

From the Archivists

Woods Hole Historical Collection

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Thank you, Arnold Dyer and Col. Oliver B. Brown. . . .

Arnold W. Dyer published a wonderful book in 1992, a reprinting of the 1897 *Residential Falmouth* brought up-to-date. In the original, there was almost no text to accompany the photos of local houses and buildings. Mr. Dyer has added at least a page of information for each of the structures photographed for the original edition, most of which are still in existence. I read it often, since one of my major interests is old houses in Woods Hole and especially Quissett.

When I read the book recently, I discovered a piece of information that enabled me to solve one of the puzzles that has intrigued local writers concerning the Quissett Harbor House. On page 30 is the description of "Col. Abraham H. Ryan's Summer Residence" at 342 Quissett Avenue. Ryan was from New York but at the time of the Civil War he was in Illinois and organized one of the Volunteer Infantry units there. He was a hero at Shiloh and eventually became a Colonel in the Arkansas Cavalry and settled in Little Rock for a period of time. Then it says: "With business associate Col. James M. Lewis in Arkansas, **who was a Falmouth native**, he became an investor in Quissett real estate." The mystery about the Harbor House has concerned the purchase in 1871 of the Jenkins house on the west side of Quissett Harbor by a **Mrs. Jane W. Lewis of Little Rock, Arkansas**. Writers have long wondered **who** was Mrs. Lewis and **why** would someone from Little Rock, Arkansas buy the Jenkins

house. Mr. Dyer's edition of *Residential Falmouth* has provided the key to answering this mystery.

When I read that Col. James M. Lewis was a native of Falmouth, I immediately went to another favorite local reference book: Oliver B. Brown's *Vital Records of Falmouth, Massachusetts to the Year 1850* and looked up under Lewis to see if there was a James M. Lewis listed in the Births. And there he was: James Milton Lewis, son of David Lewis, Jr. and **Cynthia Fish Lewis, eldest child of Deacon Thomas Fish**, born February 24, 1837. In the Marriages and Intentions section, it was recorded that James Milton Lewis married Jane W. Andrew (birth date and origin unknown) on October 4, 1849. Therefore, when Mrs. Jane W. Lewis bought the Jenkins home and forty-seven acres for \$2100. in 1871, she was buying the property from her **husband's aunt**, another daughter of Deacon Thomas Fish: Susannah Eldred Fish Jenkins, who was a recent widow. I wonder indeed if it was not Col. James M. Lewis who brought his friend Col. Ryan to Quissett, since so many of his relatives lived in the area.

In 1872, Jane Lewis also purchased the adjacent Chadwick/Hammond house (then owned by Braddock Gifford and Samuel H. Chadwick). The purchase included rights to a well and "cranberry land" of Braddock Gifford, probably behind the houses in the low area near the beach. The Lewises appear to be the builders of the Victorian Gothic cottage which was



A photo taken by Baldwin Coolidge on September 6, 1897 shows the Quissett Harbor House as the massive complex that dominated Quissett Harbor for almost a century. At the right is the Chadwick/Hammond House, built before 1790; to its left is the Connector, then the Jenkins House, built just after 1800, with its kitchen shed additions behind it and the Dining Hall. To the left is the single story Bowling Alley and at the very end is the Victorian Cottage built by Col. and Mrs. Lewis in 1872. A large catboat seems to be picking up passengers at the dock while the Woods Hole spritsail boat sails away. Courtesy SPNEA.

originally positioned to the north of the Chadwick/Hammond house. They also made up a plan for land development in Quissett with forty lots on it. At some point in the 1870's the two houses owned by the Lewises were run as a hotel. And somewhere in this era, the three-story connector was built between them. In the Fish/Morse Collection at WHHC we have a letter to Thomas Dunham Fish (grandson of Deacon Thomas Fish) from a Mr. Whitbeck dated May 30, 1878 with "Quissett Harbor House" on the letterhead and C.A. Whitbeck listed as Proprietor. In 1881 another letter to Thomas Dunham Fish has the letterhead "Quissett Harbor House" with Fish and Gibbs listed as Proprietors. The Fish in this case was Thomas's cousin, George Washburn Fish.

In 1881, Stephen W. Carey, the brother-in-law of Thomas Dunham Fish, bought the Harbor House from Mrs. Lewis for \$9,675, which apparently ended the James M. Lewis family involvement with Quissett. Stephen W. Carey moved the Lewis cottage to the south end of the hotel complex, with a single-story row of rooms connecting it to the former Jenkins house. These rooms were known as The Bowling Alley and were said to be made from the wood from the numerous salt vats that had been on the site. In 1895, the dining hall addition was built behind the Jenkins house and the hotel structure was complete. Various

members of the Carey family ran the hotel until 1973, with their cousin, Lewis W. Francis, Sr., managing the business for a part of the twentieth century.

The Chadwick/Hammond house was torn down in 1975 and flaked for shipment to Washington state where it has been rebuilt. The connector was also demolished at this time. Since then, the southern half of the former hotel complex, its bulk diminished by half, has stood at the west side of the harbor. The former dining hall became Willett Hall and is used for many Quissett functions. The Jenkins house is rented every summer.

In December of 1993, a tragic fire burned the Victorian Gothic Lewis cottage and The Bowling Alley to the ground. And now the Jenkins house stands alone, with Willett Hall behind it. The vast silhouette of the Quissett Harbor House that dominated the western side of the harbor for so long is at the end of the twentieth century a very small form seen against the sky.

Sources

Residential Falmouth, an 1897 Souvenir for the Sojourner Brought Up-to-Date by Arnold W. Dyer, 1992. Copyright 1992, Falmouth Historical Society.

Vital Records of Falmouth, Massachusetts to the Year 1850. Compiled by Oliver B. Brown. Copyright 1976, Society of Mayflower Descendants in the State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations.