the door – the first door you’d run into when you got here—it was easy to tell whether Perry was around or not, because that door stood wide open to their quarters all the time. If Perry was home, the door was closed. But she was quite a bit different than Perry. Perry was a bit of a screwball in some of his ideas and thinking; but when we found out that she was coming here –Rose was her name, Rose Morrison— so . . .

Doyle: Are there any relatives that are still here, from that family? Or maybe you don’t know that—I don’t know the name –

Frost: I don’t know; the only ones I know though that are still here are—I was going to say Danny Rase –

Doyle: Yeah, the Rases.

Frost: But they’re not here all the time.

Doyle: No, no they’re not.

Frost: We used to see a lot more of them than recently.

Doyle: So, you went to the Inn as long as it was open. And then when it closed – I don't know what the reason was—

Frost: We--we wanted to come up--- yeah, but they'd [*the Inn*] had a fire. They said the Inn was out of whack. And then we were able to get hold of a realtor here; and he said, well I can see about getting summer accommodations. Finally, why we ended up, year after year, in the house on the corner down here, in your block.

Doyle: Oh, Waterman's? No –

Frost: No; on the southwest corner—of your street, and Ninigret.

Doyle: And Ninigret. I was going to say either the Crossons' or the xxxx? No. Hmmn— (*some confusion here*)

Frost: They have both died. This fellow used to have a nice vegetable garden in the back of his lawn. His property backed up against the Rases'. Where does Rase fit in? Peggy Rase. (*confusion here, too*)

Doyle: No, Peggy's family started down on Surfside, but then she's over on Sunset Drive, now. So, you think it was down near the ballfield end or the other end?

Frost: Well, given where Ninigret is – it runs down and go past the ballfield. And as the road begins to slope down, the next block you pass is the block where Lynn Ellie just bought the place (*some more confusion here*) – on the northwest corner there.

Doyle: O.... K; I know where you mean.

Frost: They came from Connecticut. We rented their place for years and years and years.

Doyle: All right; I know where it was.

Frost: But I've forgotten what his name is all of a sudden – how could I? – But we also rented over towards East Beach two or three times. Anita– Anita Bennett was over there, and there were a couple of houses -- we were going to -- we got down to renting by the season. Usually, we had the month of August. What we'd do is split it up –

Doyle: I'd forgotten you were down there. I don't know why, but I forgot that that's where you were. So that's when –for instance, I knew Bob the best, because he was more my age. Now, is that when he was older, and then he met Whitney after you were down there?

Frost: I don't know whether we were there or whether we were in the house on the corner of Ninigret.

Doyle: Mmm. That's what I mean. . . .So, from there, from renting, then what? How did it progress for you? I mean, when did you buy this house?

Frost: In '95. We left New York in '94, sold our house in, I think it was September of '94. So, we had to get one with immediate occupancy. And since he paid everything we asked for, why we [dropped?] it: "Where are we going to go? Well, we want to go to Rhode Island. " So, we came over. I guess we rented – Bob had had a house on West Beach Road, Bayview. He was at the end of the street. We rented that house for a while. And then he had a house on the north side of the marsh, there, that was completed; we rented that for a while. And we rented another place. And then finally this came on the market. And when this came on the market, we said, "Sure." And we took this one.

Doyle: All right. What a beautiful location this is.

Frost: It's a nice location.

Doyle: It's very, very beautiful.

Frost: Unfortunately, I haven't had any time to really do anything around the place. I'm Ann's caretaker and..

Doyle: How's she doing?

Frost: Not well. Not well at all.

Doyle: I'm sorry.

Frost: But, tomorrow we're going to a new kind of physician, and Wednesday we have a date to see a doctor who's going to examine her and test her, xxxxx her muscles and one thing and another; see what muscles need to be strengthened or really worked on. And then he'll prescribe a gym, someplace-- I don't know whether it's in Westerly or in Wakefield--and that gym will be centered on reviving Ann's musculature –used to be she'd walk all over the place.

If I could get her to walk from that door to the bedroom. . .

Doyle: Does she not want to walk?

Frost: She'd like to but she tires too easily –

Doyle: Does she need help getting out of bed?

Frost: Yes, she does.

Doyle: How are you doing? You've got to be in good shape to do that.

Frost: Oh yeah, I feel fine.

