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## Interview conducted by Ron Morrison with Freeman Kitchens in March 1978 (FA 565)

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**FREEMAN KITCHENS COLLECTION**

TITLE: Oral History of Kitchens Grocery

LOCATION: Drake, Kentucky

DATE: March 1978

FIELDWORKER: Ron Morrison

INFORMANT: Freeman Kitchens; Owner of Freeman Kitchens Grocery; record collector; president and founder of the Carter Family Fan Club

TOPIC: Running and operating the Grocery/General Store, etc.

TRANSCRIBER: Jennifer M. Jameson, WKU Folk Studies: 2011

TECHNICAL NOTES: Transcriber makes educated guesses on all mentioned names, with no certainty of their accuracy. The recording sounds like it was taken outside.

DISCLAIMER: For perfect accuracy, refer to the recording. This transcription is as accurate and complete as possible. In any question of interpretation, the researcher is referred to the recording itself as the primary document representing this event.

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Ron Morrison:

This is an interview with Freeman Kitchens by Ron Morrison in March 1978, about the oral history of Kitchens Grocery.

RM: Do you know if there was another store here before the present one, or not?

FK: No, this is the only one that's been here.

RM: That's the only one? Do you know where the old post office was set up?  
Do you have any idea?

FK: Well, the old post office in Drake was set up in the, what is now called the 240. It was moved over here in the '30s from that location.

RM: Did the Duncans run it?

FK: No, the last one that ran it over there was Loterich [not sure if spelling of name is correct]. And then the Duncans ran it after it was moved here.

RM: You said that the store was remodeled. When was that done?

FK: Well, we completely remodeled about twelve years ago, I guess.

RM: Was it remodeled any before that?

FK: Well, just, you know – things that needed to be.

RM: Just periodically...

FK: Just repairs.

RM: Okay. What was the original heating source of the stove?

FK: Well, coal was the first, and then we had natural gas that came from a well across the road over here, and then of course that played out, and now it uses butane gas.

RM: That coal was burning a pot-bellied coal stove, then?

FK: Yes, they ran gas in the same old pot-bellied stove, they run sometimes, when the Duncan ran the stove.

RM: So, when was this heater put in?

FK: About fifteen years or so, I guess.

RM: Was the heater up there, and the one in the post office put up around the same time – right around fifteen years ago?

[2:20]

FK: Yes.

RM: When did they put up the gas pumps, here?

FK: Oh, there's been gas pumps here ever since the store, of course. It was hand pumps, and then several different times they've put in new electric pumps. These here, have just been in for less than a year, the ones out here now.

RM: What were the ones like before the present ones? Were the ones in the picture you gave me?

FK: Yes, they were electric, but not as modern, you see. Then I did have one electric pump and one hand pump, at one time.

RM: What time was that?

FK: Oh, twenty years ago, I guess - eighteen or twenty.

RM: Do you serve diesel [gasoline] here?

FK: No, unleaded and regular at the present time.

RM: Who are your suppliers?

FK: The main grocery suppliers? Charles Parks Company of Gallatin, Tennessee, and Midway Wholesale of Horse Cave and then I have several different salesman who deliver, like—candy and potato chips.

RM: Do you know them right off hand?

FK: All of them? Golden Flake, Tom's, Coca-Cola, Flavor Ridge, RC, Pepsi. I can't begin to name them all—Eli Whitt, Sunbeam, Colonial, Nillam's.

RM: Can I get from you sometime, what days they arrive? Can you write it down [for me]?

FK: Yes, you can.

RM: You said that you took up flowers for people who [died in the community]. Can you tell me roughly how much that's done annually?

FK: That would be hard to say, I'd say twenty to twenty-five times a year.

RM: What does the amount usually run?

FK Twenty-five dollars, I guess.

RM: How often do your nieces help you in the store?

FK: Well, she replaces me on post office vacations, and then at other times that I need her. Anytime that I need her.

RM: Like when suppliers come in?

FK: Yes, and busy days like Saturdays and other times like that.

RM: What are your busiest days?

FK: Saturday. Yes, I'd say Saturday and Monday. Wednesday would be the slowest day, I guess.

RM: What kind of patterns do you have in the store during the winter. Are there any sort of busy days or anything like that?

[5:00]

FK: No, during the wintertime they just sit around and talk a lot – sit around and swap stories and things like that.

RM: They usually drink a lot of Coke?

FK: Yes, sandwiches and drinks.

