

# Beebe Woods: Falmouth's Miracle

By Judith G. Stetson

*The Winter 2003 issue of Sprintsail featured the story of Highfield Hall which was built in the 1870s by James Madison Beebe and given to the Cape Cod Conservatory in the 1970s by Josephine and Josiah K. Lilly III. The story in this issue is about the woods that surround Highfield Hall, the Beebe Woods that the Lillys gave to the town. The story begins with the glacier that created Cape Cod, leaps rapidly over the next twelve millennia to the Wampanoag and Colonial periods, then proceeds more slowly through the 19th and 20th centuries.*

*Beebe Woods has attracted people for many reasons: for wood cutting and stone quarrying, for carriage rides and nature walks, for present pleasure and future possibilities. Some of those people have written eloquently*

*about Beebe Woods. This article uses their words to tell its story, beginning with a brief introduction to the books.*

*Ring Around The Punch Bowl, written by George L. Moses and published in 1976, is a lighthearted assemblage of many stories and accounts written over the years. George Moses was a reporter for The Falmouth Enterprise and a friend of Mr. and Mrs. Lilly. He wrote Ring Around The Punch Bowl to honor the Lillys' generous gift of Beebe Woods to the town of Falmouth in 1972.*

*Robert Finch, a naturalist living on Cape Cod, wrote the foreword to Ring Around The Punch Bowl, and more of his observations and meditations are quoted in the text. Some are requoted here.*



Aerial view of Highfield Hall and Highfield Theater surrounded by Beebe Woods' thick canopy of trees. Photo by Joseph R. Melanson.

*George Moses drew much of his material from the archives of The Falmouth Enterprise, and he dedicated his book to the owners of that newspaper, Clara Sharpe Hough and George A. Hough, Jr., "without whose close cooperation, unstinting assistance, and constant encouragement it would not have been possible."*

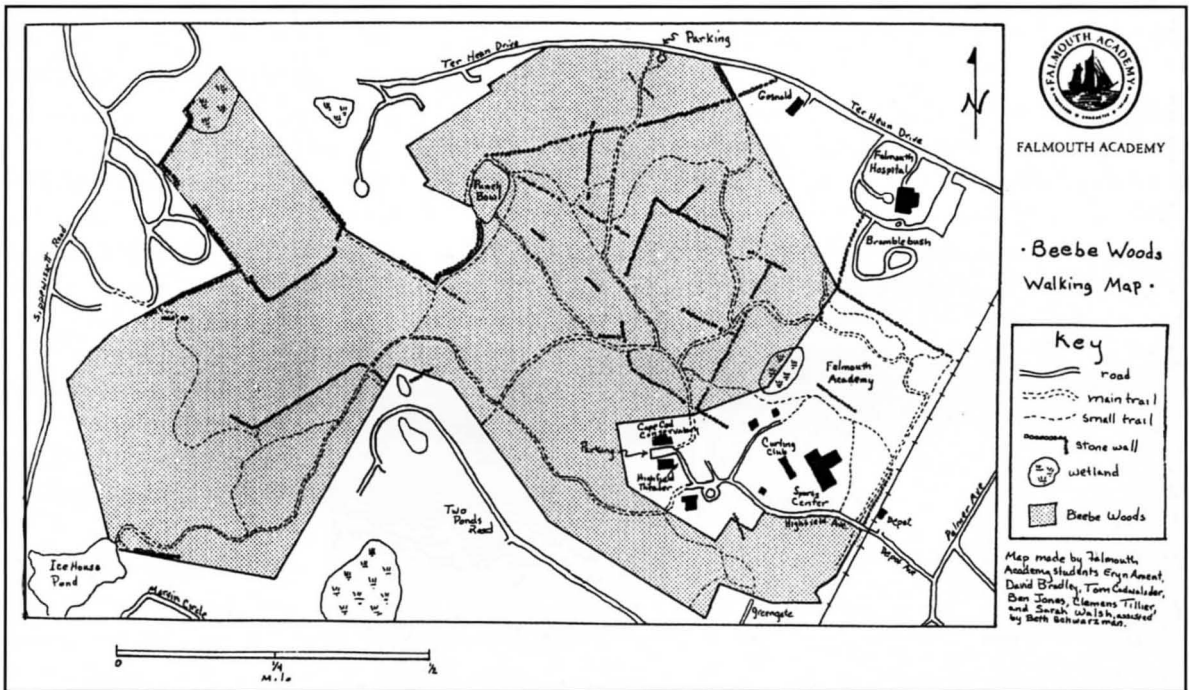
*The Nature of Cape Cod, by Beth Schwarzman, illustrated by Sandra Hogan McDermott, was published in 2002. As the title*

indicates, Beth Schwarzman's book covers the whole Cape, with emphasis on the nature of its geology and botany. The Nature of Cape Cod is designed as a guide-book with descriptions of specific places to go and things to look for in each location. The section on Beebe Woods and the adjacent Peterson Farm is brief, as is each entry, but extraordinarily thorough.

The Book of Falmouth is a collection of histories, accounts, diaries and poems edited by Mary Lou Smith, who is also the editor of Spritsail. The Book of Falmouth was published by the Falmouth Historical

Commission in 1986 to celebrate the town's three hundredth birthday. Our story begins much further back in time:

The Beebe Woods lies along the middle of the Buzzards Bay Moraine, the highest, hilliest, and the rockiest of the three glacial moraines, or strings of low hills, that form the "backbone of Cape Cod." Made up largely of chunks of granite that were dragged eastward off the mainland a hundred centuries ago by the Buzzards Bay Lobe of the great Wisconsin Stage Glacier, the hills of this moraine,



Beebe Woods walking map produced by six Falmouth Academy eighth and ninth graders under the direction of Beth Schwarzman in 1987. A geologist, Mrs. Schwarzman provided the mapping team with copies of a U.S. Geological Survey map with elevations and contours upon which they mapped the ancient carriageways, paths and stone walls that crisscross Beebe Woods. The team's spring semester mapping activity took place while Falmouth Academy was still on the Massachusetts Military Reservation, the year before the school began to build its new campus on the 34 acres of woodlands abutting Beebe Woods donated to the school in 1985 by Josiah and Josephine Lilly. The students gave copies of their walking map to the Town of Falmouth by presenting them to Selectman Virginia Valiela. The map has been available to the public in the lobby of the town hall and in the town's conservation office ever since.

stretching from the Cape Cod Canal bridge at Bourne on the north, southward to Woods Hole (and to the Elizabeth Islands beyond), contain more large boulders than any other area on the Cape. It is here, more than anywhere else on this shifting, changing piece of land, that one can get the feeling of stability and solidity, of being inland instead of at sea. (Robert Finch, *Foreword to Moses*, p. xiii.)

