

Review of *The Book of Falmouth*

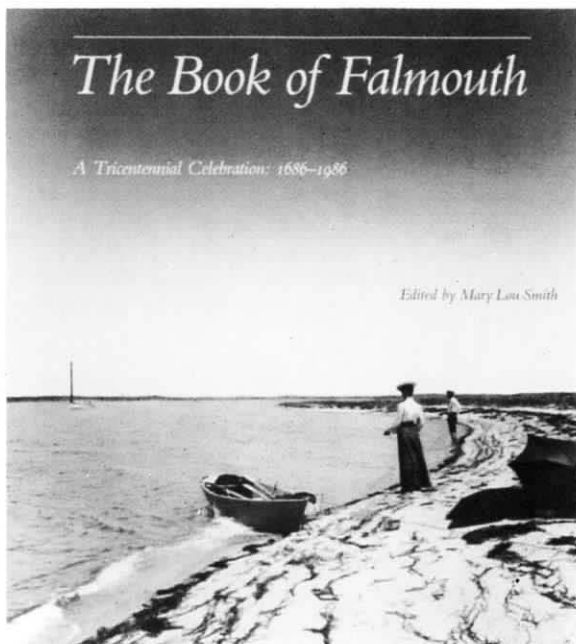
John Talcott Hough

The Book of Falmouth has been more of an event than a book; a small army of volunteers enlisted to become local historians for the celebration of Falmouth's tricentennial and to work industriously for two years in the creation of this wonderful historical mosaic. It is a rich mixture of personal recollection, anecdote, family tradition and neighborhood lore, writings from out of the past, a judicious seasoning of familiar facts from the standard sources.

It is certainly not a conventional town history, but it does begin with a comprehensive overview of the history of Falmouth by Bruce Chalmers which provides the historical context for all the subsequent pieces. His "Retrospect" starts with the present and works backward, a novel but perfectly convenient way of doing it. After all, the river of time is said to run in two directions.

At the end of two, and for some contributors three, years of labor, a very large and handsome volume was produced last year, the year of the tricentennial. *The Book of Falmouth* is heavy, nearly 600 pages long, and is illustrated with photographs of extraordinary interest. Such a collection of old Falmouth photographs has never been put between two covers. Typography and design might well be the envy of any commercial publishing house. In fact, Diane Jaroch, the Hatchville resident who designed the book, is a well-known professional in the field.

Mary Lou Smith is the editor. She had valuable experience in putting together *Woods Hole Reflections* which was published by the Woods Hole Historical Collection in 1983. When she persuaded the Falmouth Historical Commission that a book of history would be an appropriate and lasting tribute to Falmouth on its 300th birthday, she found it useful to borrow the methods and style that had produced the unique characteristics of the Woods Hole book. In both cases this approach has worked well.



The main divisions of the book correspond to the thirteen villages that make up the town of Falmouth. Each section begins with a brief history of its village. There are more than one hundred contributors to the book, some of them authors of more than one piece. They have written of what they know about or about something in which they have particular interest. There are 150 individual headings. No attempt is made to relate them beyond the village grouping, but each piece can stand quite nicely by itself.

Photography is imagery rich in detail, much of the detail unintended. It is often the unintended detail that rewards the later historian. One of my favorites is one that was taken in about 1905 at the Falmouth depot. The train has just discharged a crowd of sum-

mer arrivals, and this photograph, so full of motion and detail, transports us back in time like the fabled time machine. It is almost eerie.

Recollections in *The Book of Falmouth* have a similar quality. They are crowded with small detail, filled with life and movement. They evoke a time now at the far edge of living memory and make you feel the warmth and hear the laughter.

There is no attempt to achieve a unified style or impose an overall perspective. In each piece it is the writer's perspective that arranges events, and this results in some appealing touches. Mary F. Latimer looks back at a time when the famed Dude train passed through North Falmouth. "The summer season Dude Train rarely stopped in North Falmouth, usually only in Cataumet. But one day it did because Norman and Johnny Wright were waving little American flags. The train screeched to a halt; the station agent was appalled; but the conductor, Elmer Avery, bought the boys ice cream." And, of course, the high-toned passengers waited. It is a nice story and says something of the time that would have forever eluded scholars.

There are useful capsule histories in *The Book of Falmouth*, not always discovering anything new, but assembling the facts: about the Falmouth glass factory on Shore Street, about the trotting park in Teaticket, about the airport that no longer exists, about the mushroom plant, about the public parks, about the "company shop" that built farm wagons in Waquoit.

