

# Watson's Corner

By Susan Fletcher Witzell

Watson's Corner is one of the busiest intersections in Falmouth. It is the three-way junction of North Main Street, Locust Street, and West Main Street. One road leads north as North Main Street-Palmer Avenue, one leads east to the Falmouth Village Green, and the third road, Locust Street, leads south to Woods Hole. Who were the Watsons? And why is this corner named "Watson's Corner"?



Watson's Corner. Photo by Susan Fletcher Witzell.

On the northeast corner of the intersection is a large Victorian house painted rusty red and trimmed with buff. The house displays the varied textures of clapboard, fancy shingles, false half-timbering, and a rear

salt-box roof line associated with the Queen Anne style of the late 19th century. At a late date for this style, it was built in 1896 by Dr. James Maurice Watson; it is his family name that is attached to the corner intersection.

Dr. Watson was one of three prominent doctors in Falmouth from the 1880s to the 1930s. The other two were Dr. Lombard C. Jones, a veterinarian, and Dr. Alexander T. Walker.

All three contributed to the professional and civic life of Falmouth. James Maurice Watson, born in East Sangerville, Maine on January 16, 1860, was a graduate of Foxcroft Academy (Foxcroft, Maine) and of Maine Central Institute (Pittsfield, Maine) in 1883.

Dr. Watson first came to Falmouth in January 1884 to begin the study of medicine with Dr. Walker. At the same time he taught school in West Falmouth. He was paid \$120 for

teaching nine and three-fifths weeks in the winter term of 1884 and \$150 for teaching twelve weeks in the spring of 1884. By 1888 he had earned medical degrees from the University of the City of New York and from the New York Homeopathic Medical College.



Like other local doctors, Dr. Watson had a pharmacy as well as a medical practice. A photo of the store at the corner of what is now Water Street and Luscombe Avenue in Woods Hole shows the old flat-roofed Nickerson store repurposed as a pharmacy. This was the first pharmacy in Woods Hole, beginning a long tradition of pharmacies in that location. Photo ca. 1880s, courtesy Woods Hole Historical Museum.

The Falmouth Town Report for 1891 listed the marriage of James Maurice Watson and Kate Franklin Jones, both of Falmouth, on October 14th. They were married at St. Barnabas Episcopal Church by the Reverend H.H. Smythe. The groom was 31 and the bride was 28. Eventually they would have three children: Maurice Franklin Watson, Camilla Watson, and Katherine Watson. Kate was the daughter of Captain Benjamin Franklin Jones, a Civil War hero, and the granddaughter of Silas Jones, the captain of two of the Swift whaling ships. She was the sister of George Washington Jones, a longtime postmaster of Falmouth. They were raised in the house at 16 Main Street, where in earlier years Katharine Lee Bates lived.

*The Falmouth Enterprise*, from its earliest years, had a weekly column reporting the social ac-

tivities of residents, highlights of their children's births, parties, weddings, visits to their relatives, and major events in their lives. In the 1890s, this was called "Falmouth Locals." In February 1896 there was a Grand Leap Year Ball given by the ladies of Falmouth. "Falmouth Locals" reported that "promptly at 8:30 the merry company headed by Dr. and Mrs. J.M. Watson formed into a grand march around the hall...the dancing continued until 1 o'clock when all departed to their homes, well pleased with the Leap Year Ball of 1896."

In the May 23, 1896, issue of *The Falmouth Enterprise*, it was reported that the sills and joists of Dr. Watson's new house were laid. By July 11, the house was nearing completion, but notices of other work on the house were still being printed till the end of 1896. During the construction

of the house, the Watsons lived at the former Oliver Swift house near the First Congregational Church on the north side of the Village Green (currently number 54 Main, functioning as the rectory of the Congregational Church).

The Watson house at the corner also had a large barn and stable behind it on North Main Street. Later he expanded his large house and its parlor to the east by adding an extension and enclosing part of the "piazza" (as porches were called at the time). In August 1896, "Falmouth Locals" reported that Dr. Watson's horse, standing in front of the home and attached to the doctor's buggy, panicked and ran "at a lively pace" toward the railroad station. The buggy collided with a post and was demolished. The article does not say if the horse was injured. In 1911, Dr. Watson purchased a Model 14 Buick motorcar. No more buggies and panicking horses to deal with!



