Mary Dodd Craig Showed Falmouth Women The Way

Edgar Henry Craig and Mollie Craig Rice

In its November 20, 1959, issue, the Falmouth Enterprise ran an editorial under the headline “Mrs. Craig Showed Falmouth Women the Way.” The editorial, which appeared a week after her death, paid considerable tribute and recognition to Mary Dodd Craig for her courage in challenging for election to the School Committee, the previously male-dominated arena in Falmouth. The editorial went on to say: “In her day the masculine traditions of the sea captains must still have been strong. After them came those dominating males, our first summer property owners.”

The interesting comments of the Enterprise editorial continued: “Only ten Falmouth women voted in 1913—the year before Mrs. Craig ran for election to the School Committee. Eighty-nine came boldly out to vote for her in 1914.” (In 1920, the 19th Amendment to the federal Constitution established universal suffrage in the United States.) In the 1914 election, 366 votes in her favor were enough to give Mrs. Craig a 108-vote victory, helped by a majority of the 89 women’s votes cast, according to the Enterprise. Thus Mary Dodd Craig became the first woman elected to public office in the town of Falmouth, thereby earning for herself a niche in the history of the town.

Mrs. Craig based her campaign on two issues: there should be a parent of school-age children on the school board and at least one member should have an education equal to that of the teachers. Hers was a Wellesley College degree.

After her narrow victory in the 1914 campaign, she was overwhelmingly placed at the top of the balloting when she ran again three years later, “a striking expression of public confidence,” as noted in the Enterprise obituary.

Her 1914 campaign caused “considerable agitation,” according to the Enterprise, which “hewed to the masculine line” in stating its opposition to her first election. However, Mrs. Craig apparently won over the paper’s editorial staff during her second term as it later observed: “It is to be regretted that Mrs. Mary D. Craig who has served the town for a number of years on the school board, is not eligible for re-election on account of her position on the faculty of Lawrence High School” (now Falmouth High School). She taught English there.

Referring to the Enterprise editorial of Nov. 20, 1959, the thrust of much that followed was that with her overwhelming second election, “Mrs. Craig won an endorsement in office which all women must have felt reflected credit on them too.”

The editorial went on to point out that Falmouth women over the years have played a very important role in the management of town affairs. As a pioneer leader in Falmouth women’s political and social concerns, Mary Dodd Craig did indeed “Show Falmouth Women the Way.”

It was only after Mary Dodd Craig’s children, Alan, Mollie and Edgar, reached adulthood, and specifically at the time of their mother’s death when the story of her contributions to women’s political rights appeared in the Enterprise, that they came to fully realize and appreciate what a remarkable history belonged to their mother.
Mary Dodd Craig—always called May by her friends—was born of missionary parents in Hangchow, China, on Oct. 9, 1874. She was the fifth-born and the only girl in a family of eight. Being born in a strange and foreign land, the children learned to play together for they probably had no one else with whom to play and associate. So they formed a close bond as a family unit that continued throughout their lives.

Samuel Dodd, Mary Dodd’s missionary father, returned to the United States with his family in 1878, when he accepted a pulpit in Huntington, Long Island, N.Y. May was only a little girl of three or four when she started her life in America. In 1883 or ‘84 Samuel moved the family from Long Island to Stephenstown, N.Y., where he took another pulpit. It was here that the children really spent their “growing-up” years, together in that beautiful rural area. It is interesting to note that from their rather humble background emerged a group of strong individuals—May and her brothers—whose accomplishments and

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**Falmouth Women Elected to Town Offices**

*Frederick T. Turkington*

According to the 1911 Falmouth town report, 13 women, of 605 total voters, cast votes for the school committee. The number of women voters was the same in 1912; it dropped to 10 in 1913. In 1914, the year Mary Dodd Craig was elected to a school committee seat, the number of women voting, for school committee only, jumped to 89, and 549 men cast ballots for 31 offices.¹

It all began with an announcement in The Enterprise of Jan. 17, 1914:

"Feeling it is for the best interests of the children of our public schools to be represented by women as well as men, on the school committee, the W.C.T.U., at its last meeting, nominated Mrs. Mary Dodd Craig and Mrs. Laura Cadmus Moore as their candidates for this office. The members of the Outlook Club at its meeting last Monday heartily endorsed this nomination. These two ladies bring to us excellent qualifications for their candidacy and accept the

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Wellesley College class of '98 basketball team. Mary Dodd Craig standing upper right. Courtesy Edgar Craig.
nomination of these two organizations of which both are members. The women are the closest friends of the schools and it is only natural and just that they should be represented in this position in our town.”