There is some good source material. Shubael Nye's account book, of which we get a generous sampling, could well help some future scholar understand economics on the village scale on old Cape Cod. Edward Butler's diary is a window on the stagecoach days at the time of the Civil War. Bertha Hamblin Boyce is represented with a recollection of old West Fal-

mouth and an excerpt from her *Bertha Goes Whaling*.

The summer colonies along the shore were still in their young years in the youthful recollections that are a fresh and vigorous part of *The Book of Falmouth*.

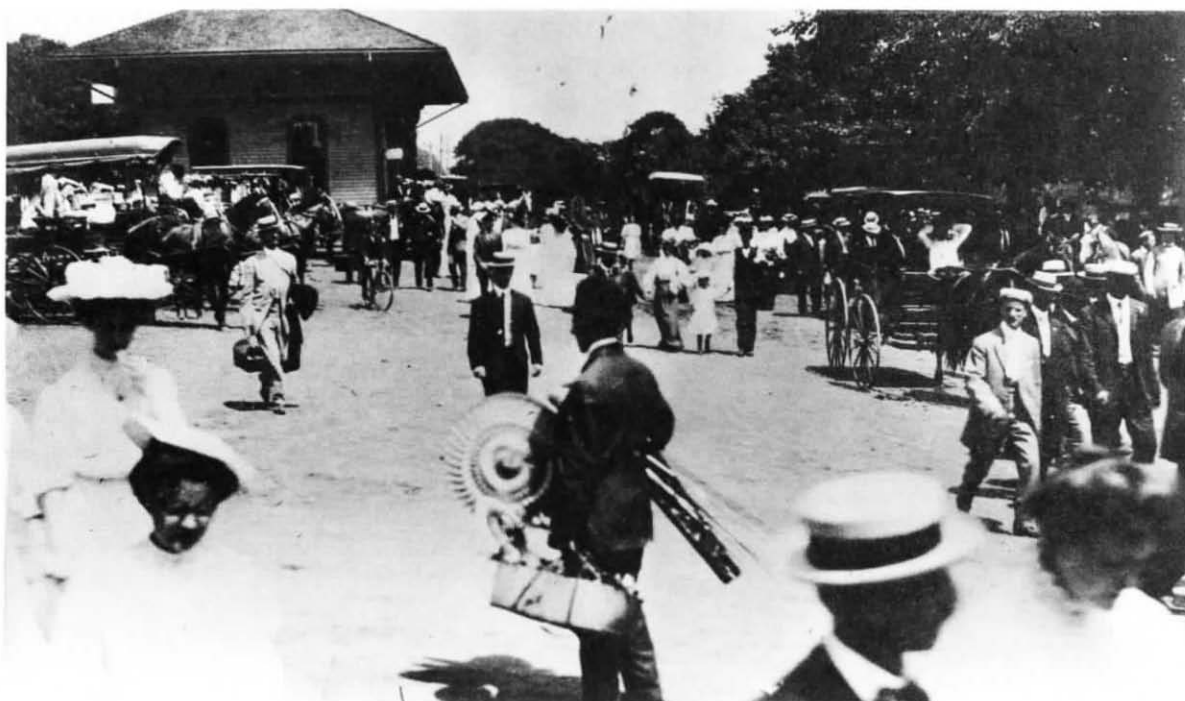
We see these young summer colonies and their social life in rich detail. The view, of course, is nostalgic. How could it be anything else in dealing with distant boyhood and girlhood and an enchanted time and place? It is remembering summer cottages without water and electricity, a simpler life, a slower pace, wholesome pleasures with a pastoral year around community as a backdrop.

"How simple was our summer living in childhood days!" recalls James R. Moor of Davisville. Halcyon, calm and peaceful, describe memory's image for Edgar H. Craig of Falmouth Heights. And we have the same feelings stirring in recollections of Menauhant and Quissett and Megansett and the others.

The young people fished for crabs, and for scup and tautog; they went sailing, they went on excursions to Cottage City, they danced at the Megansett Casino.

"Peddlers still came with blueberries, and the gypsies came selling sweet grass baskets. There was the organ man with his monkey, the scissors grinder ringing his bell and an occasional tinker's cart," recalls Helen Lowry Wyman of Belvidere Plains.

There is an awkwardness in juxtaposing summer colony and the year around community, just as there has often been a certain awkwardness between year around and summer visitor. *The Book of Falmouth* is not interpretative history, but the reader is shown the contrast between doing without running water and electricity during summer months in a seaside cottage, sort of high spirited adventure, and doing



The Falmouth R.R. station in about 1905, showing horse-drawn barges meeting patrons of summer hotels. Courtesy Falmouth Historical Society.

without the same amenities in winter. Growing up on Elm Road, Clarence J. Anderson experienced driven well, wood stove, kerosene lamps and outhouse. He does not look back with fondness on these aspects of a Falmouth boyhood.