*Beebe Woods was literally inland before the sea level rose again. The earliest Native Americans could stand on the Buzzards Bay moraine and spot the nearest of the game herds grazing on vast glacial outwash plains that would later become Georges Bank, Nantucket and Vineyard Sounds and Buzzards Bay.*

*A geologist can identify the transition from outwash to moraine. The early farmers also knew the difference, if not the cause.*

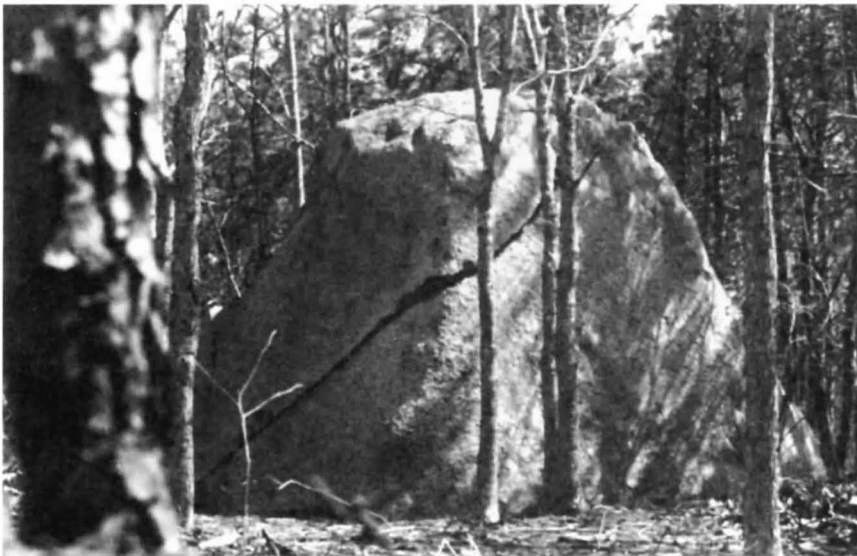
As you go west on Depot or Ter Heun Avenues you cross from the flat outwash plain onto the hilly mo-

raine just as you cross the railroad tracks. The moraine has irregular terrain of bouldery hills and swales. Peterson Farm lies in one of those swales; although the hills around the fields are rocky, there are no rocks in the fields, and few rock walls. The original farmers chose an area with rich, rock-free soil. This fine-grained soil washed and blew in after the glacier melted but before vegetation anchored the surface of the hills. Reportedly, good soils like this existed in many areas of the Cape but were eroded after the forests were cut. (Schwarzman, p. 200)

The boulders in the woods are characteristic of moraine deposits. The "Sliding Rock" is one of the larger boulders and certainly the best known - it was a stop on a driving tour suggested by the Falmouth Board of Trade and Industry in 1896. You'll find it on the west side of the trail to the Punch Bowl about 1/4 mile west of the Punch Bowl sign. The slanting surface of this 10-foot-high block of granite seems much too rough for sliding; perhaps the sliding was in winter. This rock was originally larger; big blocks of stone

have been quarried here. You can see lines of 1/2-inch-diameter holes made by hand drills. Many other boulders in the woods bear evidence of quarrying; stones cut in this way can be seen in old foundations all over Falmouth. (Schwarzman, p. 203)

*Steve Porter, a local geologist, has used the technique of cosmogenic dating to determine that the boulders of the glacial moraine were first exposed to sunlight 15,000 years ago. That is when the*



Sliding Rock, a large moraine deposit, is a landmark in Beebe Woods. Photo by John B. Lane.

*glacier began to retreat, the ancient ice turning into torrents of meltwater and dumping out its long covered boulders.*

*"Kettle holes" are another characteristic of moraines. Robert Finch describes a favorite one in Beebe Woods:*

The pond lies at the bottom of a kettle hole surrounded by steep 70-foot slopes that radiate up and out in a nearly perfect geological formation that caused it to be given the name, Punch Bowl. Kettle holes are numerous on the Cape, and might be thought of as fossilized icebergs. Large chunks of the original glacier, broken off when the main mass retreated 10-12 millennia ago, were covered with glacial till and outwash. Thus insulated, the large blocks remained frozen for some time after the ice had left the Cape a bleak and barren pile of rubble. When in time these buried icebergs finally melted, the ground above sunk to form bowl-like depressions we now call kettle holes. Where the bottom of these holes are below ground water level, we find ponds that are actually exposed portions of the water table, or aquifer.

The Cape is full of such ponds, and nearly every town has its Deep Pond or No Bottom Pond. Perhaps the early Cape settlers, lacking mountainous heights, sought with such names to confer distinction upon the land's invisible depths. Usually, though, these bodies of water prove not only to have bottoms, but relatively shallow ones at that.

I had heard from several sources, however, that the Punch Bowl was truly deep and had, in fact, been



Rope swing offers adventurers dramatic plunge into the Punch Bowl. Photo by Janet Chalmers.

sounded once at 200 feet. Considering that the pond itself is no more than twice this in length, such a depth would be truly remarkable, although the steepness of its sides said that it was possible.

Armed with a borrowed rubber kayak, a roll of string and some old window weights, I descended to the pond, launched the bright orange kayak onto the bright still water and went sailing off like a leaf across its surface. Out in the middle of the pond I let the weight and line out over the side of the kayak and prepared for a long payout. But after a few seconds the line abruptly lost its tension; the colored marks on the string read 13 feet. (Robert Finch, quoted in Moses, p. 139)

*Now it is time to leave geology, leap ahead thousands of years and enter prehistory. Native American tribes knew the land and waters of Falmouth well. They called this area Suckanesset, possibly after the quahogs they found*

*here, possibly after the Sogkonate Indians who valued those quahogs for feasts and for the wampum to be made from their beautiful shells.*

*Lucena Jaeger Barth describes other aspects of the Native American relationship with the land:*

Throughout Cape Cod, Indian villages, trails and trade routes to inland locations were found by European explorers and settlers of the early seventeenth century. A map of authenticated Indian trade routes shows a network similar to contemporary Route 28 and its subsidiaries, trails used but unmarked and unmapped for centuries. One trail began near Sandwich, proceeding through North and West Falmouth, through the woods [including Beebe Woods] to present Elm Road and on to Nobska Point, from which canoes were launched for travel to the islands. Indian trails also connected over land and rivers with trade routes in areas to become Rhode Island, Connecticut and more distant regions.



Former carriage path is narrower and more natural today than when it was created and carefully tended. Photo by Janet Chalmers.

...During the year 1616-1617, an imported infectious disease to which the Wampanoags had no immunity ravaged the native population, wiping out entire families and villages. This plague was followed by the 1620 landing of the Pilgrims near Plymouth and by accelerating encroachment on Wampanoag lands during succeeding decades....The subsequent history of Cape Cod Indians reflects the inevitable impact of European immigrants, determined to make their homes in a new land, upon a proud native population expecting to carry on its own way of life. As it developed, Indian concerns were submerged by those of the newcomers, who considered native Americans as mere tenants on land now owned by the English king. (Lucena Jaeger Barth, "Falmouth's First Americans," *The Book of Falmouth*, pp. 24-26)

*At least the settlers who came to Suckanesset seem to have been relatively fair to the people they found already in residence.*

The original 14 founding fathers and their families (who bore such surnames as Hatch, Robinson, Jenkins, Hamlin and Lathrop, all names you'll encounter here again) arrived in boats from Barnstable in 1660 at Succanesset or Suckanessett, the ancient Indian name for the town which men didn't begin to call Falmouth until 1694, fully eight years after its incorporation.

The settlers then proceeded to divide the land, limiting themselves at first to laying





Stone walls overgrown by thick woodlands, brambles, leaves and fallen tree limbs.  
Photo by Janet Chalmers.

out lots along the “neck” lying between the two ponds, now known as the Mill Road area, at the head of which is the Old Town Cemetery.

As for those “last extinguished titles” of the Indians to the westward, the first two or three waves of settlers very probably bought that hilly country from the Indians piecemeal for use of the land “in common,” following the usual custom of the Old Colony. As the lowlands along the shore were more and more thickly settled, it became apparent that the higher uplands were gaining value as woodlots, badly needed to supply fencing and firewood, with the result that these, too, were eventually whacked up for division and private ownership.

Historian Jenkins [Charles W. Jenkins gave a series of three lectures on the early history of Falmouth in 1843 and published them in 1889] tells us that at a meeting held August 23, 1704, Quisset Neck was given to John Weeks, his heirs, and assigns forever, “provided and on condition that the sd. John Weeks, his heirs and assigns, do forever hereafter save harmless and indemnitize the sd. Proprietors from the just

claim of the heirs or generation of Wequecoxett, an Indian deceased, respecting a former liberty that was granted unto sd. Indians or by them reserved for cutting of firewood on the common or undivided lands in sd. Falmouth.” This area lies just to the southwest and below a section of the original Beebe Woods.

Thus the high ground and its woods, known in later years as “hill lots,” began to assume an importance to the town.

By the mid-1800s, almost coincidental with the arrival of the town’s earliest summer citizens, the long wooded ridge of which the Beebe Woods is the heart, began to play catch-up. In *The Town of Falmouth Master Plan, Survey and Report* prepared by Arthur and Sidney Shurcliff of Boston in 1951, we find this:

“As late as 1851, when the purchasing power of money was much greater than it is today, woodlots often sold for \$100 an acre, sometimes as much as farmlands,” which is why the town, early on, had such offices as gaugers, viewers, surveyors of casks made for tar, pitch, turpentine, and rosin; measurers and sealers of wood, measurers of wood and bark, searchers of tar, surveyors of lumber, viewers and cullers of staves and hoops, and wood corders.

Yet by 1886, when the town observed the bicentennial of its incorporation, much of the upper woodland (a good deal of it stripped of its trees and cleared for pasturing sheep and cattle) had passed from the descendants of the founding fathers to another set of founding fathers - the progenitors of summer fami-

lies, a surprising number of which are Falmouth taxpayers to this day.

Speakers at Falmouth's 200th anniversary celebration held June 15, 1886, were very much aware of them thar hills and the gold to be mined in them. Chairman of the committee in charge, George E. Clarke, in his welcome said:

"Upon these hills in the west, up which you were wont to climb in pursuit of wild game, fruits, and the beautiful trailing arbutus, and to gaze upon the delightful prospect spread out before you - the rural village nestling among the green foliage, the waters covered with the white sails of commerce, and the green islands in the distance - upon these hills have been erected almost palatial residences with their beautiful lawns and drives, yet with much of their natural wildness still remaining"



Large multi-trunk beech tree close to Highfield Theater may be a survivor of early wood cutting and fire. Photo by Janet Chalmers.

Billed as the "orator of the day," Gen. John L. Swift of Boston, a native son, intoned, "The hills of Falmouth have become the residences of the people of wealth. Its woods and shores are the resort of visitors who find this region fair and delightful." (Moses, pp. 2-5)

*The "almost palatial residences" referred to by George Clarke were owned by two of James M. Beebe's sons.*

*Edward Pierson Beebe built Highfield Hall in 1878. A year later, J. Arthur Beebe built Tanglewood nearby. When and why did the Beebes get their Woods in the first place? This is how George Moses describes James M. Beebe's 1872 land acquisitions:*

For the first time he lifted his eyes up unto the hills above town and there, evidently because he desired wood to burn, as did almost everyone at that time, he acquired a small piece of what was to become the Beebe Woods - a 28-acre "Deep Pond woodlot." Just before then he'd picked up almost a half-mile of water-

terfront at the foot of Shore Street. (Moses, p. 44)

*Beth Schwarzman observes:* Much of this land was woodlot when the Beebes acquired it; wood for lumber and firewood had probably been cut here from the time Falmouth was settled. The Beebes probably also had wood cut here to supply the needs of the houses and the

farm as late as the 1930s. As a result of this wood cutting, double-trunked trees, especially oaks and maples, are to be found throughout the woods. You can determine how long ago a tree was cut if you can estimate how old the multiple trunks are that sprouted from the cut stump. Many of these trees are obviously quite young, but a few seem to have survived the fires and may record wood cutting in the 1800s. (Schwarzman, p. 204)

A photo of Falmouth from the top of the Beebes' Highfield Hall taken in 1896 shows woods on the slope of the hill below the house, though other areas that are now wooded were bare. The Beebe family put their mark on Beebe Woods....Look for the cut-stone walls that carry the carriage roads across swales. Young European Beeches can be found today among the native American Beeches in the woods. They are seedlings of the planted parent trees around Highfield. (Schwarzman, pp. 200-202)

*George Moses picked up the story of land acquisitions by the Beebe family with a description of extensive earlier land acquisitions by Joseph Story Fay.*

On June 5, 1873, Joseph Story Fay deeded to James M. Beebe "a tract or lot of land beginning at a corner nearly opposite the railroad station running by a stonewall northwesterly by land of John Jenkins, Frederick Parker, and Benjamin P. Swift to 'Deep Pond,' then by the pond to a wall and land of Richard L. Swift, thence southwesterly to land of Andrew M. Shiverick, then southeasterly by land of Silas Jones, thence by land of Francis Davis and the 'Two Ponds' to land of Celia Robinson, then southeasterly to land of Thatcher Lewis to the line of the railroad to Woods Hole, then northeasterly by the line of said railroad to the place of beginning near the railroad station. It was a purchase of 95.5 acres, and thus was born the Beebe Woods. (Moses, p. 30)

It must strike today's Cape Codders, both year-round and summer residents, as rather odd that, with the possible exception of Arthur [James Arthur, third son of James M. Beebe] who also liked boats, the Beebes preferred their woods to the waters everyone heads for nowadays. But they had a genuine affection for their park-like domain, choosing its solitude, stillness, and shade (as did and do so many of

Britain's peers they so admired) over the sea, sand, and sun which gained Falmouth its early reputation as "the watering place of the wealthy."

They built and rebuilt miles of stonewalls, many that long ago had formed pastures for the sheep and cattle that roamed the hillsides. They surveyed their vast holdings, and at various and numerous points placed markers of expensive polished granite that can still be seen throughout the woods. And they built their woods roads so well that today, cleared of windfalls and other obstructions and thoroughly brushed out along their edges, they're as smooth and pleasant to travel over as they were almost a century ago. And all along their ways Frank Beebe [youngest son of



Stone wall and granite marker #71 by path to Two Ponds. Photo by Janet Chalmers.





Rhododendrons and handsome stone walls at carriage path approach to Highfield Hall. Photo by Janet Chalmers.

James M. Beebe] planted trees and shrubs to enhance the natural beauty of the woods. (Moses, p. 132)

The roads in the woods were meticulously maintained, their sides carefully kept clear and clean. Like the gravel driveway, they were regularly raked and, at times, it was one of the many chores of “teahouse gardener” Joaquin Figuerido, father of Joseph Figuerido, Falmouth superintendent of insect pest control, parks, school grounds and tree warden, to sweep these roads of all minute debris and smooth away the carriage tracks and horseshoe prints. The woods were of greater personal interest to Frank Beebe than any of the others and there he planted many of the trees and shrubs “foreign” to Falmouth soil that are found in its midst today. His death certificate, at his expressed wish, stated that he was an “arboriculturist.” (Moses, p. 123)

*The teahouse was a “destination” of one of the roads, located approximately where the Falmouth Hospital now stands. In all, there were 14 miles of carriage roads*

*to maintain. Some of the “markers of expensive polished granite” have numbers cut into them. Mile markers from Highfield? Replacements of older boundary stones? No one knows for certain; anyone is free to speculate.*

*Other late 19th century New England families shared the Beebes’ love of attractive, accessible woodlands. The Forbes family created favorite rides and walks that have been enjoyed for generations on Naushon Island. Acadia National Park on Mt. Desert Island showcases the Rockefeller family’s delight in carefully designed, well constructed carriage roads that wind through tended woods past handsome stone retaining walls and over*

*beautiful stone bridges to arrive at chosen beauty spots adorned with imported plants.*

*The English landowners who originated this tradition of park landscaping often had “public days.” So did the Beebes:*

Pierson [second son of James M. Beebe] was also pleasant to those who elected to take the town-recommended carriage drives through the estate grounds and the Beebe Woods. In the 1890’s and early 1900’s, quite a few visitors took a spin through the



Marker #74 stands alone. Photo by Janet Chalmers.

woods, oh-ing and ah-ing at the manorial estate houses, the view above the town, and other sights. Many rented a carriage and driver to take the 10-mile "Tuesday tour" that went through the Beebe Woods to Katie Hatch's Hill [on the other side of Woods Hole Road] and down Mill Road to Vineyard Sound, then along Surf Drive through more Beebe property to Falmouth Heights (there was no harbor entrance in the way then) and around "Lake Lemon" (1896 misspelling of Lake Leaman, now Little Pond) and back to the Village Green by way of Teaticket. (Moses, p. 178)

*Several generations of nature lovers have found pleasure in Beebe Woods since those days. Robert Finch wrote in his appreciative foreword to George Moses' Ring Around the Punch Bowl:*

Notwithstanding its rich individuality of life, color, and contour, the real value of the Beebe Woods, in my mind, is that it is not special, but representative. Not a unique stand of virgin "primeval" forest, or a grove of one special species, or a haven for an endangered animal, or the site of a geological curiosity, the Beebe Woods is a genuine piece of our Cape Cod forests today (albeit a remarkably large and intact piece). Its trees are common trees; its associations natural ones; its branches and waters are threaded with our characteristic birds, animals, and insects. Its seasons are our seasons. It is part and parcel of the land in which it sits, and it reflects the life of this besieged peninsula. (Robert Finch, *Foreword* to Moses, p. xv)

*Later on, Robert Finch gives a more intimate picture of Beebe Woods:*

In early October I returned to the Beebe Woods on a beautiful, crisp, clear autumn morning.

Swallowed by the forest, I once again felt its hushed richness. The lady's slippers and mayflowers of late spring were replaced with blue and orange woodland asters and the red berries of wintergreen. The earthy colors of mushrooms dotted the forest floor. Oak leaves glowed with a subdued brilliance. Beeches curled their leaves into coppery scrolls, and their smooth trunks sported a variety of blue, green, and gray lichens. Beside the roadbed, bright green mats of hairycap moss and delicate fronds of maidenhair fern greeted the eye.



Common trees representative of the Cape comprise most of Beebe Woods. Photo by Janet Chalmers.



Lady's slippers abound in the spring woods. Photo by Fred E. Lux.

Not far from the parking lot there is an old, abandoned apple orchard, and in autumn the trees hang out their tart misshapen fruit while heaps of wild grapes wind about them. At one bend in the road, two large old pine trunks, felled by some forgotten storm, lie together in stranded majesty like huge twin skeletons of beached whales. They have, in fact the color and crumbly texture of old whale bones found on the beach. Their long spires, still intact and lichen-encrusted, point due northwest, recording like frozen weathervanes the fate that rushed in from the southeast to fell them many years ago.

Where the trail rises to a crest just before it dips down to the Punch Bowl, several small puddles remained in the way, attesting to the clayey base of the soil. Shallow and muddy, they nonetheless harbored several green frogs, somewhat sluggish in the cool October air, but slippery enough to escape my grasp and come bobbing up again like emeralds, gold-rimmed eyes blinking. So life leaps at you where you least expect it.

The spring concert of birds has been whittled down now to an astringent chorus of a few chickadees, nuthatches, some newly-arrived pine siskins, and the constant, ready background of fall crickets. This time I note that there is much sassafras in the undergrowth, along with huckleberry, highbush blueberry, and catbriar.

There is a richness to these moist autumn woods and a pungent odor of fecundity like that of a plowed field or a salt marsh when it begins to "work" in the spring. For in deciduous woods, the process of breakdown and decay is as important and as life-giving as spring growth. The decomposing bacteria and fungi that lie silent and unseen below the leaf layer are as much a part of the cycle of death and renewal as the visible leaves and singing birds, and far, far more numerous.

I descended the sides of the Punch Bowl to its sparkling water where a kingfisher announced my arrival, swooping over the pond with his machine-gun rattle. Swallows still dipped and dove above the waters, plucking late insects out of the air, while water striders and whirligigs performed their surface-tension acrobatics for nobody's pleasure in particular.

So these woods, for the most part, accomplish their vital business quietly and imperceptibly; in such a place the mind can collect itself and imagine permanence.

Yet for all its sense of stability, there is a startling contrast between this forested, morainal landscape and the sea that abuts it. Nowhere else along the Cape's western coastline do the moraine hills lie so close to the shore and fall so precipitously down to it. To spend several hours in the Beebe Woods and then to travel to the beach is a sharp transition and revelation.

After spending the morning walking its hills, I set off west from the woods and within twenty minutes came to the eastern shore of Buzzards Bay, a place unlike any other on this peninsula.

Here, as though a giant bean-bag had been torn open, the very stones of the moraine lay spilled and exposed, acre upon acre of naked granite upon the sands. Suddenly I had entered a place that was all light, planes, motion, and unfettered energy, a world of rhythmic flux. Sunlight, which had fallen in ordered, vertical shafts through the woods, creating a distinct mosaic of shadows, was here broken up into a brilliant ubiquity, like constantly shattering glass. Disembodied islands and points of land hung shimmering, mirage-like, above the dark blue horizon of the bay. The sea breeze gently quartered around the compass, whipping up little whitecaps across the water. The day had become all centrifugal, decentralized, and the weather sucked at me like a vortex.

As though to symbolize the energy of the place, a cloud of a hundred gulls appeared just offshore, moving swiftly over the open water. These familiar but beautiful birds, a mixture of herring gulls and the larger black-backed or "minister" gulls, were a charged swarm of motion and noise. Their high, loose laughter and deep throaty calls assaulted my ears, and their broad, shifting wings glinted like swords. Beneath them the waters suddenly exploded with a school of silverside minnows chased to the surface by some

unseen predator, and the gulls swooped down like banshees to feed.

All this made the morning in the calm woods seem years away. Yet I could turn and look to the east and see, less than a mile off, those same solid-seeming hills that I had sauntered through shortly before. Only now, from the beach, they seemed covered with an ephemeral haze; now it was they that seemed a mirage, a false front of temporarily arrested motion.

On such a beach, solidity loses credibility. The Beebe Woods becomes mere mounds of loose gravel (gravel, it is true, that sometimes runs twenty feet coarse, but gravel nonetheless) with a thin coating of cellulose. Its moraine hills are indeed fossils of glacial movement, but fossils whose fate it is to move once more, under the urging of wind and wave, to descend to the beach and become, at last, like the rocks



Dogs hurry down the slope to plunge into the Punch Bowl, hoping to retrieve countless thrown sticks. Photo by Janet Chalmers.

that lay scattered about me. (Robert Finch, quoted by Moses, pp. 201-203)

*Beebe Woods has suffered more immediate threats than the eventual erosion of the glacial moraine on which it grows. To quote the understated opinion of The Falmouth Enterprise, "It is somewhat of a miracle," that Beebe Woods survived the insect, fire and development threats of the 20th century.*

After the youngest son of James Madison Beebe died in 1932, the woods and its two Victorian estates, Highfield and Tanglewood, changed ownership several times, bought by men with grand schemes. E. H. Bristol, of Bristol Beach, tried to turn Highfield

into a health resort in the thirties. Religious revivalist J. Elwin Wright in the forties hoped to make Tanglewood a hotel with a religious bent. The next decade's owner, Texas oil man DeWitt M. Ter Heun, dreamed of a foundation for performing arts at Highfield. (Margaret Hough Russell in *The Book of Falmouth*, p. 138)

*George Moses, veteran newspaper writer, used The Falmouth Enterprise archives for the vivid details of the next story:*

Fires have always threatened the Beebe Woods.... It wasn't until E. H. Bristol put in town water in 1937 that the old Beebe buildings had any real protection against fires, with two hydrants located on either side of the old tower. [A shingled water storage tower that stood between the two main houses. Water was pumped up to it from a well near the railroad tracks, first by a windmill, later by a steam engine. (Moses, p. 117)]

It's a good thing they [the two hydrants] were there in October, 1947.

