Jane Beck: He told me that you had told him about driving turkeys all the way to Boston.

Earle Fuller: Oh yes.

Upbeat cello theme plays.

Mary Wesley: Hello, Welcome to VT Untapped, a podcast from the Vermont Folklife Center that explores the state through the voices of its own residents. I’m Mary Wesley.

Upbeat cello plays under narration.

You’re listening to the VT Untapped 2020 Thanksgiving Special! We’re diving into the VFC archive again to unearth some more audio treasures that haven’t really seen the light of day in a while. In fact, to bring you this episode, archivist Andy Kolovos had to mask up and head to our building in Middlebury to digitize the original tape, recorded by VFC Founder Jane Beck in the early 1980s.

Jane began her fieldwork in Vermont in the late 70s, recording interviews with Vermonters that laid the foundation of her first Folklife Center projects and were the seeds of our archival collection. One of the earliest people she connected with was Earle Fuller.

Cello music ends.

Earle was born in Warren, Vermont in 1888. His grandfather had first squatted on Fuller Hill in the 1840s giving his name to the surrounding land. The Fullers were a farm family, specializing in horses. Earle’s father raised and trained them, and buyers came from Boston and New York looking for well-trained, matched pairs ready for city life. Earle was a marvelous storyteller with detailed descriptions and colorful analogies. Jane saw his reminiscences as a way to illuminate the early horse culture of the Mad River Valley. She saw him often over a three-year period, from 1979 to 1983. Ultimately, she made over 45 recordings with him. Earle Fuller died at age 95 in January, 1984.

As a pandemic project, Jane’s gone back into this tome of interviews, revisiting Earle’s life and stories and looking for new connections. When I came asking about material
related to Thanksgiving in the archive, it turned out that Earle has a good one! So good in fact, he told it more than once.

_Cello theme plays, continuing under narration._

In the early 1800s, in the fall, it was common for Vermont farmers to drive (meaning _walk_) their livestock to market in Boston. One of the most unusual sights was the turkey drive. Imagine thousands of turkeys being cajoled en masse along roadways, through towns, over bridges, all the way to Boston. People say herding cats is hard...but turkeys!? In a time before large trucks, industrial refrigeration, and the interstate system, it turns out that marching giant flocks of poultry through the countryside really was the simplest way to get it done.

In all honesty, we don’t know if Earle Fuller _actually_ participated in a such a venture—the turn of the 20th century, which is when it would have taken place—was in our understanding a bit late for such an undertaking. But even if he didn’t actually participate in a turkey drive himself, he certainly grew up hearing stories from those who had, and the way he tells it brings you right into the experience.

_Upbeat cello plays._

I’m going to play for you two different clips of Earle’s turkey story. The first was recorded on November 29, 1979, the second a few years later on February, 10, 1981. A heads up: Earle has a _great_, old-time Vermont accent. It’s wonderful—it reminds me of my great aunts who grew up in Bethel— but folks unfamiliar might find it a little hard to follow at times. To be sure you don’t miss anything, you might want to put down whatever it is you’re doing right now and give Earle your full attention for the next ten or so minutes. Trust me, it’s worth it. When I listen to Earle, I like to to notice the little details that show up in both versions—as well as the differences between the story as shared in 1979 and 1981—if you’re inclined, give it a try. And if you do find yourself challenged by Earle’s accent, don’t worry! We’ve included a transcript of both stories in our show notes at [www.vtfolklife.org/untapped](http://www.vtfolklife.org/untapped).

Ready? Let’s go herd some turkeys.