Doyle: Well, you look like you are but –

Frost: I don't know what I look like--but I'm up before six. But when 9:30 comes, I'm ready for bed. And she'll sleep till 9:00 or 10:00 in the morning, and she's lucky if she gets breakfast before I have lunch. And so, it kind of mixes us up in the afternoon, 'cause she goes back to bed again. That's where she is now. She'll probably sleep through 4:30 , 5:00, maybe half past 5:00. And then gets up to watch the news or something like that, for a little while, and have dinner.

Doyle: What are your particular interests now? I mean, other than caring for everybody else. But I know that of course it takes a lot of time for you to care for your wife.

Frost: That's all – that's my interest.

Doyle: That's your interest; that's your job.

Frost: And if there's something that's a project that really needs – we had a leak someplace around here, a couple of days ago --I called Bob, and Bob said well, get a hold of your grandson, and so he came over and [lugged some of my stuff?] out in the garage. And I haven't been able to put the things away. I have photographs and all kinds of-- and that sort of thing I've never even looked at; but they're out there and I think if somebody like yourself, if you'd be willing to take them and just do what you want with them, I'd be delighted to have you have this stuff.

Doyle: Well, I'll let you call me about that.

Frost: I'll see what I can find.

Doyle: Thank you very much.

Frost: How did you ever get to be where you are? So, interested in other people and things?

Doyle: I don't know.

I just have interests. I like life – you know, I'm really enjoying my life.

Frost: I think we're very blessed – And how it worked out this way, I don't know. But we always --As the children were coming along, nobody was featured, nobody was standing head and shoulders above everybody else. They were all growing; they all had chores to do. They [listened?] better also; they knew very well they couldn't just go do everything they wanted to do at any time, but there's routines. One of the ones that I marvel at his success now is Bob; he's the hardest working one from time and hours and everything. How many times he moves the same shovelful of earth back and forth, I don't know. But he makes a go of it. And of all the houses we have lived in, I don't think I've ever lived in a house that is well built as the one he let us use for a year, and is now set back up on somebody else's place.

Frost: But uh, we were there. We like it here where we are, but we didn't have any intentions of originally coming here [saying] that's the house we want. [Then] we were thinking of building a house someplace. And as a matter of fact, we bought lots from Nurmi, we bought lots [in] two or three locations here, so that we would have a place if we knew where we wanted (*to live*)---. And we only moved in here because [laughing] we saw the house and said I want your house, and he said where's the money for it?
And we took him up on it.

Doyle: Did you work for the same company down in New York?

Frost: I worked for (the Brooklyn Union Gas Company.)

Doyle: Did you change jobs?

Frost: I changed all kinds of jobs in the company. I worked in Brooklyn Union Gas Company.

Doyle: So you stayed with them.

Frost: Yes. I started out with them as what they called a cadet engineer; in other words for 18 months you're not at all productive, but you go from department to department to department, seeing how each department is put together and what their obligations are. And then you're supposed to put the --I had my engineering degree from the same place that Ainsworth and Ray Bennett, and two of the other boys got.

Frost: But at the time, it was right in the middle of the Depression: we graduated in 1935, and jobs were few and far between. I was flattered because the *New York Times* offered me a job, and I had to turn it down because it meant working nights for the rest of my life, I thought. And they said, well we can't tell you how long you'll be working night shifts. But, I said, well, I want to get married and I want to raise a family; and I don't think that the way to start is to be working every night. So, I had to turn that one down.

The telephone company offered me a job but I had to turn that one down, because they couldn't tell me where in New York State I would -- I'd been -- just grew up in Malone New York; and I knew New York State pretty well.

Doyle: You were born in Brooklyn.

Frost: Born in Brooklyn. Educated in Brooklyn --in xxxx: that's part of Brooklyn. Brooklyn was home. All my friends were from Brooklyn. So, Ann and I knew -- we had been going together three or four years by this time --and I had to turn that down because they said no, we'd probably [be] shipped up near Canada right away. So, I said well, thanks very much. When Brooklyn Union offered me a job, why I knew it was going to be in Brooklyn: Brooklyn Gas Company's in Brooklyn.

So I took that job and started out as a training engineer. And when it came time to decide what department I wanted, I told them I wanted to be in the engineering/manufacturing end of the business, in the plants and one thing and another. "No, Jack, we don't want to put you there." And I said, "You're asking me what I want. I didn't put in four years of studying engineering to do something else." "Well, we'd rather have you in the sales department." I said, "I don't think so." And I kind of laughed, and I shouldn't have because the officers I was talking at had been sales people. And I said, "I'd rather pass that up." And they came back at me and said, "Jack, would you take the job we have for you and would you run it for a year? And at the end of that year, we'll put you in engineering in almost any available job that you want. But you'll be able to go back to --" I said, "Sure; you're being fair with me; let's do it."