*The Falmouth Enterprise:*

### **Flames Sweep Across Beebe Woods to Edge Of Falmouth Village**

Before noon on Saturday it was a line of fire marching threateningly upon the theatre, hotels, and outbuildings of Tanglewood on the tree-covered hill above Falmouth village. The far-flung fire jumped the road which bulldozers had widened and cleared in the track of a long overgrown woods road near Elmer Gifford's on Sippewissett Road [corner of Sippewissett Road and North Palmer Avenue,



Double-trunk tree on path behind Cape Cod Conservatory.  
Photo by Janet Chalmers.



now the home of Mrs. Robert G. Weeks] to Tanglewood, and from Tanglewood down along the ridge to the Red Gate [site of the current Kettle Hole Road?] on Woods Hole Road. When this long and laboriously opened road barrier was crossed there was no stand left for firemen to take except around the Tanglewood buildings and along the railroad tracks at the foot of the Beebe hillside. Along the tracks are oil tanks, lumber yards, coal yards, railroad buildings, and gas tanks. Across the track the homes of Falmouth village nestle closely.

Saturday afternoon brought the final and the major crisis. Tongues of flame reached the track from Locust Street to the Palmer Avenue bypass, except that they were beaten back from the Texaco fuel tanks on Woods Hole Road, the Wood Lumber Co. sheds, the Lawrence grain store on the very edge of the Beebe Woods.

Saturday evening anybody on Main Street looked into the western sky to see a circle of fiery red closing around the town with flames flaring through thick settling smoke. From Main Street it appeared as though the whole end of the town, along Locust and Palmer, was ablaze. Blazing trees sending flames shooting skyward were plainly visible, looking nearer than they were. Great sparks and showers of red flecks drifted from across the railroad track to settle thickly over the nearest houses and to fly townward until some reached Pin Oak Way, North Main Street, and well across Palmer Avenue from Locust Street all the way to Sippewissett.

George Hough, whose *Enterprise* newspaper office and plant were endangered just across the track from

the Beebe Woods at the foot of The Hill, wrote his personal recollections of the Great Fire shortly before he died last spring [1976] especially for this account:

While Boston papers were frightening friends and relatives of Falmouth people with evacuation headlines, Falmouth folks were standing their ground, wetting roofs and yards with hoses, getting ready for flaming embers and thousands of sparks by lugging pails to upper floors and attics. Those along the railroad track packed their valuables, sent young children to the homes of friends and relatives in other parts of town and made gallons of coffee for the firefighters, hundreds of them, as they watched a great sheet of flame sweep down on them from the hills above carrying chunks of fire in the heavy smoke.

As more and more people gathered at the road entrance to Highfield in front of The Enterprise building - reporters, photographers, canteen drivers, onlookers - smoke and dusk were blending rapidly. Flames jumped into the tall trees which fringed the woods. The sky flared red and yellow. It became a sheet of light. Pine tops sputtered. A telephone pole became a torch. The air beyond the track was filled with what looked like red dust with a glint of yellow in it and a steady shower of sparks, like giant fireflies, began to fall and dance and bounce. Where they landed a tiny glow became a bigger one. The bed of the woods became a mass of flame laced with black shapes of charred limbs and trunks.

How the fire was finally contained and died was a spectacle for the men who had been spraying the roof of The Enterprise building with garden hose all day. The wall of flame

descended from the Beebe hill. It was terrifying as it swept down on us. It leaped the stone-wall boundary of the Beebe estate. The gravel road to the grain mill stopped it. One minute it was on the point of sweeping into town. The next the flames were disappearing in a cloudburst of fire, soot, and debris. The hot air picked up sticks and even stones. It sent embers flying across The Enterprise roof and fluttering down on the Gulf gas station next door. In panic the newspaper people called fire headquarters for help. Chief Wells answered the phone.

"The fire is all over," he said. And it was. (Moses, pp. 264-267)

*The fire was indeed all over; but its fierce assault on the woods could still be traced more than fifty years later. In 2001, Robbie Shaver studied the regrowth of the woods for his science class at Falmouth Academy. He discovered that the old burned areas could be mapped by the location of dominant stands of pine trees. He explained that pine tree seedlings grow up earlier than those of oaks or other hardwoods. This head start means that pine trees will mark the extent of a devastating fire for decades afterwards, until the hardwoods once again grow tall enough to shade them out. (Conversation, March 28, 2003)*

### Another Grave Threat

The new threat to the woods had actually had its beginning in 1947, the day after the end of the Great Fire. At that time, Frederick V. Lawrence, landscape contractor and road builder among other things allied, made this suggestion:

Burned areas in the Beebe Woods should be planted over and a scenic drive opened up in Sippewissett. It will pass through beautiful ponds and along the high



Large pine tree. Photo by Janet Chalmers.

ridge. The project would greatly increase property values in that section.

In the hectic aftermath of the fire, the suggestion passed more or less unnoticed, completely unheeded. But two years later, with the town suffering more than ever from "arterial sclerosis," the 1949 annual town meeting acquiesced to a recommendation of the Planning Board and appropriated \$15,000 for purchase of a "25-year development plan" for Falmouth. The board thereupon hired a Boston firm operated by Arthur and Sidney Shurcliff to do the job.

After much study, many interviews with key citizens throughout town, and months of applying their

expertise, the professional planners unveiled - in the winter of 1951 - a "master plan" that covered every part of Falmouth from Waquoit to Woods Hole, from Megansett in North Falmouth to the Moors in the middle.

One of its proposals was to relocate Route 28 leading into town, starting at a new traffic circle in the general area of Saconesset Hills Road in West Falmouth and running on a straight line for slightly more than two miles to another traffic circle located about a half-mile west of the Mill Road-Elm Road-Locust Street intersection on the Woods Hole highway. Object, of course, was to cut off the flow of Martha's Vineyard, Nantucket, and Woods Hole ferry traffic from Falmouth center ... and, also, to shorten the distance between Woods Hole and all points north.

The new road would have had two paved strips, each 24 feet wide, separated by a 20-foot grass median.



When snow is deep enough to cover glacial till in the woods, both narrow and wide paths are ideal for cross-country skiing. Photo by Paul Ferris Smith.

And it would have slashed down the middle of the Beebe Woods, dividing it into two pieces with the estate buildings about the same distance from the road on one side as the Punch Bowl would have been on the other. Highfield Hall and the Punch Bowl, although more than a half-mile apart, would have each been only about 1,000 feet from the busy new superhighway (measured in a straight line) as it barreled down between them.

