Mail Order Houses

By Judith G. Stetson

Mail order houses captured the imaginations of thousands of Americans in the early 20th century. People were excited about the new Machine Age that applied powerful tools to the forests and precise tools to the mills. They were impressed by the new Scientific Principles that brought rational design to house plans and efficient production methods to house construction. They were enthusiastic about the Industrial Age that brought reliable, low cost housing to the market. And they eagerly read the mail order catalogs filled with enticing advertisements. Affordable housing was on sale at market rates and everyone profited.

Campbell House, 7 Brooks Road, Woods Hole. Photo by Janet Chalmers.

Mail order houses were also called prefab houses, preassembled houses, portable houses, kit houses, precut houses, ready cut houses, and sectional houses. They were also often known by their company name: a Hodgson, a Montgomery Ward, an Aladdin, a Sears Roebuck.

Lumber was cut at the mill to the measurements of a specific house plan and each piece was numbered for easy assembly on site. When Homasote and other composite wall panels were manufactured in the '30s, whole sections would be shipped by rail or truck. Sears Roebuck designed its house materials to fit into two box cars. Montgomery Ward advertised the cost their customers saved by skipping the jobber, the local lumberyard, and even the local carpenter because lower paid day laborers could easily follow their blueprints.

Left out of the balance sheets of the time was the enormous "subsidy" provided by the Western forests that were leveled to provide the wood for these houses, wood of such high quality that Aladdin, based in a booming lumber town, promised to pay its customers one dollar for every knot they found in their lumber. By the 1950s and '60s, in contrast, "Knotty Pine" had become the new fashion in wood paneling, presumably because the original forests were gone and lumber had to be cut from second or third growth trees. But the bonanza had lasted for forty years, years that on Cape Cod included the slow growth of Falmouth and the more rapid growth of the Marine Biological Laboratory.

The MBL, established in Woods Hole in 1888, was the first institution in Falmouth to recognize that its long term success depended on its ability to provide affordable housing. In fact the MBL had been short of housing from its very earliest days. The following story is recounted in Vol. 2 Number 2 of the *Spritsail.* It is about Cornelia Maria Clapp, a pioneering sci-

entist and one of the foremost zoologists in the country. She had studied at the Anderson School of Natural History on Penikese Island in the mid-1870s, as had Charles Otis Whitman. She was one of the first applicants accepted at the new laboratory in Woods Hole under Dr. Whitman, its first director.

"When she arrived at the MBL on July 10, 1888, she assumed she was on time for the session. But when she made her way to the laboratory she found only carpenters, still putting the finishing touches on the laboratory building. Whitman, she was told, was delayed, probably due to family illness, and no one else had yet arrived.

"She soon learned that no arrangements had been made for her room or board, so she quickly searched Woods Hole for a place to stay. She finally found a room at Mrs. Hatch's house on Little Harbor and was told of an eating establishment at the railroad station."

Housing problems persisted as the MBL thrived and grew. In his 1911 report, then MBL Director Frank R. Lillie referred to overcrowding in the village rentals and the number of workers at the Laboratory who were buying their own houses for summer use. In 1912 he added, "The growth of the Laboratory in numbers and the yearly purchase of houses in Woods' Hole by members of the Laboratory have combined to reduce the living accommodations in Woods Hole for transient workers at the Laboratory below the margin of safety. There is no doubt that if we have even a slight increase of numbers another year some will be unable to secure rooms in the village, and the price of available rooms will become excessive... Some emergency provision must be made for the summer of 1913, and at the same time we must look beyond this to the necessity of more satisfactory and permanent provision. We cannot expect that the villagers will take care of any increase, because they find it more profitable to rent their houses to families than rooms to detached individuals." There were 82 investigators in 1911 and 122 in 1913. They taught 65 students in 1911; by 1914, there were 89 students at the MBL.

In 1917 the director called for "extra dormitory space for students, and ... the need for cottages for the families of investigators, or of land on which such cottages could be placed. Provision has also been made for building sites for investigators by the purchase of 21 acres of woodland in the Gansett woods immediately joining the Crow Hill region of Woods Hole, in which many of the Laboratory members now have homes, and extending from Quissett Avenue nearly to Buzzards Bay. This piece of land en-

Rickles House (formerly Whiting), 5 Mast Road, Woods Hole. This house was built in 1925 for Phineas Whiting and his wife Anna Rachel who were both research geneticists who worked at MBL for many years. The MBL has recently bought this house back and plans to move it to its own property soon. Photo by Janet Chalmers.

Grosch House (formerly Taft) 53 Mast Road. Photo by Janet Chalmers.

joys perpetual rights in a bathing reservation in a sandy cove of Buzzards Bay immediately adjoining."

Barbara Little has researched the houses and history of this area and comments that there had been an abundance of good craftsmen who built houses, barns, sheds and boats as needed during the first 200 years. The story changed when an influx of scientists without building skills and with little money suddenly needed summer housing. Primitive cottages began to spring up on the edges of the settled village. Oral history says that students put up sleeping tents and a mess tent for meals a little further out, in the Gansett woods.

Barbara Little adds that once the MBL owned the Gansett land, it divided the tract into 63 lots and began selling them to investigators and staff at nominal cost but with the requirement that the lots should only be sold on to other MBL people. Of course there was a quick scramble for these lots. Eighteen houses were put up in that first year.

In 1917 the MBL officially reported on its attempt to address the perennial problem of how to keep affordable housing affordable for later occupants. "[The] director recommends that none of this land be permanently alienated from the Laboratory by outright sale, in order that it may be reserved for the purposes for which it was acquired. He also recommends that none of it be disposed of except to members of the Laboratory unless by vote of the Board of Trustees in each case. Deeds of sale should, therefore, include a claim ensuring ultimate reversion to the Laboratory on equitable terms, and provisions should also be made for long term lease-holds."

The United States entered World War I in April, 1917 and war conditions postponed further development of the Gansett property.

In 1921, the director reported, "We should also erect about ten small bungalows, furnished and equipped for light housekeeping, on the Gansett tract, to accommodate some of our married members who can not now find reasonably priced and suitable accommodations for their families. About $75,000.00 is needed for these purposes. The rental would furnish an addition to the income of the Laboratory, though it could not be expected to yield a high rate of return on the investment."

Kempton House, 10 Hyatt Road, Woods Hole. Photo by Janet Chalmers.

As it turned out, the MBL's capital investment in affordable housing could not be sustained on rental income. Development costs had to be recouped by permitting "outright sale" of some of the lots.

In 1923 the director reported, "The Gansett Property - The sale of lots in the Gansett tract proceeded rapidly in 1923. By the end of the year the amounts due on sales were sufficient to pay off the remaining mortgage indebtedness amounting to $8,182.01, and to complete the grading of the roads. There remained then unsold eleven lots, two reserved for laboratory purposes and two undivided parcels." The Executive committee withdrew these from sale pending a new policy "...to ensure the interest of the Laboratory in its perpetual control of at least a portion of the tract..."

The summer woods filled with pioneering researchers living in small houses. Professor Samuel Mast, MBL 1906-47, bought Lot #62 on Mast Road, later inherited by his daughters. His son-in-law, John E. Buck, has researched the deeds in the Gansett woods and prepared a synopsis of the careers of the MBL investigators and their students who bought the lots. Professors Merkel Jacobs, Phineas Whiting, and

Architectural Forum

In December, 1942, the Architectural forum began a series of articles describing the new technologies and methods that was printed as a book, "A History of Prefabrication" in 1944. Brief excerpts follow.

In place of the old post and girder support for wood houses or the solid load bearing masonry wall support for houses erected brick by brick, a unit-formula for the structural support of the house began to gain acceptance. Under this formula, closely spaced columns or posts that came to be known as studs were erected, using standard wood pieces placed at regular intervals to form a frame that supported the structures.

...With the introduction of mechanical equipment for the home - including plumbing, heating and electric service - the space between the wall surfaces in the frame of this structure was particularly adaptable to the installation of the piping, ducts and wiring for such equipment. And, with the use of special insulating materials for temperature control which has come to the fore more recently, the same space has been used for its applications, varying the former practice of depending upon wall thickness for this control.

The most efficient method of providing a conventional floor plan within a low cost house has been studied. From this study, combined with the work of other agencies, has come the development of the single story, 24 x 28 ft. house which was to become, to a large degree, standard in prefabrication. Currently in the field of the floor plan, a complete and overall study of family living habits, as the basis for a more intelligent planning, has been undertaken. The one-story, two bedroom unit of so-called "Cape Cod" design which has become the standard of recent conventional construction has also become the typical model of most prefabricators.

Helen Taft all chose to put Hodgson Portables on their property.

In 1925, the director commented that, "The supply of lots in the Gansett property is approaching exhaustion; and the demand for real estate on the Cape is sending the price of land up very rapidly." By 1927, families of laboratory workers owned 58 houses in Woods Hole of which nineteen were in the Gansett tract. Building continued through the '30s, stopped during World War II, then picked up again.

In 1946 the Atwood family put a Hodgson House on their Gansett lot on Brooks Road. Barbara Atwood remembers that it took just two days for her husband, Kim, and his brother, with the help of the paid hands from the Hodgson Company, to put the sections together. Kim and Barbara moved right in with their two babies and a housekeeper. Barbara recalls the yard being just pebbles that first summer, but the fact that they had the only indoor shower in the Gansett woods made for fine sociability with their neighbors who dropped by for showers as often as for coffee or tea and a chat. In 1954 their Hodgson idyll ended with a move next door to a larger house. The Hodgson house was eventually taken down by later owners.

Coincidentally, another Woods Hole "Hodgson idyll" began in 1954.

"The Ark," pre-roof lift, Bar Neck Road, Woods Hole. Courtesy Eleanor Bronson-Hodge.

A Hurricane-proof Hodgson Portable at 69 Bar Neck Road, Woods Hole

by Eleanor D. Bronson-Hodge

When I was a teenager, my family rented a summer house in Woods Hole at the corner of Gosnold and Bar Neck Roads. Situated on the strip of land leading to Penzance Point, it looked out to Great Harbor in front and Buzzards Bay in back, beachfront on both sides, an altogether wondrous site.

We loved that house and were overjoyed when the property was put on the market by Harvard Professor Hector Hughes. My father, Fred Harold Daniels, quickly made an offer which was accepted. The closing was set for the 22nd of September, 1938.

On the 21st day of that September, a major storm, to go down in history as the Hurricane of 1938, raged through the town at full force, laying waste to all in its path. The Hughes house did not escape: the west foundation was undermined and the interior, awash in three feet of water, was devastated.

What to do? Withdraw from the sales agreement? Honor it? The deal went through. My father, noble man that he was, split the restoration costs.

Thus my parents became owners of "In Between," named for its unique location. There was, however, a drawback to this prime site: it was vulnerable. A narrow waterway used to separate Penzance Point (then Long Neck) from the village, perhaps dug to provide storm surge relief, like an overflow valve?When the Pacific Guano Company was established on Long Neck in 1863, the channel was filled in for the access road. The breakwater built to anchor this fragile terrain is still partially visible along Bar Neck Road.

Amy Daniels Bronson raises flag, 1964. Courtesy Eleanor Bronson-Hodge.

The years came and went, as did subsequent big blows, for one, the Hurricane of 1944. Again my parents had to cope with a storm's aftermath, a cavernous hole at the west foundation, a flooded interior and beached boats strewn on the lawn.

Then in 1954 along came Hurricane Carol, the first to be given a name. She may well have been the virago who drove my father to action, or perhaps it was Donna or Edna who blew in the next year. Or maybe it was because by now there were all those grandchildren underfoot.... In any event, by 1955 my parents were planning for a second house on the property, a little house, just for them; its address would be 69 Bar Neck Road.

They decided on a prefab, a Hodgson Portable, popular modular of the era. One story, 30' x 36', a simple dwelling with all the essentials, easy to order from E. F. Hodgson Company, and the price was right!

This was, however, no ordinary "portable." Weary of damage control, my father was determined it would be hurricane-proof. Himself an engineer, he designed a veritable fortress with a footprint of concrete poured deep into the ground, then carried three feet up the exterior walls to the highwater mark of the '38 hurricane. A sub-floor of concrete bridged these walls, like an H in cross-section. As a further storm baffle, he added on the north a stone-walled patio shaped like the prow of a boat, this to deflect surge waves from Buzzards Bay, the classic climax of local hurricanes. At the apex he positioned, like a

Author looks down from balcony of The Ark. Courtesy Eleanor Bronson-Hodge.

mast, a radio antenna tower, perfect for flying the Stars and Stripes and/or penants, the hoisting privilege hotly contested by grandchildren.

He named the house "The Ark." Hurricane-proof? To this day, nobody knows! My father longed to test it, often threatening to ride the next one out, but he never had that opportunity.