So, I stayed until -- After 50 years of service, why I was running the Sales Department and several other departments as well. Something to look at. End of that must have seemed a big deal to Brooklyn Union.

But right after that we got married and settled down. My Ann's Engineer; been working for her for years and years.

I'm very fortunate. When I look at the children --Johnny comes from Texas, Tommy from running the railroad, CSX Railroad—he lived in Baltimore, West Virginia, all over the eastern seaboard -- and Linda 's on the west coast with her family out there, all -- her daughter, real good Lutheran, ended up going to Notre Dame and was converted to Catholicism

You know what she told me? She's just been accepted by the bar in Chicago, so she's a first-class Italian now! They grew up in Rhode Island.

Little Tom, little-- just the third member of the family -- that guy running railroads and that sort of thing, why they made him an officer in the company as well. And now Ellen, she's with City --with Chase Bank, and is doing very very well with Chase. All of them have turned out [remarkably]. I think Linda has cared for more, raised more babies than anybody I've ever heard of. She's had 43 children, 43 babies.

Doyle: Tell me how that happened!

Frost: Somebody dropped a baby in the garbage can, somebody else dropped a baby in a bush.

Doyle: You mean she's taken them in? Really? Is that what she's done?

Frost: Yes

Frost: Excuse me [Becoming emotional] But when I'm thinking how hard she worked, and the job she did, and what a wonderful contribution it's been-- Not that those children are left -- for some of them --She had two colored children that were left with her, 'cause the word got out -- but here's somebody that'll take care of the children.

Doyle: She's something like a foster parent, is that what you're saying?

Frost: Yes. To 43.

Frost: That's one way of getting attention. But when you figure the years, and you see some of these baby books around, it just gets ya. Well, she got 'em. As a matter of fact, she worked for Pan Am, xxxside, and flying to the Orient. She said one of the hardest flights she ever had was bringing the last flight out of Vietnam. [muffin?] children. Big, big – this big -- She's ended up with two of them but considers them –they look upon her as their parents. Anywhere she's going, these kids show up, show up although they've all been accepted and adopted and are doing beautifully. But there is a price alone on that child's life that could –

Frost: How can anyone treat a child like that? But it is, all the time. Somebody doesn't want the child, so they go to stop at –what's the name of the golden arches up there – MacDonald's –and leave them in a basket in front of MacDonald's. And that's [what] goes on. It's xxxxx but there's nothing you can do by getting mad at them for – But she'd have to get them herself or somebody'd bring them to her and say I understand you're aware of what the organizations do. And she can tell you about every one of these kids, and where they are and what they've been doing.

But we just had a . . . granddaughter get married on the west coast. She married a guy from Australia, but he's a nice gentleman, and he'll fit in well. He liked it here; he was here during the summer. . . But there was a wedding. Those two little girls insisted on going to the wedding. They padded the van; they made them a wedding present and sent it to them. And even though they were adopted, and they had adoptive parents, xxxx these kids are going to go a long –I guess they'll go a little farther along --

Frost: It would be a --Think of the misery there is in the world. What for? "Cause I want what you got." And then even in the case of– even if people could get what they want, it wouldn't make them happy. Some of 'em would be delighted, sure; but others – why, they'd still be up against it. We work at it – so we figure we've been very, very well blessed, when we look at some of the other houses around.

Doyle: Well, for all that to happen, Jack, it's what *you* gave. It just keeps on giving. You know, when you affect somebody who then may affect other people. And so that's something that you've been a part of.

Frost: We've been a part of – sure! They're grown. But here we are now: three boys: John, Bob, and Tom –they're all living 200 feet of one another. And Ellen's right down there across the street from you now –

Doyle: I just saw her over the holidays' actually.

Frost: They love it and think it is great, but Ellen works tremendously hard for the Bank. Devising methods and procedures and one thing and another. But she's looking forward to the day she retires and she can come up here. And as I said, Linda has the lot over there. We usually refer to it as Nurmi's lot—we bought the lot from Nurmi –

Doyle: Is it on West Beach Road, you mean?

Frost: West Beach Road. The one that (xxx?) somebody cuts the grass –

Doyle: I know where that is.

Frost: That's Linda's lot.

And, uh, we thought we were going to live there. But it didn't quite work that way. But it will be in the family—extra. That's great!

Doyle: Well, thank you for sharing parts of your life.

[End of Conversation]