In 1896 Dr. James M. Watson built his 3-story house, fronted by a large "piazza" overlooking Watson's Corner. An imposing barn and stable can be seen behind the house. Courtesy Donald W. Fish.

During the 1890s and early 1900s, Dr. Watson was mentioned frequently in the "Falmouth Locals" column. He was one of the founders in 1896 of the Gentleman's Driving Club for trotting horse races. Although it was later called Trotting Park in Teaticket, the club lasted only a half dozen years. At this time Dr. Watson was a warden of St. Barnabas Episcopal Church and served on its music committee. He had been one of the original founders of the church.

From 1906 Dr. Watson was the Falmouth school physician. The Commonwealth of Massachusetts had just enacted a law requiring children to be properly vaccinated. The October 6, 1906, *The Enterprise* stated: "don't be alarmed if he comes to your house prepared to vaccinate your children. As it is required by law." In May 1908 he was named Forest Warden for the Town of Falmouth and was chosen as the Board of Health physician in 1910. Among his other Town positions, he was also an Overseer of the Poor.

In the reticent manner of the period, "Falmouth Locals" on June 6, 1914, reported that Dr. J.M. Watson was "confined to his house by illness." In reality he had had a stroke. Dr. Watson died a day later on June 7 at the age of 54. He was much beloved in Falmouth and there was great shock at the news of his death. This beautiful obituary was written by the Reverend H.H. Smythe, the rector of St. Barnabas:

"On Sunday last the news of his sudden death spread rapidly through the Community as its members were gathering in the churches. The consciousness of its loss was instant and un-

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<b>J. M. WATSON, M. D.</b> Physician and Surgeon. Woods Holl Mass.		<b>Stationery.</b> <i>Having enlarged my stock of</i> <b>STATIONERY</b> <i>I am now prepared to furnish my customers with all the latest and most fashionable styles, at the lowest cash prices.</i> <b>Lewis F. Clarke.</b>			
<b>MRS. N. E. MAYHEW,</b> <b>Dressmaker &amp;</b> <b>Milliner.</b> FALMOUTH, MASS. Please call and examine our 55 & 50 cent Counter of straw Hats & Bonnets for one week only.		<b>Auction!</b> Will be sold at public auction on Saturday June 24th, the lumber used in the construction of the seats and tables at the 24-Convention, on the grounds where the tent was located. Per Order of the Committee. Falmouth June 17th. 1886.			

These advertisements appeared in *The Enterprise* in 1886. Note that the location of Dr. Watson's medical practice is located in "Woods Holl." Courtesy Falmouth Museums on the Green.

mistakable. Probably no one in the entire community had touched, so closely and so personally, so large a number of people for so long a period of time as has Dr. Watson.

"Dr. Watson was a true physician. He possessed warm sympathies and was quick to respond to the call of suffering. Wherever he went, he went with an open heart and open hand. He gave himself, his sympathy, his skill, his judgment ungrudgingly to all. Perhaps one of the finest things one can say of him is he will be missed by the poor. His home was always an open house, with a generous welcome to young and old. This was the natural expression of the happy life within. There are few happier homes than was his. He was a kind husband and father, a loyal friend, a beloved physician, a Christian gentleman, a true lover of men."

In November 1914, five months after Dr. Watson's death, the Probate Court in Barnstable appointed Kate Watson guardian of her minor children Maurice, Camilla, and Katherine. Like her husband, Kate was devoted to her family and was an active contributor to the Falmouth community. She was one of the early members of the Falmouth Historical Society, becoming its curator in 1904. It was noted that her long association with the town and its families aided her

skill in collecting information and preserving important records and artifacts. She obviously acted as archivist as well as curator for the Society since they observed that "the collecting, arranging and recording of gifts and their history required no small outlay of time and effort." As a founding director of the Falmouth Nursing Association in 1916, she originated the very popular annual nursing fete on the Village Green, and was a member of the Falmouth School Committee during the 1920s.