When I inherited The Ark in 1981, I found it livable and lovable but small. It really needed an upstairs; but where to put a staircase? No space! It was a problem for the professionals.

So in 1982, a Roof Lift! Jung/Brannen/Reese, Boston architects, and C. H. Newton, Falmouth build-

The Hodgson Sectional House

A View from the 1940s, Including the Arrival of Cars and Vacation Homes

Paul H. Tedesco, president of the Dover Historical Society, wrote to the Woods Hole Historical Collection in 2001 asking for local information about "Hodgson Portable Houses" and including the following information:

"In 1892 Ernest Hodgson developed a system to make chicken brooders, poultry sheds, incubators, and small animal and storage buildings easier. In 1902 he built a summer home for a friend, adapting his system to building houses. By 1907-1908 he was erecting model houses in what was called Brewster Park on the Cape. Today there are a number of these houses still in the park and being used.

"The major advertising medium for the "Portable Houses" was the various catalogs that Hodgson published. It was his practice to show actual homes in real settings. I am enclosing copies of several pages from a 1928 catalog which show homes built near or in your area. I have also included a copy of how the system works."

Page 10 of that 1928 catalog showed a picture of Cottage 2868 at Waquoit Bay, Mass. On page 21, under the heading: Little Harbor Farm, there is a quote from G. G. Whitney of Woods Hole, Mass. "The fact that we are considering a fourth cottage speaks for itself, and assures you that we are thoroughly satisfied with the buildings. The first one has been in use for five years and remains in perfect condition."

Another satisfied customer is quoted on page 24 of the 1928 catalog under the heading: At Falmouth (Cape Cod), Mass. "Will you please send me one of your new catalogs? We are hoping within the next year or two to put an addition to our house, No. 2325, which we bought from you nine years ago. Our house is still as sound as the day we got it and we are very proud of it." Marion Thayer Waldo, Kansas City, Mo.

This dramatic storm story is quoted from Richard K. Hawes, partner in a Fall River law firm: "After occupying this house from the middle of May to the middle of October for three successive seasons, I can state that it has been absolutely successful, and that its arrangements have been ideal. It has withstood many severe storms, particularly the great hurricane of August 26, 1924, when the sea repeatedly broke over the wall in front of the

continued on next page

ers, redesigned The Ark, opening up the first floor and adding a cantilevered staircase to a new master suite. For finishing touches, they added a graceful balcony on the front facade and a top deck out back, prow-shaped, of course, with views to forever.

I have spent more than twenty summers in The Ark, which now belongs to my children. The little house is a delight to look at and often attracts the eyes of strollers on their way out to Penzance Point. Sometimes they stop for a bit and admire it. Do they ever suspect that this house-by-the-sea with its picket fence and flower beds, jaunty peaked roof and arched balcony was once a Mail Order Purchase? Would anyone ever suspect it? It seems unlikely....

Hodgson continued

house and rolled underneath the house and burst open the dining room door, and flooded the room of which pictures are enclosed. After the storm subsided and we had dried things up, we found that there was not one single repair to be made to any part of the building."

The Bruce & Sandbank history adds a wider context to the story of the Hodgson Portable House. "With the introduction of the automobile, they undertook the production of sectional garages, and the increased demand for vacation cottages that resulted from the widespread use of cars brought a further increase in their operations. During World War I, Hodgson manufactured a number of special buildings for the Army.

"By 1936 the company was offering, in addition to standard groups of 10 ft. wide cottages for camp use, a varied line of houses for year-round occupancy prefabricated in partially assembled wall, floor and roof sections. Panels were assembled in a variation of conventional wood-frame construction using 2 x 3 in. studs set flatwide on 12 in. centers, and covered with matched boarding applied over a layer of felt without sheathing. Floor panels were framed with conventional joists and furnished in 6 ft. wide sections 12 or 16 ft. long, and prebuilt roof panels were furnished in 6 ft. widths and various lengths according to pitch.

"In erection, a group of 6 ft. sections for sidewalls, floor and ceiling were bolted together on the foundation, following which a second group was assembled and wedge-bolted to the first, and so on. End walls and gable ends were added last, joints in the roof covered with batten strips. An interior finish of any type could be applied at the site but the standard recommended by the company was 1 in. insulation board.

"Unlike many of the experimental systems of prefabrication, the Hodgson system makes no attempt to provide a universal set of panels that can be used to create any plan. Instead, the possibility of variety that is inherent in any group of standardized panels is exploited in a wide variety of standardized units ranging from tiny cottages to houses with several bathrooms, each with a fixed plan and a package price. These are sold directly to the customer, for erection by factory representatives or local labor, primarily on the basis of speedy erection and known quality rather than low cost. Working on this basis, the company has done a considerable business in the eastern seaboard for more than 50 years." [pp. 54-55]

This Hodgson portable house was put up on Old Dock Road, West Falmouth on land bought from the Landers family in 1922 by Harold and Luna Niles. It was shipped to West Falmouth by rail and unloaded at the station onto a wagon, then carried to the site by the water. Mr. Niles was very excited when he heard that his house had arrived.

Another Multigenerational Hodgson Portable House

Photos and captions courtesy of Anne Parker Schmalz and her cousin, Molly Niles Cornell.

Harold and Luna Niles

Trees and shrubs have grown up between the house and the street but the view of the cove is still open and unchanged in over eighty years. Five generations of family have now sat on the porch to enjoy this view.

It is said that the '38 hurricane water came to within one foot of the ceiling. The family retreated to safety up Blacksmith Shop Road. There had been no warning, no time to rescue any furnishings. From then on Mrs. Niles always hung the rugs from the rafters when she closed the cottage on Labor Day.

During World War II the Niles's took rooms in the Inn down the street so that their daughter, Katharine Niles Parker, could bring her three young children and a babysitter to stay in the cottage. They had no car and carried the children on bicycles in wicker seats, fore and aft, or walked everywhere - to Bowerman's Beach twice a day, to the bridge to fish, along the tidal flats, to the point to float scallop shells, and, of course, to West's Store.

Hurricane Carol flooded the cottage again in 1954 and pushed it around a bit, but it was easily put back in order again.

The bedroom wing on the south end of the house had to be rebuilt after an arsonist set fire to it in the 1950s. Fortunately people living on Chapoquoit Island saw the fire and it was put out before further damage could be done. The house has never been changed structurally.