Two weeks later The Enterprise carried a long letter from Mary D. Craig, arguing that the school committee should include “one or two at least who are trained for educational work and who are fitted by nature to deal with teaching problems.” She urged “the mothers and all women to come forward and register, if they have not done so, and to vote with all good citizens for the candidates who will best represent them in standing for the welfare of the children, for good schools and a high standard, morally as well as intellectually.”

The editor of The Enterprise, Charles S. Burgess, who was a member and secretary of the school committee, responded:

“We are inclined to think that the present school agitation, and the political campaigning to change the personnel of the school committee, is more in the nature of a personal spite against some member of the committee, than for the good of the schools. While Mrs. Craig has a college education and has had some experience as a teacher, we are not satisfied to trust her with the many and varied duties of the school board.”

That brought quick response from Elizabeth H. Kelley, who had signed the original nomination letter:

“This year the women were fortunate enough to find a candidate with the desired qualifications, the right policy, the willingness to serve and the desire and determination to make good, if elected. The only spirit of spite which has shown itself in this campaign, can be read between the lines of an editorial in last week’s Enterprise.”

In the Feb. 14 Enterprise, the other members of the school board showed where they stood, with an advertisement recommending the election of John P. Sylvia Jr. and T. Lawrence Swift, “for the best interests of the school system.” Signers were Fred R. Swift, chairman, Hiram F. Hall, Charles S. Burgess and Godwin M. Brown.

The next week’s Enterprise (Feb. 21) commented on the extraordinarily large turnout for the town election, which had been aided by a special train carrying voters from Woods Hole at noon.

Falmouth had for the first time voted yes on the liquor question, 280-229, and also for the first time had elected a woman to town office.

The school committee’s monthly meetings were held in the superintendent’s office, Room 4 of the old town hall. In the committee’s charge were 11 school buildings, at Waquoit, Fresh Pond, East Falmouth, Dauitsville, Woods Hole, Quissett, Teaticket, West Falmouth, North Falmouth, the Village Grammar School where Town Hall Square is now, and Lawrence High School, where the main library’s parking lot is now. There were 715 pupils enrolled.

On Sept. 3, 1915, the minutes record that “Mrs. Craig gave notice to the Board that as she had accepted a position in Conn., she would not be able to meet the members again this year.”

For the next nine months the minutes listed Mrs. Craig as absent. Not until June 29, 1916, did the secretary list “all members present.” At the same meeting she was delegated to oversee repairs to the Teaticket school, a task divided among all the members for the various school buildings.

In 1917, Mrs. Craig came up for re-election. That was the year that Falmouth became a two-precinct town, with polls at the Woods Hole fire station and at town hall on Main Street in Falmouth Village, open from 7 A.M. to sunset.

That year there were 723 voters, including 99 women voting for school committee only. She led the voting with 501. James Nicol, with 436, was also elected, and T. Lawrence Swift trailed with 348.

In the 1918-1919 school year, Mrs. Craig was appointed a teacher of English at Lawrence High school, a position from which she resigned in the 1919-1920 school year.
She did not run for a school board seat in 1920, but the voters of Falmouth sent Kate Jones Watson to maintain the feminine presence on the school committee, her 438 votes topping the polls. In 1921, Mrs. Jones was joined by Dora Dickson Dwight, whose 736 votes were barely behind the 784 of Dr. Asa L. Pattee. Mrs. Dwight's campaign for office was long remembered. Between silent films at the Elizabeth Theatre, advertising slides urged "Vote Right - Vote Dwight." She resigned from the school board two years later.

To fill the unexpired term, the voters in 1923 chose Virtue Bowerman Gifford, with 396 votes to 319 and 310 for her two male competitors. A former teacher at Quissett and at the East Falmouth and North Falmouth schools, at $10 and $11 a week, she was easily re-elected, and remained on the school board for a decade.

It almost became the custom in Falmouth, as shown by the election results in the annual town reports, to have at least one woman on the school committee. Frances M. Nickerson was elected in 1921, Harriet L. Veeder in 1932, Mabel J. Fox in 1934. Then there was a gap, from 1937 until Abigail J. Powers was elected in 1944, appointed in 1947 to fill a vacancy, and ran in 1949 for another three-year term. Ruth H. Farrell was elected in 1947, Frances H. MacDougall in 1950. Eugenia Swift Lawrence was appointed to fill a vacancy in 1951. In that year Ethel B. Howard and Mary Sears were elected to the board, Dr. Sears starting a long term as school committee member and chairman.

When the finance committee was re-established as a 15-member board in 1921, Ellen M. Jones, Helen F. Swift and Lettie L. Hall were named by town meeting among the original members. Next year there were five women members. It then became an all-male body for 34 years, until Janet Litzkow Bosworth began her six years as member and file as board secretary. Mrs. Bosworth had been, in 1954, the first woman juror from Falmouth.

Earlier, in 1936, Helen W. Peters was elected a public library trustee, another previously all-male domain, and was re-elected three times, retiring in 1947 to be succeeded by Abigail P. Hopson, who was elected unopposed.

Jessie L. Soares was elected collector of taxes in 1953, after clerking in that office for a dozen years, and held that position until 1972, facing opposition only once. Ruth B. Newcomb, Mrs. Joseph Lawrence and Frances B. Stevens were all elected to the planning board in 1929.

Falmouth's first election of a woman to town-wide individual office came in 1934. Eunice M. Lawrence, who had been assistant to the town clerk and treasurer, ran successfully to succeed William H. Hewins, who retired after 45 years in both positions. With 1203 votes, Mrs. Lawrence easily outdistanced Joseph R. Hall (624) and Paul A. Peters (212). A year later she was re-elected unopposed. She was to continue in office until her own retirement in 1958, having a competitor only once more in those 25 years.

Notes
4. Ibid.
15. Falmouth Annual Town Report 1936, p.203; Enterprise, April 22, 1941.
Mary Dodd's secondary schooling was at Northfield Academy, Northfield, Mass., from which she graduated in 1894. From there she attended Wellesley College and graduated in the Class of 1898. At Wellesley her extra-curricular activities included dramatics and athletics, as a member of the Class of '98 basketball team. Her major was English, in which she took several courses from Falmouth's own Katharine Lee Bates, chairman of the English department. Shortly after her graduation from Wellesley she became engaged to Henry Hamlin Craig, son of Henry Kinsman Craig who served as pastor of the First Congregational Church on Falmouth's Village Green from 1871 to 1888.

Prior to her marriage to Henry Craig, Mary Dodd taught for a year in the English department of Atlanta University, a Negro university in Atlanta, Ga. where the eminent black educator and author, W. E. Burghardt DuBois was professor of history and political economy. The experience must have had a lasting impression on the young woman's attitude towards minority issues and, later, women's rights, which played such an important role in her adult life.

Mary Dodd and Henry Hamlin Craig were married in September, 1900, at the home of the Rev. and Mrs. H. K. Craig in Teaticket. Over the next ten years the young couple tried various ventures, including tomato farming in Florida. By 1910 they had two children and decided to move to Falmouth permanently. From Henry Craig's mother, Mrs. H. K. Craig, they took over the running of the old Craig House Hotel on Crown Circle, Falmouth Heights.

In addition to running the hotel with her husband, it was then that Mary Dodd Craig began her interest in community affairs. Early among them was her role in the founding and development of the Outlook Club, now the Women's Club of Falmouth, in which she served several terms as president. She was also one of the founders of the Falmouth Nursing Association, later named the Visiting Nursing Association.