**STORY #1:**

**Jane Beck:** He told me that you had told him about driving turkeys all the way to Boston.

**Earle Fuller:** Oh yes. Who was that?
Jane Beck: Bill Perry over at Hubbard's store.

Earle Fuller: Oh yeah. It was a year ago, Mike Tierney, Thaddeus Tierney, he was a road commissioner down in Bristol, and he died but he was the boy that, he was twelve and he rode with his father in the front rig, pair of horses on it. They put a pair of horses on to the surrey. And he took 1,500 of corn and 500 of oats and he sat on the back side with a basket of corn side of him and he'd throw it into the road. And then they'd come along and after they got to driving good, they was driving all right, then he'd throw out some more. And gracious, he went to work and we had two dogs, drivers. First ten miles was pretty tough. Damn turkeys would take out into the field and the dogs would go out and put them back into the road. A narrow road, just like these old fashioned, why, for miles and miles it was just like going up through Granville woods only there was sand in some places five or six inches deep, roll along.

Well, when it got to be about four o'clock. Old gobbler, he begun to gobble. And in half an hour, we was in kind of, well, a few maple trees, few apple trees, all both sides of the road. Them trees was filled with them birds. 512.

Jane Beck: 512!

Earle Fuller: Yup, well he says, "That's all right, so they'll stay there tonight." So we hitched the horses, them days they didn't mow the roadside any more than anything so we let the horses loose on the rope, let them eat grass. After they got filled up with grass we give them grain and hitched them. Set that tent and put a blanket in and we'd crawl in there.

Well, the next morning about four o'clock, just gonna get peep of day, by gosh, they begin to fly down out of the tree. And that feller ahead with the corn, his boy begun to scatter corn on the road trying to attract attention and he hitched his team up. He started along. We hitched our's up and we followed along.

Jane Beck: Were you just a boy then?

Earle Fuller: What's that?

Jane Beck: Were you just a boy?

Earle Fuller: Eleven years old. When I was eleven years old he wanted, this Mr. Robinson, he was a drover. And he was looking for someone and Pa said “I've got a boy that'll go.” I got 75 cents a day and what I had to eat. You didn't ride much. Once in a great while I'd step on to the side of the surrey, on the running board, and ride a little piece when they'd be going good. And the boy up front you know, he set on the hind end of the wagon and if they let up a little he'd throw out a few corn.
Jane Beck: There were what, three of you?

Earle Fuller: Huh?

Jane Beck: Three of you?

Earle Fuller: In front of us. That led the crowd you know that's what, the corn is what called the turkeys to keep following. So, if they let up why he'd throw out a little corn and they'd hustle up and hurry them up a little. When night come they took to trees again.

Jane Beck: And how many days?

Earle Fuller: Five.

Jane Beck: Five days.

Earle Fuller: Yup, well we had four nights and the last day we got in on it says Boston, City, turn left, go down the right channel to the, to the market. And so we took the left turn. And back there they had wire fences, about a mile and a half had wire fences up sides of the roads. And we went down and they had great big yards and we ________ and they see us coming and open the gate and the turkeys all went into that one pen. Well we shut them in that night and we went in to the, well, into a slaughter house, one side of it they had bunk beds. We got our own meal ourselves. Even Mr. Robinson, he made us some hot coffee. But we was tired enough so we slept.

Jane Beck: Well I bet!

Earle Fuller: Yeah we slept good. Next morning they got up and Mr. Robinson says, "We've got to weigh up the turkeys." And the way they done it, on one side of this yard they had a lane and they'd go up a ramp, just like these scales, you know, they had an outside flap on 'em. We'd drive...a gate at each end of them. The scales had that flap. We'd drive them up this ramp and when the ramp got full, shut the gate down and weigh that bunch. Take them down and let them go down at the other yard. Shut the gate down and drive up some more. That's the way they weighed them.

Well we got back. We was four days coming back. We jogged a little in places, not too much, because long trip you know and the way damn roads were sandy, lots of places would be miles and miles when you was walking and the sand would be half way up on your shoes. And there are no cars. Gosh you know. you see a car and didn't know what they was, never heard of them. And gosh, the thing of it was, when the team was coming they'd drive right out into the field and let the turkeys go by. And there was one old lady and she says, "I wish I could get a picture of those." Robinson hollered to the fellow ahead, "Throw out a little corn, halt them a little." She got her whole thing set up
on the sticks you know, one of them cameras you put a rag over your head, and by gory she bit the bulbs and said she’d got it.