RM: In the spring does work start kind of suddenly, or does it gradually –

FK: They'll gather in the morning and work and then maybe back at lunchtime and then they are gone again maybe until nearly closing time.

RM: In the summer and fall it's the same kind of pattern?

FK: More or less, yes.

RM: What kind of services do you offer at the store?

FK: Well, of course, groceries and gas, and mail service, of course – I have a post office. Just anything that a country store would offer, I guess. I try to keep it more like the old country style as I can.

RM: So, you help with—

FK: I help and assist them in any way that I can. Like, address their mail for some, or make their telephone calls for them, or address certain items for them, or fill out any papers that they want completed. Anything like that.

RM: How much do you make in the post office in a year?

FK: Well, we're not really supposed to tell, exactly, but since I've been here, on average, maybe \$200 a month, or something, I guess. It started out real cheap, and you know they've raised it.

RM: Has there been any talk here, lately, about doing away with the post office?

FK: Not here, that I know of? We never know anything like that in advance.

RM: You said that elections were held here?

FK: Yes, in the back room store.

RM: How many people are in this city?

FK: I think there are about 250-300.

RM: So, in other words, it roughly corresponds with how many [post office] boxes you had used before they changed the route then.

FK: Yes, well see, when they had mail routes, I had about 500 boxes because some of it went into Allen and Simpson county, as well as Warren, and those people didn't vote here-see? They voted in their counties.

RM: You gave me a figure of 350 boxes—that's average? So did it vary from [inaudible] to 350-some?

FK: Yeah, it was up to about 500 when they moved.

RM: And that was in '69?

FK: '69, Yes. See, there was a Route 1, and Route 2, and a "Star Route."

RM: The post office at the other end, was it discontinued?

FK: Yes, it was discontinued in '59, I believe and it was made a rural station for my office.

RM: What do you mean "like a station?"

FK: Well, it was just a station—it operated just like a post office, but they reported all their business to me, and I kept it in my book.

[8:40]

RM: I notice you keep your records – do you do them every morning?

FK: They have to be done every day, yes.

RM: Is there any certain day that you have to turn in all your stuff?

FK: We have an account every three months, average every three months.

RM: How often do you send in your money and stuff?

FK: Daily.

RM: Can you recite that story you told me this morning about Drake, and how it got its name?

FK: Well, the best I know, they said it was from the Indians killing two men by the names of Drake and Tramble [?], and they named the creeks Drake and Tramble Creek and then later they named the communities after the creeks, I guess.

RM: What was Drake like when you were growing up as a kid, here?

FK: Well, I can't remember that far back [laughter]. It was similar, but just a few houses scattered about. There are a lot more people here now.

RM: A guy had mentioned a couple of mills being around here. Do you know anything about them?

FK: Yes, I remember one of them. There was one down on this bridge down the road—I don't remember it at all. But, there was an old water mill back at Old Drake, where the old post office was.

RM: Do you remember who ran it at that time?

FK: Mr. Jim Wiggins, I believe was his name.

RM: And it just did grinding?

FK: Grinding corn in the mill, is all I knew about it.

RM: What did your parents say when you told them you were going to buy the store?

FK: Well, they didn't say anything. I had been working here already, and they didn't mind it.

RM: How long had you been working here?

FK: Five years.

RM: And you said you made a dollar a day, and a dollar and a quarter a day. What was the difference—just the length of the day?

FK: Well, at one time—maybe for a while they paid me a dollar a day, and then later on it was a little more, you know.

RM: What was the store like when you first started working here?

FK: What do you mean, now?

RM: Well how was it laid out, now?

FK: They had counters laid out on both sides with showcases, and spaces in the center where you went in behind to wait on people. They didn't have check out counters like they do now. They just more or less had a service spot up there that you counted up—weighed up a lot of this stuff up instead of packaged.

RM: Well how was the post office figured? Similar to how it is now?

FK: Yeah, similar to how it is now.

[11:36]

RM: Over here, where you got the records now—how was that sealed off to make for living quarters, here?

FK: Uh, I don't remember too much about it, but back then it was curtained off, and I suppose it was there.

RM: Yeah. So half of this was—

FK: This half of the store used to be dry goods, completely...shoes, and dress material, and everything like that. There were not many canned goods back then. It was just salmon and sardines, pork and beans, and a few things like that in cans, and then the rest of it was beans and potatoes and things like that.

RM: Back here in the living quarters—how was it laid out, do you remember?

FK: This one half was for the kitchen and cooking, and this other half was the bedroom. This was first beginning.