In addition to these interests, she decided, in 1914, to run for election to the School Committee, with the results previously described. Daughter Mollie remembers as a small child being aware of the intensity of the earlier campaign rhetoric, and feeling apprehensive whenever her mother went out in the evening to school committee meetings, escorted by one or two of the stern-looking male committee members. However, Mollie also remembers that her mother soon began baking a batch of cookies to take
with her on meeting nights, with the results being that the stern looks and remarks that had originally greeted her mother became much more pleasant.

The decade from 1910 to 1920 was a busy and productive period for the Henry Craigs—especially for May. During this time the size of the old Craig House was doubled. In recognition of the expansion, its name was changed to Oak Crest (later Oak Crest Inn) and she bore her third child, Edgar. As noted, she served two terms on the school committee, and was a teacher and head of the English department at old Lawrence High School. It was during the latter part of this period that she also found time to develop her talents in dramatics, both as an actress and a playwright, which started with her experiences at Wellesley.

In 1918 she wrote a play called “The Strafing of Willie,” a morality play dealing with the brutality of World War I, which was performed in several Cape towns to considerable acclaim. She played the part of Willie, a bully, who was intended to represent the German Kaiser, Wilhelm Hohenzollern, not a very popular figure in those days. Proceeds went to the American Fund for the French Wounded and the American Red Cross. Joseph C. Lincoln, author and a summer resident of Chatham, was one of those who recognized and congratulated her for her talent. She also received a citation from the governor in appreciation of her fund-raising activities.

But perhaps the locale where Mary Dodd Craig drew the most applause for her acting and directing talents was in the lobby of the old Oak Crest Inn. Every Saturday night would feature some special attraction, which she either directed or wrote or performed in. These included recitals, one-act amateur plays, and acting games she organized, all interspersed with occasional dances to Studley’s orchestra and appearances by outside entertainers such as “Waters the Great Magician” and “Blind Bill and His Banjo.”

In 1918 one of the worst epidemics of the century, a virulent strain of influenza called the “Spanish Flu,” struck throughout this country and the world. Millions of deaths resulted. Falmouth was not spared: an overwhelming 680 cases reported here.\(^1\)

Edgar was only six years old at the time, and both he and sister Mollie, five years older, were seriously ill, with very high fevers from the dread disease.

One of Edgar’s earliest recollections was his mother’s tireless attention and care throughout the ordeal. Especially vivid in his memory was his mother’s effort...
School Board Minutes

Frederick T. Turkington

The minutes of meetings of Falmouth School Committee in the early years of this century are hand-written in large record books, black with red leather binding, stored in the upper floor of the school administration building in Teaticket.

The writing for many years was that of Charles S. Burgess, who founded and for 30 years was editor of the Falmouth Enterprise. First mention of Mrs. Craig in the minutes came on March 6, 1914:

“The matter of criticism of the conduct of a teacher at the Waquoit school, was referred to Mrs. Craig, for investigation, and if in her judgement it be of sufficient importance, the Superintendent call a special meeting of the board, otherwise that Mrs. Craig report to the next regular meeting of the board.”

There was no further mention at the two April meetings. Electing faculty for the school year 1914-15 at its May 1 meeting, the board named a different teacher, Dorothea Doloff, to the Waquoit school, at a salary of $510.

At the same meeting the board voted that hereafter the Fresh Pond school be designated as “Pine Ridge” school, that electric lights be installed at the West Falmouth school house and that “the sum of $13 be appropriated for use for costumes for the High School play.”

Mrs. Craig and Superintendent Carl Holman were chosen at the July 3 meeting to serve as a committee on resolutions on the death of Dr. J. M. Watson. Dr. Watson had been school physician. Dr. Lombard C. Jones was elected to succeed him.

Bids for transporting students were opened at that meeting, and chosen. For North Falmouth, J. Everett Noyes was given the contract for either (horse-drawn) barge or motor, $35 a week for a barge, $45 a week for motor. Later Mr. Noyes was offered an extra $5 a week for providing motor service exclusively. Time from North Falmouth to the high school was two hours by barge, 20 minutes for motor car. High school students from Woods Hole could travel by train.

Transportation was then provided only to students who lived at least 1 1/2 miles from the school house.