The Oldest and Newest Hodgsons

Grandchildren of Paul and Mary Lou Smith enjoy the dock in front of the Hodgson cottage they spent five summers in. Dorothy Ryder says this is the first of the four Hodgson Portables that G. G. Whitney erected at Little Harbor Farm in Woods Hole in the 1920s, and one of the first ones the company ever made. It was a three bedroom house for his boatman, practically on his dock in Little Harbor. When Mr. Whitney's son inherited the property thirty years later, he invited Francis and Dorothy Ryder to use this Hodgson in the summers - from April to Halloween - for years. There was a pulley in one of the bedrooms used to raise the roof on a hot night. The windows had no locks, not even any sash cords. There were clamps on the sides of the windows to hold them up at a desired height. Dorothy Ryder says it was well designed, spectacularly located, and in fine shape even after all those years. She also said that the other Hodgsons were treated as portable and were moved about on the farm. A distant cousin of hers, Claude Henry, was the Treasurer of the E. F. Hodgson Company and worked in its main office in Dover, Mass. Photo by Jamie Anderson.

This is perhaps the last Hodgson Portable ever built. It is at the end of Scraggy Neck in Cataumet, Mass. and is owned by Edith Stokey, Dorothy Ryder's cousin. It was erected in 1970, just before the company went out of business. Edith Stokey designed the floor plan herself. Her aunt had owned the Stokey-Evans house on Gardiner Road at the edge of Mill Pond in Woods Hole mentioned in the next story by Albert Wilson. When the MBL tore down the old Breakwater Hotel in the '50s and petitioned to build a new dormitory for 200 and a mess hall for 400, with only eight new parking places, it was time to move.

Many early MBL investigators bought lots down nearer the Laboratory. On Gardiner Road at the edge of Mill Pond, the Peebles put up an Aladdin prefab with a startling difference. Albert Wilson grew up in the Peebles house. Here are some of his recollections:

Childhood Memories of Woods Hole

by Albert Wilson

My folks purchased our Aladdin cottage in 1930, when I was 8 years old. Actually, it was *two* identical, single-story Aladdins which its original owners, a pair of creative woman biologists, had set one on top of the other. The result definitely provided more living space than the tiny building lot would otherwise have accommodated, but its boxy, top-heavy shape was not attractive to the eye. The house was located on Gardiner Road, on the very edge of Mill Pond, not more than five feet from the water. The entire structure listed slightly to one side because one of the locust posts, which provided the only foundation, had not been driven solidly enough into the swampy soil. Over the years the tilt worsened, despite occasional efforts at jacking, so that during a meal any spilled peas rolled to one corner of the living room.

There were a number of other cottages along the westerly border of the pond. Nearly all were single-story, probably Aladdins or other prefabs. They were owned mostly by scientists, the location being only a short walk from "the Lab" and the "Mess," and besides, the price for these narrow, low-lying lots was probably right. My folks paid only $2200 for our cottage, which included some odds and ends of furniture, plus a collection of voluminous ladies' bathing costumes left behind in a bureau drawer.

I wish I could recall the names of those two women, whose approach to the design and assembly of this unique cottage so well exemplified both New England imagination and practicality. Except for an inside stairway connecting the two floors, structural changes to the stacked Aladdins had been confined to those considered essential. For example, while the front door of the upper house had been eliminated, the back one was still there and, until we added a portico with a tiny balcony, that door opened onto thin air. Each floor had identical screened porches facing the water. The upper one had cots with straw mattresses to accommodate extra guests. The master bedroom - originally intended as a living room - had its own fireplace directly above the one

Wilson family's double-decker Aladdin cottage, Gardiner Road, Woods Hole, overlooking Mill Pond, July 1933. Courtesy Albert Wilson.

in the room below, a rather elegant touch for a modest cottage. There was a galley kitchen across the back of the first floor with a small electric stove, refrigerator and kerosene-fired hot water heater. Another advantage of this two cottages-in-one structure was the luxury of having bathrooms on each floor, although only the upstairs one had a tub. Some leftover lumber, possibly intended for the now unnecessary second roof, had been used to build an attached 9 ft. x 6 ft. bedroom off the living room. Oddly, this tiny addition was always referred to as "the outhouse," despite the presence of inside plumbing. The cesspool, in fact, was only a few feet from the rear of the house and piped its overflow directly into the pond, as did those of all the other cottages. The effluent nourished the algae which covered much of the water surface around the borders of the pond and, on hot summer days, added its own unpleasant aroma to the air. Understandably, shortly after W.W.II my mother was a leader in the group of local residents whose campaign helped bring a sewer to Woods Hole.

Our neighbors were distinguished scientists. Dr. Cornelia Clapp owned the house on our left and

Master bedroom with fireplace. Courtesy Albert Wilson.

Stairwell to second floor, only structural change to the Wilson's stacked Aladdin cottages. Courtesy Albert Wilson.

Dr. Victor Heilbrun once rented the Schram house on the other side. Dr. Cannan owned a similar cottage just north of Dr. Clapp's until it washed away in the '38 hurricane, while Dr. Tashiro's, just beyond, somehow survived. My mother, a professor at New York Hospital & Cornell Medical School, was a world-recognized expert on the etiology and treatment of Rheumatic Heart Disease. She had an office in the old Botany Building and, later, in Lillie, where she wrote medical books and journal articles during her summer break from teaching. My dad, a general practitioner, whose practice in New York allowed him only short sojourns at the Cape, looked forward to the weekly lectures when he was here, and probably hoped along with my mother that 'the boy' would soak up an interest in science.

Sadly for them, the boy's focus was not on flora or fauna. Forced to attend Science School, I resented every hour away from Dr. Clapp's 12 ft. skiff, which she generously allowed me to appropriate, and the

Indoors featured comfortable spots ideal for quiet reading. Coursesy Albert Wilson.

model sail boats I launched and followed patiently around the pond.

Two other boys had rowboats on the pond. Buddy Silva, whose family lived for the summer in a camp across the pond near the ball park, and Dicky Veeder, who lived in a pond-front house on Millfield St. Both boys were a bit older, with grown-up responsibilities. Dicky crewed for his grandfather, Captain John J. Veeder, on the MBL's *Cayadetta* and Buddy often did handyman work with his father, so their skiffs were tied up most of the time. However, as an "only child" I was accustomed to devising solitary amusements. Each summer, from May until September, I must have rowed a hundred miles up and down the pond. Then Dr. Evans, who lived in the Stokey/Evans house two cottages south of ours, observed my clumsy efforts to sail the skiff with a piece of bed sheet on an oar, and sewed a proper sail of unbleached muslin for my boat, which I set from a bamboo mast in the bow. Lacking a keel or centerboard, the skiff would only sail downwind. So the drill was to row against the usual brisk sou'wester to one end of the pond, unfurl the sail, and steer with an oar from the stern until, far too soon, the other end of the pond was reached. Then, furl the sail, and do it all over again. Ninety percent of my childhood memories take place out-of-doors, although I do recall being confined inside by three-day nor'easters while I lay on the couch in a corner of the living room with a stash of books from the library.