**Jane Beck:** Did you ever see it?

**Earle Fuller:** No. But it was a handsome sight.

**Jane Beck:** I bet!

**Earle Fuller:** You know, them turkeys' heads was red and then they've got that white beading, speckled like, and the old gobblers _______ and they were black you know. And you see all that up the road and it looked just like a rose bush. All those red heads you know, it was a handsome sight.

*Cello tune.*

**Mary:** I don’t know about you, but I will never look at a rose bush in the same way again. Ok, here’s Earle telling the same story to Jane a few years later, in 1981. Keep your ears peeled for some great onomatopoeias in this one.

**STORY #2**

**Earle Fuller:** He says “Tierney’s going to go with a load of corn and his boy; and he says Norm’s going to have two horses, he’s going to take the dried beef and bread and stuff. Come along behind they have the two dogs go with you. And he says, “You follow along, they’re going to drive 525 turkeys to Boston.” And I says "what do I get?" Well he says "You get a dollar a day, and your board." Well, I got ready and I went down. And we got them, Tierney got out in the road with a little corn and he began to shake it along the road and the old gobblers, they begun to go along and they’d follow. And they’d go out a piece and get out of corn then they’d thrown down some more and they got ‘em driving pretty good. We went about 50 miles the first day and I was tired, too. The dogs would go along on the side of the road and that kept the turkeys in, they was regular drivers, them dogs was. And by gosh, about 4 o'clock we come into a place, well, it was just about like going up through Granville Woods. Long trip, five, six miles there warn't a damned house. Sand road, just buggy wagon. About 4 o'clock the sun begun to go down and we come into some maples. And up went one turkey and by god, Norm says "Ho ho," he says "no more." Got right out and took our tent out and hitched our horses out side of the road and give them some hay and grain and set up our tent. By the time we got ready to eat, the turkeys was all up in the trees. Couldn't see a turkey in sight, but you look up in them old maples was a black sight. They was quiet, quieted up as could be.
Well, the next morning, just begun to peep of day, I heard a kachoog, down beside of the tent. I said what's that? He said "We've got to get up," he says "the turkeys are getting up." By god, time we got up the turkeys was all down the middle of the road, yopping. Tierney strung 50 pound of corn up and down the road. Picked up our stuff and got loaded. Norm made a few sandwiches, we ate them and took our jug of milk and we started down the road.

Well when we got down to within, it said on a sign here this way city, this way slaughterhouse. He says "Take that road to the slaughterhouse." We drove down in there and them turkeys went right into a pen they had. They put them in there and looked them up and Norm give them his bill, what they cost him. What they was paying, I never knew what the profit was, but he paid him, and we come away.

But I'm going to tell you right now, nobody ever saw a bed of roses any prettier than they was in the morning when the sun shone. On their backs, they were dark colored and red heads. And all sitting up there. And you take 525 of them, them red heads sticking up, you never saw a bed of roses any prettier than them were. Down the road.

_Cello tune._

**Mary Wesley:** And that's Earle's story, twice told, of driving turkeys to Boston.

_Cello theme plays and continues under narration._

Again, if you'd like to see a transcript or learn more about turkey-driving, visit our show notes at [www.vtfolklife.org/untapped](http://www.vtfolklife.org/untapped). You can also follow us @vermontfolklife on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter.

I want to say a big thank you to Jane Beck for helping us unearth Earle's recording and helping us with research for this episode.

Whatever's on your Thanksgiving table this year, (and however it got there!) I hope you've enjoyed these audio treasures from the VFC archive. From all of us at the Folklife Center we are wishing you a safe and happy holiday.

_VT Untapped_ is produced by me, Mary Wesley. Our executive producer, who also happens to be the VFC archivist, is Andy Kolovos. The cello music in this show was recorded by Dave Haughey. Thanks for listening.

_Cello music fades out._