"A further advantage of the new highway location," the Shurcliffs asserted in their *Master Plan, Survey and Report*, "is that it will make accessible a large tract of land hitherto unused for any purpose so that residential developments may be expected to spring up with consequent increase in tax revenue." (Moses, pp. 285-286)

Mr. and Mrs. Ter Heun, owners of more than a mile of the proposed road, sent the Shurcliffs a telegram: "Eager to cooperate in betterment of community.

We will not expect remuneration from land used for highway." (Moses, p. 286)

*That was in 1951. There was not enough enthusiasm, nor enough money, for the Shurcliff plan; the double-barreled road was never built. The Ter Heuns used the buildings at Highfield for art and theater, but left the woods to grow on their own. Then the Town started looking for land for a hospital:*

...Mrs. Mildred [Ter Heun] Milligan, an original [hospital] trustee, came forth with a virtually unsolicited offer: Her brother and

sister-in-law might be willing to part with a "little piece" of the Beebe Woods, for 25 years looked to by many as the ideal site on which to locate a hospital. The Ter Heuns came through handsomely with considerably more than a little piece - 22½ acres, all told - a rectangular layout lying at the northern edge of the woods, a hill site rising from the railroad commanding a magnificent view. Town meeting promptly voted to build an entrance road to the site and, in appreciation, perpetuated the donors' name by officially calling it Ter Heun Drive.

*The Enterprise* expressed the town's appreciation editorially:

"Mr. Ter Heun has settled down with us to enjoy the good things which make Falmouth, and to show his appreciation of them. Of course, few newcomers have the introduction to Falmouth which has been Mr. Ter Heun's good fortune. From his hilltop home he can see the beauties of the town spread out below him, while the ugliness of some recent innovations is obscured by distance. His home is a stately reminder of Falmouth's rich and gracious past. History, there, clings fragrantly about him.

"In the traditions of the past, Mr. Ter Heun sees inspiration and hope for our achievements of the future. In this spirit he has given many acres of his old estate as the site for Falmouth's future hospital. To all the physical advantages of the site there should be added sentimental ones. The land is potentially worth a lot of money. It is healthily high. It is most centrally located. Less concretely, it dedicates a part of the property which has been a Falmouth heritage to lasting public use. It will make the hospital, upon

a commanding elevation, a monument to the public spirit of the people who build it." (Moses, pp. 293-294)

*Mr. Ter Heun died in 1963. In 1964 his Beebe Woods estate was bought by Stanley G. Welsh and his sister for \$650,000. George Moses dips into The Enterprise archives for our next chapter:*

On January 18, 1966, *The Enterprise* ran this headline over its lead story:

### **Development Will Turn Beebe Woods Into Planned Residential Community**

Story went on to inform that Stanley Welsh and his sister, Marjorie Whittemore, operating as the Highfield Associates, would develop the woods from a "careful master plan" that would result in a "blue ribbon development of 500 houses, a roomy neigh-



Dog heads home through Beebe Woods after visiting adjacent Peterson Farm. Photo by Janet Chalmers.

borhood blended into the wild landscape.” Added *The Enterprise*:

“Donald Durell & Associates, landscape architects, have been employed for months in the development of a plan that will create a distinctive village within Falmouth, a community of substantial houses with wide expanses of common parkland. The Durell plan envisions a shopping center and eventually a school.



Snow-covered stone retaining walls. Photo by Paul Ferris Smith.

“‘Planned Unit Development’ is the name given by planners to the method of development intended by the Durell Associates. It will be the first such development on Cape Cod. ‘Highest and best use’ of a large tract developed altogether as an integral unit is the goal of Planned Unit Development. The method has been pioneered in Amherst, Mr. Durell said, and has won approval of the Attorney General.

“This opportunity for a development of this kind is unique on Cape Cod. The Beebe Woods is the largest single parcel still available for development on the Cape,” reported the newspaper.

“At that time, Don Durell announced that municipal services, playgrounds, even churches would be provided for in his plan.

“Preservation of the natural beauty of the woodlands was to be achieved, in part, through “cluster zoning.” With cluster zoning, by grouping houses on lots that are smaller than the basic zoning requirement, a reservoir of land belonging equally to all home owners is achieved. This reservoir, in broad strips, separates the clusters of houses. According to

Don Durell, one would still be able to walk through the old woods after the area had been fully developed without trespassing on private yards.

“On September 29, 1972, it was suddenly announced by a prospective Newton, Massachusetts, buyer, one of several principals in a development firm negotiating its purchase, that a big deal for the Beebe Woods had fallen through because “Falmouth’s out-moded zoning discourages creative land use.”

Town meeting had had the foresight, at the strong urging of the Planning Board, to re-zone the entire woods into lots of almost one acre. The push to protect the woods as much as possible by zoning was led by Geoffrey G. Whitney, Jr., scion of a longtime Woods Hole summer family, who retired this year [1975] from the Planning Board after 20 years of service, 18 of them as chairman. The 40,000 square-foot zoning didn’t suit the would-be buyers. They didn’t want what they termed a “grid-type” development of one-acre lots but, rather, insisted on land that could or would be placed in the far more elastic and much less restrictive category of cluster zoning.



This editorial written by John T. Hough appeared in *The Enterprise* after the Welsh deal with the land developers had fallen through:

Attention has been called again to Beebe's woods. We are reminded that nearly 500 acres of unspoiled woodland remain within a stone's throw of Main Street.

It is somewhat of a miracle.

When James Madison Beebe bought this land from Joseph Story Fay in 1873, it lay on the untouched outskirts of a small and rustic village. A century later hundreds of unspoiled acres remain. Around this green island has grown the modern town of Falmouth.

Beebe's woods remain because the owners chose to preserve it against the pressures of development. But a hundred years have passed, the pressures have increased, and the present owner is evidently willing to surrender the woods to development.

Perhaps this is inevitable. Perhaps it is also desirable; a closing of the gap between village

and Buzzards Bay with houses and streets. Growth used to be a slogan of progress.

But if there is a better and higher use for Beebe's woods, the time to recognize that fact is now. Later will probably be too late. Future generations would think of us very kindly if we left a public park of this size in the heart of town. It would distinguish the town more and more, as open land became more and more scarce. It would do more to preserve the present character of the town than almost anything else.