During those carefree years of my childhood the cottage and grounds were being gradually upgraded. The hazardously short distance between the back steps and the edge of the pond was permanently extended another 10 ft. - after two failed attempts - by filling in with truckloads of lightweight cinders before the topsoil, sod and a waterfront border of stone were added. (Two earlier efforts using only heavy soil had sunk without a trace into the underlying muck.) Early on the upstairs bedrooms were enlarged by eliminating the sleeping porch. The kitchen was refitted with a larger stove and refrigerator and a gas hot water heater. Mike Neal, a talented local carpenter, installed a heavy beam spanning the living room which eliminated a dividing wall and created a large living/dining area with an attractive new stairway in one corner. I loved to jump up and chin my-

Dr. May Wilson and her son Albert enjoy a quiet moment in their garden, July 1933. Courtesy Albert Wilson.

self on the beam, probably because Mother invariably lost her usual common sense and would beg me to stop before I "pulled the roof down."

By age 11, my circle of summer life expanded beyond Mill Pond and the tiny cottages lining it. There were tennis lessons from "Miss Rudd" on the Rudd's tennis court, fishing for scup and tautog from the Fisheries and *Cayadetta* docks instead of catching eels and netting blue crabs in the pond. I no longer came in for lunch every day smeared and reeking with pond muck and Mother and Dr. Clapp never again groped with rakes and nets for my fisherman's boots that I'd left stuck in the mud.

Young Albert pulls hard at the oars of Dr. Clapp's 12 foot skiff. Courtesy Albert Wilson.

Formal sailing lessons began in Comstock and Vicky Glaser's blue and white polka dot Knockabout, *Porpoise*. The reactivated Woods Hole Yacht Club sailed out of the Frost Boathouse located where the Penzance Point gatehouse now stands. In 1935 the club completed its own building and docks and a year later I assumed command of an ancient Beetle cat which my folks had rented from Charlie Eldred at Quissett. The rent was $75 for the entire summer, including a mooring in Great Harbor. The following year I was upgraded to a rented Knockabout - $150 this time - and finally in '38 there was a Knockabout of my very own, unimaginatively named *Winsome*. Thereafter, the stair railings in the cottage living room were invariably draped with her canvas racing sails spread out to dry.

In September, 1938, when the Great Hurricane struck, our cottage was already closed for the winter, but wooden shutters were no obstacle to the flood. During the height of the storm the rising water of Buzzards Bay burst across Gardiner Road, washed Dr. Cannan's house across Mill Pond, and submerged the lower floors of the remaining cottages. When Mother made her way to Woods Hole after the water had subsided her scientist's eye noted that ours was clearly the lowest property in the neighborhood since everyone else's loose lawn furniture had collected there as the water drained away. Once inside the cottage she found our living room furnishings were a stinking mud and water-soaked mess, so she simply dragged everything outside and hosed out the Aladdin's all wood interior as if it were a boat. Of course most of the furnishings and all of the kitchen appliances and electrical wiring had to be replaced.

Just three years later, the country was at war and suddenly, without transition, childhood and adolescent priorities evaporated. The boat was sold and year-around college classes took over. Worried parents shared their concerns with one another on a less-crowded yacht club porch. I was in the Air Force.

Only a few years away from building balsa models I was learning to fly a fighter plane. There was one short leave at the cottage with none of my friends in town and then, overseas.

When I came back to Woods Hole in '46 I walked down Bar Neck Road towards the yacht club trying to decompress, hoping to slip back into a former life. As I passed the Crowell Cottage, Prince Crowell was deeply engrossed in one of his typical engineering projects, trying with the help of planks, rollers and hauling tackle to single-handedly maneuver his Knockabout out of the garage and down to the water. Deep in concentration and oblivious to my three-year absence, he said, "Just in time, Albert, grab that plank."

Mill Pond side of Wilson cottage. Courtesy Albert Wilson.

The Aladdin Company, founded in 1905, originated its Readi-Cut System of Construction. It compared this system to the invention of carefully engineered, standardized parts used to build the first skyscrapers. "Bear in mind that when you buy an Aladdin house that the foundation sill, floor joists, the sub flooring, the regular tongued and grooved flooring, the studding, the wall sheathing, the roof sheathing, the steps, the stairs, all porch framing, is *readi-cut,* ready to nail into place.

The Aladdin Company, like Montgomery Ward and Sears Roebuck, eliminated middlemen, offering its mail order customers well designed houses in a wide range of styles and prices to be shipped directly from its own mills.

Aladdin's "Dollar-A-Knot Guaranty" was a feature of its 1917 catalog: The "Good-enough" lumber grades, the "Anything-will-do" grades and the multitudes of evasive substitutions for Clear Knotless lumber have been shown up. You cannot be expected to fathom the intricacies of lumber associations' manual of grading rules; how many circles, hearts, rings and barks make a good log, nor how many knots, spots, pitch pockets or worm holes there will be to a board. There are none of these defects in your dollar, and there should be none in what you trade your dollar for.

The company won a medal at the 1915 Panama-Pacific International Exposition for its model cottage which it produced and erected for Uncle Sam. Its 1917 catalog offers "Complete houses shipped direct from our mills in Michigan, Louisiana, Oregon, Florida, U.S.A. and Toronto, Ottawa and Vancouver, Canada."

This Sears Roebuck house belonging to William K. and Winnie Mackey at 17 Gosnold Street in Woods Hole was built in 1920. Photo by Janet Chalmers.

In a typical Sears Roebuck house, all of the lumber was furnished cut to length and notched to be fitted together by the local contractor at the site. Detailed plans were furnished, and each piece was numbered on the plans, with a corresponding number stamped on the piece itself. Precut 2 x 4 studs to be erected on 16 in. centers were furnished, together with precut joists and precut, prenotched rafters sized according to span and also set on 16 in. centers. Windows and doors were preassembled with trim precut. Shiplap sheathing and cypress, redwood or red cedar siding was furnished precut to be nailed in place at the site over building paper. Roof shingles and lath for a plaster interior finish were included. [pp. 56-57]

The National Trust Library offers these tips to tell if a house was a kit house by Sears Roebuck: Sears numbered the framing lumber at the factory for assembly at the construction site. The basement and the attic are good places to check. Also, the Sears logo might be seen on doorknobs, hinges, and miscellaneous hardware. Another tip is to see if there are 4 ft. long double joists in the basement, an element that added to the structural strength of the well built prefabs, and to their longevity. Sears houses were often built in groups. Neighbors might know if there are other Sears houses in the area.