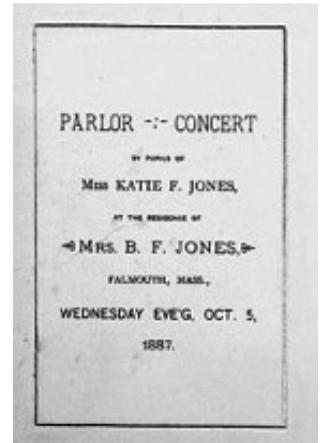
At the same time she continued to devote herself to music, always a focus of her life. She had studied piano and organ at the New En-



Kate Watson saved this theater souvenir after seeing Edwin Booth in 1885. He played the title character in "Don Caesar De Bazan," adapted from a French romantic drama. Courtesy Falmouth Museums on the Green.

gland Conservatory of Music as a pupil of Carl Zeerhan, a noted organist. Kate was an accomplished musician and before her marriage had a number of piano students. Her mother's home during the 1880s was the site of recitals: guests were invited to the home of Mrs. B.F. Jones to hear the performances of the students of her daughter Kate Jones. In 1888 she attended the Southeastern Massachusetts Music Festival in Taunton where "The Messiah" was performed as well as musical programs of violin, piano, and voice. She went to the First Cape Cod Music Festival in 1889 where "Emmanuel" was presented.

Kate was the first organist of the new St. Barnabas Church,



This is a program of a parlor concert presented by Kate Watson's students in 1897 that she saved in her scrapbook. Courtesy Falmouth Museums on the Green.

### Kate Watson's Grandfather

One of the first entries in Kate Watson's scrapbook was a newspaper account of a dramatic incident involving her grandfather Silas Jones. In October 1835, Silas Jones survived an attack of Pacific islanders from Nemarik, an atoll in the Marshall Islands halfway between Hawaii and the Philippines, on the whaler *Awashboks*. Silas Jones was only 20 years old, serving as the ship's third mate and most junior officer. The attack killed the captain of the *Awashboks*, Prince Coffin, and all the mates except Jones, who then became her captain and took the ship back to Hawaii, an arduous 50-day passage. Later in life he would be known as the captain of the Swifts' vessel *Commodore Morris*.

which opened in 1890, and later occasionally substituted for the regular organist. Kate's scrapbook contains newspaper clippings, invitations, images and photo cards of actors, musicians and composers, and many musical programs of opera, musicals, plays, and orchestral performances dating from 1882 to the 1920s. The earliest programs are from Omaha, Nebraska, featuring the Boston Ideal Opera Company; New York's "new" Metropolitan Opera House where she saw Lillian Russell in *La Cigale*; Madison Square Garden; the Academy of Music and Broadway theaters where she saw operas, operettas, and several performances by a Hungarian Gypsy Orchestra.

Kate Watson died on August 15, 1930. Her home, the barn, and the stable have become rental apartments. Although the house has been handsomely painted in fairly authentic Victorian colors, from older photos it is clear that the current colors are not the original ones. In any case, the exterior of the Watson house is in a

remarkable state of preservation and of a style seen in only a few other houses in Falmouth.

It is fitting that Dr. James Watson and his wife, Kate, a couple so devoted to the well-being of Falmouth, should still be remembered by the name Watson's Corner.

**About the Author:** Susan Fletcher Witzell was born in New York City, grew up in Summit, New Jersey, and moved to Woods Hole in 1972. Her background is in art, architectural history and photography, as well as book editing and design. Since 1992 she has been involved with the Woods Hole Historical Museum, where she is currently the Archivist.

Sources: *Falmouth Enterprise* digital database, Falmouth Public Library; Falmouth Historical Society, Watson Collection; *Sprintsail*, Volume 4, Number 1 ("Falmouth's Village Green"); *Sprintsail*, Volume 12, Number 1 ("Swift Family Whaling"); *The Book of Falmouth*.

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Watson house side view showing Queen Anne style asymmetrical window placement, varied textures of clapboards, shingles, and half-timbering. Photo by Susan Fletcher Witzell.