It is not easy to see how Beebe's woods can be preserved for public use and enjoyment. It is too much for us to accomplish alone...

(*Falmouth Enterprise*, October 3, 1972)

### Lillys Buying Highfield For Falmouth

This was the happy headline set in 42-point type by *The Enterprise* across the top of its front page on October 27, 1972.

In a real estate transaction as significant as any in Falmouth's history, Mr. and Mrs. Josiah K. Lilly, III, of West Falmouth, yesterday signed an agreement to purchase Highfield, long known as the Beebe Woods," announced the paper. "Their intent is that the nearly 500-acre property will not be developed, but will be set aside for conservation.

But while they were greatly pleased, they weren't as greatly surprised as you might think. Several years earlier, in 1964, "Joe" Lilly and his wife Josephine had given a



Beebe Woods is beautiful in every season. Photo by Paul Ferris Smith.

45-acre tract full of the most beautiful holly trees in America, located in the back-country section of town known as Ashumet, to the Massachusetts Audubon Society for a wildlife sanctuary and holly reservation. In making this one of the Audubon Society's 13 Massachusetts sanctuaries, the Lillys preserved a far-famed collection of hollies assembled by the late Wilfrid L. Wheeler, premier pioneer in this arboriculture. In fact, they'd purchased the property only two years earlier when they heard there were plans afoot to turn the tract into a residential development.

"Gift of Ashumet to the Audubon Society is no less a gift to the town," stated an editorial at the time, pointing out the obvious. "Mr. and Mrs. J. K. Lilly, III have provided, as did Joseph Story Fay before them, for an enduring and wise guardianship in the public interest." (Moses, pp. 304-309)

*Margaret Hough Russell's description of the gift adds details that show the broad range of the Lilly's public spirited philanthropy. They gave more land for the Falmouth Hospital adjacent to the original 22 1/2 acre gift of the Ter Heuns. They provided for sports and education as well as health:*

One month later, Falmouth learned that Beebe Woods would never be developed. The Lillys had bought it and presented 382.74 of the 487 acres to the town for conservation, having carved out pieces for Falmouth Hospital, Falmouth Nursing Association, Cape Cod Conservatory and Falmouth Sports Center. They gave another parcel in 1985 to Falmouth Academy for a school campus. (Margaret Hough Russell, "Parks and Open Space," *The Book of Falmouth*, pp. 138-139)

*George Moses gives some background for Mr. Lilly's generosity:*

After five years [in Indianapolis as executive secretary of the Lilly Endowment, Inc., a philanthropic organization dedicated to religious, educational, and community service] of examining literally thousands of requests for funds and trying to spend them in the wisest possible ways, Joe Lilly again reversed the advice of Horace Greeley and went East, still a young man. For a while he lived around the Boston area, but he kept hearing the call of the Cape.



Snow-caked dogs pause, panting from their exertions in the deep snow. Photo by Janet Chalmers.



Early morning skiers usually take advantage of new snow on the trails before hikers and dog walkers add their footsteps. Photo by Paul Ferris Smith.

To thousands of second and third generations of summer people, Cape Cod is home. It's not just a place where they can beat the heat or meet the elite or whatever....To many of those brought up on the Cape summer or year-round, those memories plus the rare combination of New England countryside and sparkling seaside are irresistible, in memory and in fact.

Joe Lilly is one of those many. He succumbed to the irresistible and returned to Falmouth, not just for summers as he had been doing, but for good. (Moses, pp. 323-324)

Available to all, for free, are miles of old Beebe carriage trails that have been cleaned out over the last two years to enable fire equipment to get into the woods, if and when (heaven forbid) it should become necessary. These same trails - smooth and wide, shaded and cool - are open to the public for nature walks. In fact, the whole woods is open to everyone, young and old. There are, however, certain restric-

tions written into the Lillys' deed to the town for the protection of the woods. (p. 329)

...Falmouth - not by law but by deed - will allow no fires, camping, or public entertainment in the Beebe Woods. Hunting and trapping are out, as are gasoline-powered vehicles. Many old-time Cape Cod deeds contained this written guarantee: "The grantor covenants with the grantee that the grantee shall have quiet enjoyment of the land."

The Lillys and the town - supported by trained conservation officers - are making sure that Falmouth residents and the town's visitors and guests will have quiet enjoyment of the land - now and forevermore. (p. 333)

*In 1989, Dr. George H.A. Clowes, Jr. and his brother, Allen W. Clowes, both long-time Woods Hole summer residents, donated an additional 10.21 acres of conservation land abutting the Punch Bowl to the Town of Falmouth, sparing the shores of the pristine kettle pond from development. The donated parcel was part of 24.33 acres acquired by Dr. George H.A. Clowes, Sr. Long known for their philanthropy, the Clowes family were benefactors of the Falmouth Hospital.*

*And so to the present. Beebe Woods is an astonishing, generous, wonderful gift to the town. It is astonishing that Beebe Woods lasted intact long enough to become a gift. It was extraordinarily generous of Josiah and Josephine Lilly to give Beebe Woods to the town "for conservation and quiet enjoyment." It is wonderful to see the number of people who do enjoy the Beebe Woods.*

*In all seasons and almost all weather there are walkers, dog walkers, joggers, mycologists, naturalists, nature lovers, poets, photographers, swimmers and cross-country skiers. Here is one last scene from the heart of Beebe Woods to close our story:*

The trail to the Punch Bowl drops almost 60 feet down the steep slopes above the pond. This would be "Deep Pond" indeed if the water rose that high, but a valley to the northwest would drain water into Little Sippewissett Marsh if the pond rose more than 10 feet. The peat-brown water in the pond is usually still because of the protection of the hills. When the Swamp Azalea is in bloom its heady fragrance fills the valley. Red Maples, Tupelos, and Highbush Blueberries turn brilliant red in late summer and illuminate the pond doubly - once on shore and again

in the reflections. In midsummer Painted Turtles sun on logs, and dragonflies snatch mosquitoes from the air above the water. This is a favorite local swimming spot. Barking, joyous shouts, and vigorous splashing often banish the warier pond creatures on warm summer afternoons. (Schwarzman, p. 202)

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Black dog enjoys retrieving stick again and again. Photo by Janet Chalmers.