"Sears sold a high-grade kit called the Honor-Bilt, a lower grade called Standard Built and sectional cottages that could be built in a day. In Honor-Bilt homes, studs and rafters were to be spaced more closely - 14 3/8 inches - than most house plans required, and the lumber for framing, sheathing and trim was a combination of cypress, cedar, oak, maple and yellow pine."

Quoted from SouthCoast Today www.fisherrocha.com

Professor Edwin Conklin erected this 1890 Sears Roebuck Kit House on Crow Hill above the MBL. He was told, "It will never stand up," according to Rachel Cox, the current owner. Professor Conklin used the house until 1910 when it became the guest house of his larger new home nearby. The workers who are renovating it now declare it is in fine shape, "it is a collector's item and it will outlive us all." Photo by Janet Chalmers.

Woods Hole was not the only part of Falmouth that tried the new catalog houses in the 1920s. Most of Sippewissett and Saconessett Hills had been in the Moore, Gifford and Bowerman families since the original William Gifford, a Quaker of Sandwich, had purchased his first 40 acres of upland at Sippewissett from Job Nootenko on July 24, 1677. Florence Moore was a descendant of these old families. She grew up in the big house that the Stommels have owned since 1950 near the intersection of Palmer Avenue and Sippewissett Road.

Florence Moore married Mr. Alfred M. Gay, a pharmacist in Red Bank, N.J. When he retired, they ordered a Montgomery Ward catalog house and had it assembled on fifty acres off Palmer Avenue that Florence Gay bought from Albert S. Bowerman in 1923.

In 1925, Florence I. Gay was the supervisor of primary grades and principal of the Village School and earned $2000. In May 1936 she became Massachusetts State Supervisor of Elementary Education. Margaret A. Mullen was appointed Principal of the Village School in her place. Mr. Gay died in 1949.

In the 1960s, longtime friends, Howard and Marion Barrows, purchased the home and the fifty acres of land. Mrs. Gay lived with them until her death in 1972. After Mr. Barrows' death Mrs. Barrows sold the house and four acres of land to Dwight and Marianne Potter in 1977; they later sold to the Clearys. The remainder of the 50 acres was purchased by a group of a dozen people who subdivided it into large lots, leaving about 15 acres of undeveloped open space.

The Wardway "Woodlawn" design has been enlarged with gabled dormers and expansive deck. Photo by Janet Chalmers.

Charles and Mimi Cleary, the current owners of the old Montgomery Ward house, have the original blueprints, now soft and flexible, as well as several installation alterations drawn on brown paper that has become brittle with age.

Undated blueprints show that the owners decided to add a gable dormer to the front of the Wardway "Woodlawn" design and a shed dormer on the back. The basement plan shows both an old fashioned "cold storage" space (a dirt floored root cellar for storing potatoes and turnips, etc.) to be excavated under the porch and a large open space under the house with the modern label, "Garage."

Shed dormer on rear of Charles and Mimi Cleary's house at the corner of Palmer Avenue and Drumlin Road is one of many alterations to original Montgomery Ward house. Photo by Janet Chalmers.

The blueprints are professionally detailed. The attic floor framing plan is the most specific: "Note: Double Joists are directly under rafter studs as shown on rafter plan" "2 x 4 plate well nailed to 2 x 12 beam" "These 4 joists to be well nailed together - they are to support studs under valley rafters" Other instructions appear on other plans: "Note - All house joists 2" x 10" - 16" o.c. except as noted" "Porch floor joists - 2" x 6" - 24 o.c." "1" x 6" sheathing" "cased column built on the job." The "Stud Schedule" identified the 98 studs supplied for the exterior walls and the 126 for the interior walls; all were 2" x 4"s and all but seven came with Bottom Plates of appropriate thickness. A few changes are marked on the blueprints in yel-

low pencil: "Porch Step Material is furnished 'not cut'. Not cut material is furnished for rear porch step Front porch step to be wood and similar to rear steps."

At some point, one owner apparently wanted to add steam heat to the house; a steam boiler is penciled in on the blueprint next to the ash pit, as is a new coal bin. This plan was not modified to show any heat going up to the added dormers. There is a blueprint for a Windsor Systems water system, dated May 11, 1928. It shows water pipes leading to the kitchen and bathroom on the first floor with two roof vents coming through the attic rafters, but no cesspool to receive outgoing wastewater. Municipal water would have been available from Long Pond via the West Falmouth standpipe by 1928.

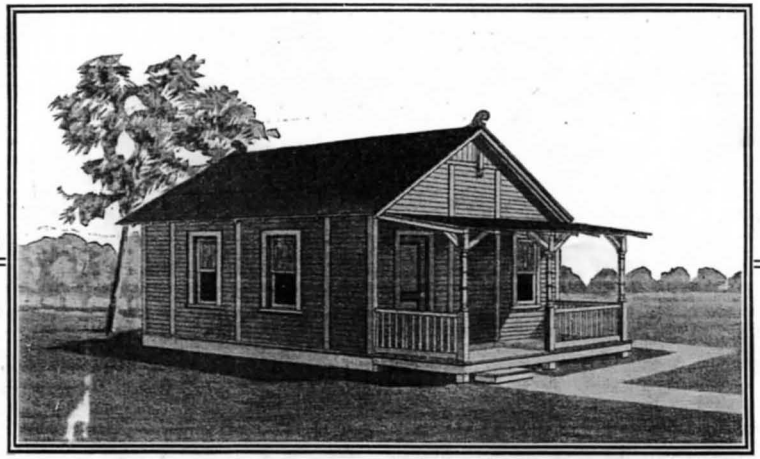
No piping diagrams survive, but the Gays would not have bought Montgomery Ward's optional "Acetylene Lighting System." Electricity had come to Falmouth in 1909, as described in Spritsail, Vol. 3 #2, and knob-and-tube wiring was surely added, perhaps by David Quinn, manager of Eastern Electric Co. in Falmouth who advertised "Electric wiring securely and neatly installed" in The Enterprise.