"Bundled in heavy clothing, we would stumble out into the snow and down the hill to our driven pipe well with its pitcher pump. Hot water from our tea kettle would thaw out the pitcher pump, and by pumping rapidly without interruption, we would fill our three or four buckets with water. Immediately we had to release the pump before it froze up. Should one fail to do this, there would be no way to get water the next day."

The peddler selling blueberries to a young Helen Lowry was more likely than not a member of a Hatchville or East Falmouth farm family, desperately anxious for any small amount of hard money.

When summer cottages were boarded up the cottagers went back to city houses with central heating. The natives stayed to face winter in heatless houses.

"In the summer time it was a very pleasant place but in winter it was very dreary being so near the water," recalled Amanda Davis at age 90 of her native Davisville. The cold, damp houses of winter and the generally poor diet took their toll after the summer people had left. Tuberculosis was epidemic. When Elizabeth A. Eliot-Smith came to be Falmouth's first visiting nurse, she found caring for tubercular patients a large part of the job. The county hospital at Pocasset had a monthly tuberculosis clinic.

Through a large part of Falmouth's first 300 years, the people of the town were not, generally speaking, well off. Many, for much of that time, were downright poor. There is the evidence of this in *The Book of Falmouth* when one looks carefully. In 1880 Dr. George Faulkner of Jamaica Plain, a summer resident, thought there were not many more than a dozen good incomes in a town of more than 2,000 inhabitants.

Judith Eldred Cooper, writing of her Quissett childhood, recalls, "At an early age we became aware of the class difference between the 'natives' and the 'summer people'. We were the working class."

I recall the barefoot boy of 10 or so making his way to the shore along Mill Road and hearing from an upper window of one of the large summer houses that lined Mill Road a stern father's voice shouting, "I will not have you going out with local yokels!" The 10-year-old recognized that this sweeping appellation would include him if the occasion arose and remembered it, eventually with wry amusement.

The Book of Falmouth, as I have said, does not pretend to interpret the vivid history that it presents, nor should it. It has fulfilled its purpose in collecting and creating all this material.

The compartments into which *The Book of Falmouth* is divided result in some slight duplications. There are two treatments of the Portuguese presence, by Eva Agrawal and by Raleigh Costa. I don't think either does full justice to the subject, although both present good, useful and interesting information.

The fact is that the arrival of the Portuguese-speaking Azoreans, starting around the turn of the century and continuing for 20 to 25 years, was one of the very few real watersheds in Falmouth history. Before 1900, Falmouth was largely a homogeneous community, with customs and institutions that went back with little change to the beginnings. After 1930 Falmouth's was a mixed society, for quite a few years with two languages, two cultures, two distinct streams of memory, custom and tradition. It was a fundamental remaking of the Falmouth community.

Consider these records from the town reports. In 1900 59 births were recorded in Falmouth, 40 of these in families with distinctly old Cape Cod Yankee names. There were five with Portuguese names. In 1930, 136 births were recorded. Nineteen of the old Cape Cod Yankee names were among them; 63 Portuguese.

Eva Agrawal points out that there were, in fact, two immigrations. Azoreans and Cape Verdeans came from different places, were racially different, spoke different languages, sprang from different cultures and traditions, experienced different hardships and different trials. Each is deserving of a full and separate treatment.

One lively aspect of an even earlier Falmouth scene appears in several accounts in *The Book of Falmouth*. "Sometimes on a pleasant day I have counted as many as 80 vessels from east to west as far as you could see," recalled Amanda Davis of

Davisville in 1920 at the age of 90 or thereabouts. In the village history that introduces the Woods Hole section, Jane A. McLaughlin reports that "In 1829, a year in which more than 10,000 vessels were estimated to have passed through the Sound, Nobsque Lighthouse was built." In that era the Sound was almost always filled with sail. Joseph Chase Allen told how, when the wind changed, vessels that had been in anchorage waiting for the change streamed out of Vineyard Haven harbor and Tarpaulin Cove with regatta-like effect. As late as the 1930s coasting schooners passed regularly through the Sound, but in earlier days Vineyard Sound was one of the east coast's busiest ocean thoroughfares. The circumstance of living beside this busy highway must have affected and enhanced the Falmouth experience. A Vineyard elder once told me how, depressed on the occasion of his father's death, he chanced to look out over the Sound and, strangely, saw not a sail in all the broad reach and how more profoundly that depressed him.