RM: And what about the area back here, where you got your records?

FK: Oh, they later built on living quarters on the back, which was about three or four rooms.

RM: Do you remember when they built it on?

FK: In the mid-30s, I guess.

RM: Do you know about any of the events that might set different areas off?

FK: I couldn't say, really.

RM: Who are the most common people that hang around here in the wintertime?

FK: Just mostly the farmers in the community, like Mr. Buchanan there, and Mr. Baker, and Mr. White...Bob Hughes...

RM: Could you identify them by their first and last names?

FK: Max Sears, Bob Hughes, Morris Buchanan, Eldon White, Curtis Slidefoot, Hillary Graves, Jim-Bob Reynolds. Oh, and Lucian Holden.

RM: When did the "liars' bench" come into being?

FK: Not too many years ago. This lady came in to get her mail, and saw three on the bench and she said, "Look, they're swapping lies on the liars' bench!" And ever since then, they've called it that! [Laughter]

RM: Do you know about when that was? How many years ago?

FK: Oh, three or four years ago.

RM: And how has the stock changed over the years since you've had the store?

FK: Well, like I said before, it used to be a lot of things that you weighed up, like beans, loose crackers—you used to get barrels of crackers and they would be loose in a box, and everything like that. More or less...now, now as many dry goods as we used to carry.

RM: Did you used to have a pretty good hardware section?

FK: Some, yes...more than now, yes. You'd sell axes and plow points and nails, and some things for horses like the bridles, and collars.

RM: What type of records do you keep in the store?

FK: I just mostly keep the old, hard-to-get albums that—

RM: Oh, I don't mean the vinyl, I just mean the good you sell, and stuff like that.

FK: Oh, I see now what you mean. I just keep it on my add machine tape each day, and then on my sales tax records, see. You have to keep the add machine tapes what you keep your records.

RM: So that's the only type—you don't keep account of what you carry or anything like that?

FK: Oh, no...no records of it.

RM: How is your credit system set up?

FK: Well, it's supposed to be set up for every fifteen days...of course, you know how that works sometimes!

RM: Are there very many people who charge with you? And they come in and pay you when they need to?

FK: Yes, most of them do, but there are some, of course, that don't.

RM: Well that's the case with everything. And...how would you describe the living you make with the store?

FK: Well, once it was good, but now, you know, with inflation, it eats your profit up on most things. Now, when you sell it and buy it back, sometimes you pay more than what you sold it for.

RM: With the post office, and store combined, would you say you make a pretty good living?

FK: Yes, that would be fair, I'd say.

[16:20]

RM: And how would you describe your trade, at the present time? How many customers do you have and all that?

FK: Oh, I have no idea. Do you mean in a day?

RM: Well, I mean just over the year? Just good, or fair, or—

FK: Oh, I'd say just good, for this type of store.

RM: When do you take your postal vacation?

FK: I can take it any time that I want to.

RM: And how long does it usually run?

FK: Well, see, I've been in twenty-five years now, so I get about twenty-four days, where I used to get only ten or fifteen. You know it varies, [depending] on how many years you've been in.

RM: So, in other words, the longer you're in, the more days you get free. Do you get sick leave days, too?

FK: Yes, I do.

RM: How did you get interested in country music? In your youth, or—

FK: I'd say, as a youth back in grade school, I guess.

RM: And when did you start your record collection?

FK: In the mid [19]30s.

RM: When did you start the Carter Family Fan Club?

FK: About 1950.

RM: Do you have any idea of how many people in the neighborhood buy your albums? Maybe 5 or 6, or something like that?

FK: Well, there's quite a few from the neighborhood, but most of them, you know, come from other places.

RM: Like college students?

FK: College students, and other places where they know that I sell this type of record.

RM: Does the Glasgow radio station help your record sales a lot?

[18:06]

FK: Yes, they do. They have an old-time music show, and they plug them for me on that, and I've furnished them, some.

RM: When is that on?

FK: 5-7 am, each morning.

RM: How many people [have] come here to buy or trade albums from out of state?

FK: Oh, I'd say fifteen, or more.

RM: Which state—which one is the farthest off that you've gotten orders from?

FK: Well, Canada, out of the United States—I've sent records there. Minnesota, and places like that.

RM: And, you don't know how many people come from Bowling Green, do you?

FK: No, I'd say average...ten a week, or something?

RM: And, how was Miss Duncan, to work for?

FK: They were just fine, yes.

[END RECORDING at 19:07]