“Voted that the steam heater at Falmouth Grammar school be re-covered with asbestos.” No detail was too small for the school board’s attention. “Voted that ink wells be placed in the desks at West Falmouth.”

At the Oct. 2 meeting the committee “Voted that the truant officers keep a record of their doings, also that they make a monthly report to this board, giving the names of all truants brought to their attention.”

And it was “Voted that the ladies of the Woods Hole summer school be given permission to use the building at their own expense, and that they pay for the electric power used.” This was the start of what became the Children’s School of Science.

At the Nov. 6 meeting, Mr. Burgess was instructed to take up the matter of toll calls from the school house phones with the local manager. It was also voted that “the schools close on Friday, Nov. 13, that the teachers may attend the convention at Hyannis.”

Dec. 11, 1914, the board “Voted, the use of the vacant room in the Woods Hole school house be given to the people of Woods Hole, providing no pool playing or card playing be allowed. Also the people of Waquoit were granted the use of their school building provided that there will be no extra expense to the committee.” It was also voted that the school children be permitted to contribute to the Belgian fund.

The secretary was instructed to write to Dr. Jones regarding his monthly report not being received. At the meeting of Jan. 1, 1915, “Dr. Jones being present, the matter of his report to be printed in the town report was discussed at length. Dr. Jones agreed to rewrite his report.”

At that same meeting, the board agreed to recommend the following appropriations for the coming year: Common schools, $17,009; High
school, income from trust fund and $7,500; Transportation, $4,500; Supt. and special teachers, $5,600; repairs to school buildings, $4,000; Athletics, $200; School physician and special medical aid, $500; Miscellaneous, $1,000; Manual training and domestic science, $1,000.

In February of 1915 the school board voted "the erection of fire escapes at the Village Grammar school be awarded to the Builders Iron and Steel Co. for $698." Next month the board also voted that two extra switches for ringing the fire gong at the Village Grammar school be installed."

In Mrs. Craig's first term, the school committee recommended to the town that a central elementary school be built in the vicinity of East Falmouth. It would replace, the committee hoped, "half a dozen one and two-room schools, all filled with children of all ages, many of whom do not speak our language."

"On account of the large foreign population that have settled in our eastern villages," the committee's report in the 1914 town report continued, "our schools are being overcrowded."

In the town meeting warrant for 1915, the committee asked the town to raise and appropriate $35,000, partly borrowed, to construct a large or general school house in the east part of town, and to sell the present properties.

Using school census figures, the school board projected enrollment of 170 in the then-existing East Falmouth school within six years.

"It will be seen, therefore, that an eight-room building will be required in the near future to accommodate those children, if we are to give them a proper education."

The school construction article was indefinitely postponed by the annual town meeting. Not until 1922 would Falmouth vote to build a new school in East Falmouth, of six classrooms plus gymnasium and assembly room, at the corner of Davisville road and the highway.

The earlier projections of school enrollment in the east end of town had not been far off. The superintendent's report for 1921 lists 157 pupils in the three-room East Falmouth school. There were 91 in four grades in the two-room Teaticket school.

Superintendent Holman complained that they had been forced into a platoon system, with first and second graders having class only in the morning, third and fourth graders only in the afternoon.

"The attempt is being made," he wrote, "to educate 140 pupils in a building that might accommodate 90."

The white frame building erected in 1922 continued in use until the fall of 1958, when East Falmouth students moved into the present school further south on Davisville road. The old structure was demolished, and the land was sold.

Frederick T. Turkington grew up on Long Island, N.Y., graduated from the Syracuse University School of Journalism and came to Falmouth in 1948. Long a town meeting member, he has served on the finance committee and conservation commission. Retired after 35 years with the Enterprise, he is active on The 300 Committee, wrote for The Book of Falmouth, and attends the Quaker meeting in West Falmouth.

to teach him to play solitaire after he started to feel better. The game was called Klondike, supposedly invented by gamblers from the frozen lands of Alaska. Learning and playing it helped pass many hours of boredom during his recuperation.