Mr. and Mrs. Cleary have done a lot of work on their Montgomery Ward house and it is now a very pleasant place indeed. Throughout their refurbishing they were impressed with the quality of the original building. Wardway houses were well designed and well built with high quality materials. Buyers got their money's worth, as promised.

World War II brought a huge demand for instant army housing from the US government, with an added requirement that the houses be 'demountable' for easy relocation. The private housing market vanished. A few W.W.II structures still stand in Falmouth, trucked off from Camp Edwards to enter civilian life as houses or sheds.

The end of the war and the new GI mortgage subsidies brought another surge of demand for houses. New companies and new materials appeared, and Mr. Levit began to turn the potato fields of Long Island into Levittown.

Renovations continue at the Cleary's Montgomery Ward house. Photo by Janet Chalmers.



Ready Made House

No. 300

Price $218.00

A very neat and tasteful three room house ready to put together and live in the day after it is received. A fair sized bedroom, a kitchen large enough for cooking and eating purposes, and a good sized living room make up a convenient floor layout, while the exterior has a pleasing appearance that is brought out more strikingly when the house is placed in its setting.

IMPORTANT

Ready Made Houses require no tools except a hammer and wrench. They are made in sections, assembled at the factory to see that they fit perfectly. We furnish full directions for setting up, so that you can do the work yourself with the help of a handy man.

Floor Plan

SPECIFICATIONS

Size, exclusive of porch, 16 feet by 19 feet 4 inches.

Doors—Front door, 2 feet 6 inches by 6 feet 6 inches. Thickness, 1¾ inches. Glazed double strength. Rear door and inside doors four panel, Yellow Pine.

Windows—Six windows, size 24x24 inches, two lights. Top sash divided lights.

Frames—Best quality, built in place.

Foundation—Set on Cedar posts. Diameter of post, 6 inches. Length, 2 feet, 6 inches. Furnished with house.

Sills—2x6 doubled, No. 1 Yellow Pine.

Floor Joists—2x6 inch, No. 1 Yellow Pine. Hung in patent steel hangers.

Flooring—Thirteen-sixteenths inch thick and 3¼ inch face. No. 1 Y. P. dressed and matched.

Wall Sections—Made of thirteen-sixteenths inch, No. 1 Yellow Pine drop siding, dressed both sides, nailed on 2x2 No. 1 Yellow Pine studs, 8 feet high.

Partition Walls—Made of ⅜ inch No. 1 Yellow Pine ceiling, beaded one side, dressed smooth other side, on 2x2 studs, 8 feet high.

Roof Rafters—2x3 No. 1 Yellow Pine, surfaced.

Roof Boards—No. 1 Yellow Pine, dressed under side.

Roofing—Best quality prepared roofing.

Hardware—All necessary hardware fitted in place. Galvanized iron chimney furnished.

Painting—Entire exterior painted one coat heavy gray paint.

Ready Made House No. 300, complete, as described above. Shipping weight, about, 7100 pounds. Price, $218.00.

With partitions to reach to roof. Shipping weight, about 7300 pounds. Price, $222.00.

If enough Achilles Wall Board and accessories to line walls and ceilings are desired, add extra, $25.00.

READY MADE HOUSES SHIPPED ONLY FROM ST. LOUIS

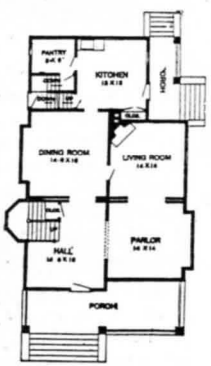
Low and high end houses featured in the Montgomery Ward catalog "From the collections of Henry Ford Museum & Greenfield Village Research Center."

HOME No. 124

$1,685.00
HOME No. 124

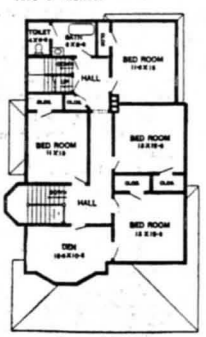
For $1,685.00 we will furnish the material to build this ten room home, consisting of all lumber, lath, shingles, flooring, finishing lumber, doors, windows, frames, trim, china closet, mantel and grate, medicine case, sash weights, hardware, building paper, pipe and gutter, paint and varnish. We absolutely guarantee the material we furnish to be sufficient to build the home according to our plans and specifications.

A fine upstanding home that bespeaks prosperity, comfort and the good things in life in full measure. No useless frills to add to the cost, no freak construction; but the expenditure of every dollar has been wisely planned to bring generous returns in all that makes a home desirable. Big from every standpoint except that of cost.



First Floor

Size, exclusive of porches: Width, 30 feet. Length, 47 feet 6 inches.



Second Floor

GENERAL SPECIFICATIONS

Built on a brick foundation, lattice under porches. Double first floors. Outside walls have sheathing and building paper, over which is nailed Clear 3½ inch Cypress siding. All framing material best quality Yellow Pine. Star A Star Cedar shingles. No. 1 lath. Windows glazed "A" quality glass. Excellent grade hardware. Painted two coats best Tower Brand paint outside, your choice of colors, wood filler and varnish for interior. Read full descriptions of each item in our Building Material Catalogue.

By allowing a fair price for labor, brick, cement and plaster, which we do not furnish, this home can be built for about $3,640.00

FIRST FLOOR

Bevel plate front door leads from wide porch into reception hall. To the right through cased opening, is the parlor, with large Argyle cottage window in front and three window square bay on the side. Separated from this room by double sliding doors is a pleasant living-room, with another group of three windows and a handsome mantel and fireplace. To the left of living-room is the dining-room, with another three window s uare bay. Beyond is the kitchen, very conveniently arranged, with sink, china closet, and a large light pantry, from which there is a grade entry and basement stairs. Rear stairs from kitchen to second floor. Rear porch the length of kitchen completes this floor. Yellow Pine trim throughout. Ceilings, 9 feet high.

SECOND FLOOR

Note the arrangement of front stairs in a bay. On second floor there are four bedrooms and bath, all opening from hall. Each room is well lighted and has a closet, and there is a den that could be utilized as a bedroom if desired. Stairs lead to attic. Yellow Pine trim throughout. Ceilings, 8 feet 4 inches high.