It is a little too bad there is in *The Book of Falmouth* no mention of the circus. The circus was in olden days an annual event. Its coming was eagerly looked forward to. It was the lively topic of conversation for weeks afterward. The circus lot for many years was on Scranton Avenue, a broad, open field stretching from Main Street almost to Clinton Avenue. First by train and then by truck the circus came, and much business was neglected on circus day while townsfolk from earliest morning watched the transformation of the empty field into a tented showground. And there was the circus parade through Main Street.

There is a very nice circus story about a Falmouth boy named Abel Razinha who went to the Elizabeth Theater to see a movie called "Saturday Night Kid" with Clara Bow and came out of the movie theater

remembering only the tightrope walker. He went home to Brick Kiln Road, stretched a length of fence wire between two trees in his backyard and began to practice wirewalking. He was 19 in July of 1934 and working as a gardener on the Warbasse place on Penzance Point when Lewis Brothers Circus came to town. The hometown crowd was startled to see Abel, the hometown boy, performing on the high wire at the evening circus performance. He went away with the circus, but word came back to Falmouth of his rising success. He went on to bigger and better circuses and to Midwest county fairs, performing under the name of Martinez Rosina, and he married a trapeze artist from Illinois.

Well, *The Book of Falmouth* is an extraordinary achievement, and it takes its place now among the source books of Falmouth history. These do not yet fill a very large shelf. There are the lectures of Charles W. Jenkins. There are Frederick Freeman's *History of Cape Cod*, and Simeon L. Deyo's successor work, published in 1890. These preserve many records, and we wouldn't know where to start, really, without them.

Theirs is history of Cape Cod largely without women. In the original Freeman there are 762 pages, 700 names in the index. Among the 700 are the names of just five women. Mistress William Bradford made it by falling overboard and drowning, Mary Dyer by her heresy, Priscilla Mullins for figuring in a folk tale, Goodwife Turner by being punished for not attending worship, Alice Freeman by marrying someone important. On the other hand, *The Book of Falmouth* gives women their full due as creators and recorders of history.

Dorothy G. Wayman's, *Suckanesset*, published privately in 1930 under the pen name of Theodate Geoffrey, is more or less a romantic version of familiar history.

George L. Moses added a useful volume with his *Ring Around The Punch Bowl* in 1976, commissioned by Josiah K. Lilly 3rd as a history of the Beebes and their properties and their manorial living in Falmouth.

There is a small collection of smaller works. Helen G. Wise's *In Old Menauhant* was brought out in 1967, Harriet M. J. Sinclair's *Chapoquoit Island* in 1964; Kevin Smith's *The History of Falmouth Heights Through the Years*, in 1982.

We have mentioned *Woods Hole Reflections*, published in 1983.

Anything that anyone could possibly want to know about the University Players is found in Norris Houghton's *But Not Forgotten*, published by William Sloane Associates in 1951.

The Book of Falmouth concludes with a 24 page index of people, places and events, a six page bibliography and an invaluable listing of historic maps, charts, atlases, engineering plans, aerial photographs. Perhaps the most valuable service that can be performed next in the interest of preserving Falmouth history is to incorporate this material into a comprehensive town-wide historical index.

An easy start could be made with "Mail Away" editions of *The Enterprise*, which have been indexed at the Falmouth public library. The historical pieces could be sorted out of that index. There are a good many, most of them the work of the late George A. Hough Jr., and carefully researched. Without attempting to look back, I think right away of his pieces on the coal barges, on the Mashpee woodlot riot—in which Falmouth played a discreditable role, the Woods Hole secession movement, Father Ignatius and the monks of "Monastery Cottage." There are many more. If made readily available, they

would enrich Falmouth's present sense of past history.

Hollis Lovell, recalling old Menauhant for *The Book of Falmouth*, told of the Fourth of July baseball games. Waquoit was Menauhant's chief rival. "I recall a pitcher they had by the name of Hamlen. He was a holy terror to us. With all our practicing, even our better ball players couldn't touch him." This memory was supplemented in a subsequent "idyll" published in *The Enterprise* which centered on Nathaniel Hamlen's large family in Waquoit. "Arthur had," his niece recalls, "a magnificent tenor voice and joined the family singing." (Artie Hamlen was also a considerable baseball player.)

Many others who browse through *The Book of Falmouth* will find their own memories stirred and will make similar connections as they read; many will wish that they had added their recollections to its unique blend of story and history.

The Book of Falmouth, edited by Mary Lou Smith, 1986. Published by the Falmouth Historical Commission, Falmouth, Mass. 582 pp. \$35.00

John T. (Jack) Hough has been observing and recording Falmouth history for 32 years as reporter, editor and publisher of the *Enterprise*, Falmouth's newspaper of record, which has been a Hough family operation for three generations.