Mary Dodd Craig was a many-sided and talented woman, and above all she was a devoted and loving mother and grandmother, to her three children and seven grandchildren. It was in recognition and appreciation of this devotion, and also for the educational opportunities she provided for her children and encouraged in others, that members of her family in 1985 established the Mary Dodd Craig Memorial Scholarship Fund with annual contributions from family members and friends. The Mary Dodd Craig Fund is now one of the larger funds of the Scholarship Association of Falmouth.
Mary Dodd Craig in 1932 at the age of 58. Courtesy Edgar Craig.
The Scholarship Fund was established with two objectives in mind. The first was to recognize and pay tribute to Mary Dodd Craig for her contributions to the town of Falmouth, especially in the fields of education and community service. The other purpose was “to serve as a source of recognition, incentive and inspiration to an outstanding woman graduate from Falmouth High School each year, who best demonstrates those qualities that made Mrs. Craig such an outstanding and exceptional human being.”

The above quotation is from an article announcing the scholarship, prepared by John A. DeMello, then president of the Scholarship Association of Falmouth, which appeared in the Enterprise on Sept. 20, 1985. Also highlighted in the article was this requirement: “The candidate should be a person who has shown special interest in community service and affairs, and one who demonstrates consideration and concern for the rights and welfare of her fellow students and society in general.”

Mary Dodd Craig never let her family forget the reason why her father-in-law decided to settle in Falmouth. The Rev. Henry Kinsman Craig always said that he chose in 1871 to move from his pulpit in Bucksport, Maine to Falmouth because he found Falmouth “to be the most beautiful spot in the world.”

Oak Crest Inn from west end, with new addition at right rear. Originally called Goodwin House, later Craig House, and finally Oak Crest Inn after addition was made in 1913. Postcard photo taken after 1929 when Union Chapel was demolished. Courtesy Edgar Craig.
Edgar Henry Craig was born in Falmouth Heights February 27, 1912. He attended all grades in Falmouth schools, graduating from the old Lawrence High in 1930. In 1934 he graduated from Trinity College, Hartford, Conn., and in 1944 he received an MBA from the University of Chicago.

Most of his business career was in marketing, first at Marshall Field’s in Chicago, later at Joseph Horne department stores in Pittsburgh, Pa., and finally at Jeorg Jensen retail store on Fifth Avenue, New York City.

Mr. Craig and his late wife Elizabeth owned property on Surf Drive and were regular summer visitors here for many years. He was an active sailor and a member of the Falmouth Yacht Club, where he was instrumental in promoting cruising class racing. He and his wife Jane make regular summer visits now. They live in La Jolla, California.

Mary Louise Craig was born in Brooklyn, N.Y., attended Falmouth schools and graduated from Barnard College in 1934. She received a B.S. from Simmons School of Social Work, a PhD from Boston University and a Masters of Sacred Theology from New York Theological Seminary. She has been a social worker, a professor of humanities and an ordained Deacon in the Episcopal Church where she advocated Creation Theology, an environmental concern in the sacred care of the Earth.

Now retired and living in Florida and South Carolina, she is still taking courses at the age of 86, "just for the fun of it." For the past ten years she has managed almost every summer to pay a visit to Falmouth, where she still has high school friends. She says, “Seventy-five years ago, when I was a child, the beauty of Falmouth gave me a passionate love of Nature. I still find it the most beautiful spot on earth of the many I have been privileged to know.”

Notes
1. Falmouth Annual Town Report, 1918, p.83. In its report for 1918, the Board of Health gives the incidence of eight infectious diseases. There were nine cases of Diphtheria, three of German Measles, two of Ophthalmia neonatorum, eight of Measles, seven of Mumps, four of Tuberculosis, 37 of Whooping Cough, and 680 cases of Influenza.

The Craig children in Falmouth, ca. 1916. The two authors, Edgar, age 5 or 6 and Mollie, age 10 or 11 in front of Alan, age 15 or 16. Alan taught history for 30 years in the old Lawrence High School and with his wife, Faith, ran the old Oak Crest Inn in Falmouth Heights for many years; they now reside in the J.M.L. Care Center on Ter Heun Drive. Courtesy Edgar Craig.