BASEMENT

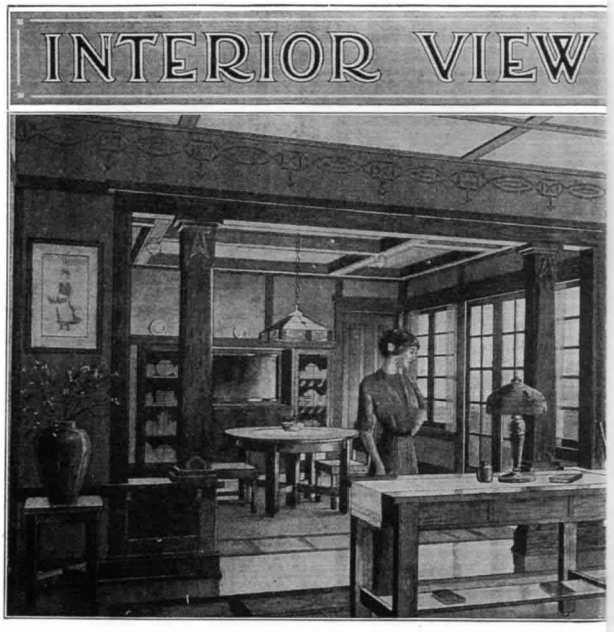
Excavated under entire house. Well lighted by cellar sash. Seven feet to joists

Heating, Plumbing and Lighting

WRITE FOR DETAILED ESTIMATES

Warm Air Heating Plant, complete...$112.50	Plumbing System, complete.....$83.50
Steam Heating Plant, complete..... 247.00	
Hot Water Heating Plant, complete... 285.00	Acetylene Lighting System.....(See Page 79)

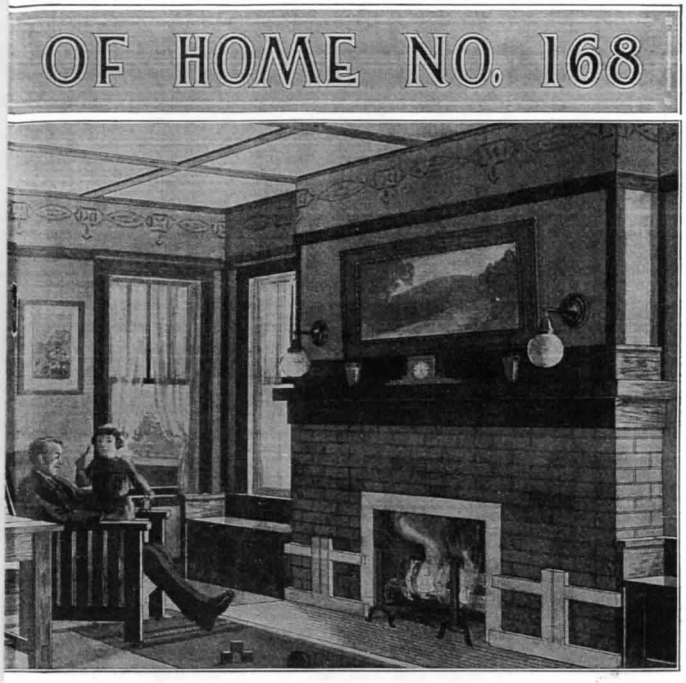
READ OUR FREE PLAN OFFER ON PAGE TWO.



Catalog "From the collections of Henry Ford Museum & Greenfield Village Research Center."

The Montgomery Ward catalog not only offered a wide range of house styles, it assured customers that the plans were flexible, a bathroom could be moved or turned into a pantry; a welcoming vestibule could be eliminated to enlarge the room behind it.

The ad copy often offered advice on location and even on living patterns. Home No. 109, for instance, was described as, "An especially pleasing design for a corner lot in town, and equally desirable for a farm residence, because of the number of bedrooms, and the back stairs, which eliminates the necessity of tracking through the front of the house. A home in which you will be proud to live and entertain your friends."



Biographies

Judith G. Stetson is a resident of Woods Hole who has been on the editorial board of *Spritsail* since it began in 1987 and has served as chairman of that board since 1997. She has written for *Spritsail* previously, most notably "Woods Hole Buys Its Post Office" published in the Summer 1994 issue; "Falmouth's Historic Pumping Station" in the Summer 1998 issue, and most recently, "Beebe Woods: Falmouth's Miracle" a year ago. Mrs. Stetson was also on the editorial boards of *Woods Hole Reflections,* pub. 1983, and *The Book of Falmouth,* pub. 1986, and wrote articles for both books.

Mrs. Stetson spent her childhood summers in a "Hodgson Portable" erected in the late '20s or early '30s for her grandmother at the request of a cousin at Harvard: "Lottie dear, Alfred North Whitehead is coming over from England to teach at Harvard and needs a place to stay for the year. You can put up one of those Hodgson Portable houses behind the tree line on your farm in Milton where you will not have to see it."

Mrs. Stetson's parents moved in when they married in 1935. The Hodgson was unheated except for a coal burning AGA stove in the kitchen. Her mother added first a nursery and then four small bedrooms as the family grew bigger. The house has had some major renovations and remodeling, but it is still there "behind the treeline," still inhabited by Lottie's descendants.

Barbara Chase Little grew up on Prudence Island in Narragansett Bay. She came to Woods Hole in 1937 to study physiology at the MBL, and since then has spent almost every summer there. In 1977 she retired to Woods Hole and became active in the Woods Hole Historical Collection. She has been a board member and president of the board. Currently she is a docent in the Woods Hole Historical Museum and volunteers in the archives. For years she led tours around the village and scientific institutions of Woods Hole.

Eleanor D. Bronson-Hodge has a long association with Falmouth, first as a summer resident in Woods Hole and now as a permanent resident. She is a former book editor in Boston and New York and now serves on the *Spritsail* board. She was editor of *Stamford, Past & Present,* (1976), the Stamford (CT) Bicentennial Commemorative Publication. She is author of two books: *Sojourner, People and Places I have Loved,* (1997), and *Thither and Yon, Travels with a Sketchbook,* (2002). Mrs. Hodge is an active alumna of Smith College, a trustee emerita of Falmouth Academy, and a longtime member of church choirs and community choruses. She has traveled widely; several of her travel accounts have appeared in the *Falmouth Enterprise.*

Albert Wilson spent every summer between 1930 and World War II at his parents' Aladdin cottage on Gardiner Road. Memories of his happy childhood in Woods Hole left him with a determination to return here to live, but the goal was not easily achieved. Six years as a free-lance short story writer were followed by another dozen at New York City advertising agencies before he joined in the founding of Ocean Research Equipment, Inc. in Falmouth. He has lived here year-around since 1967.

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Thanks to oral historians John E. Buck, Rachel Cox, Mimi Cleary, Jean Macdougall, Dorothy Ryder.