

# The Woods Hole Clippers: Filling the Postwar Years With Baseball, Basketball, and Camaraderie

by Deborah Griffin Scanlon

From 1946 to 1951, the 21 members of the Woods Hole Athletic Association met in an upstairs room of the Community Hall to plan their upcoming sporting events. The Woods Hole Clippers baseball team played a full schedule through the summer months, and then it was time for the Clippers' basketball season.

How did a village the size of Woods Hole – the population in 1950 was about 600 – come to have an athletic association and such an active sports program?

"After the Second World War, the soldiers came home, and people wanted to get together," explained Robert W. Griffin, who founded the athletic association with Norman "Nogie" Eldridge, and was its first president. "It was the era before TV, and baseball and basketball games afforded the opportunity to not only play the sports, but for the townspeople to spend evenings together and socialize." *The Falmouth Enterprise* reported, "It has been unauthoritatively said that fishing boats often put in early at Woods Hole in order to be on hand for a Clipper game."

The Woods Hole Athletic Association sought and gained membership in the Falmouth Twilight League baseball association, and since there was no basketball league, organized its own basketball schedule. The members named their team the Clippers, long before the Falmouth schools adopted the nickname. "We just discussed it and decided that this was appropriate for a team representing a Cape Cod seaport village," Mr. Griffin said.



Some of the Woods Hole Clippers got their start in baseball playing for the Woods Hole Yankees. In the early 1930s, Bob Griffin organized the team schedule, and his uncle, T.S. Perry Griffin, drove the team to their games. Photo is at North Falmouth railroad station. Front row from left: Bud Denny, Jackie Quickert, Jimmy Cavanaugh, Eugene Young, Frank Cavanaugh. Middle: Jack Cavanaugh, Richard McKenzie, Leslie Hilton, Jimmy Gifford. Back: John Kittila, Roger Savery, Billy McInnis, and Bob Griffin. Photo courtesy Robert W. Griffin.

The Clippers baseball team played mostly Falmouth teams: Johnny Pena and the Falmouth Giants, the North Falmouth team with its star and former semi-pro player Marshall Douthart, Waquoit, and the Town club. The teams played on hardball diamonds throughout the town, Nye Park in North Falmouth, the Woods Hole ballpark at Bell Tower lane, Falmouth Heights field and Fuller Field, which had been built for football and baseball during the Depression. Mr. Griffin said that Charlie White, town engineer and WPA coordinator, studied Fenway to get the dimensions of Fuller Field correct.

They only played five years, but those were glory days for the Woods Hole Clippers baseball team, based on the news clippings of that time. A headline in *The*

*Cape Cod Standard-Times* read "Sports Program at Woods Hole Attended by 100." The story reported that "Baseball jackets were presented to 16 members of the Woods Hole Clippers baseball team, Falmouth Twilight League champions of 1947, at a sports night program in Community Hall here last night."

The Woods Hole Clippers baseball squad was made up of Woods Hole natives and young men who had other connections with the village. Charlie Vail lived in Waquoit but his sister worked at WHOI. When he came back from college during the summer, he was the team's catcher. Bob MacMillan was in the Coast Guard; Mr. Griffin, the team manager, grew up in Woods Hole and was a civil engineer and land surveyor.

## FALMOUTH TWILIGHT LEAGUE

### FIRST HALF

June:

- 3 Giants vs. Woods Hole, at Falmouth Heights 2-1
- No. Falmouth vs. Waquoit, at No. Falmouth
- 6 Woods Hole vs. No. Falmouth, at Woods Hole 3-5
- Waquoit vs. Town Club, at Falmouth Heights
- 10 Town Club vs. Giants, at Falmouth Heights
- Woods Hole vs. Waquoit, at Woods Hole 4-2
- 13 No. Falmouth vs. Town Club, at No. Falmouth
- Waquoit vs. Giants, at Falmouth Heights
- 17 Giants vs. No. Falmouth, at U.S.O.
- Town Club vs. Woods Hole, at Falmouth Hgts. 2-1
- 19 Woods Hole vs. Giants, at Woods Hole 11-0
- Waquoit vs. No. Falmouth, at Falmouth Hgts.
- 24 No. Falmouth vs. Woods Hole, at No. Falmouth 13-3
- Town Club vs. Waquoit, at Falmouth Heights
- 26 Giants vs. Town Club, at U.S.O.
- Waquoit vs. Woods Hole, at Falmouth Heights 4-0

July:

- 1 Town Club vs. No. Falmouth, at Fal. Heights
- Giants vs. Waquoit, at U.S.O.
- 3 North Falmouth vs. Giants, at No. Falmouth
- Woods Hole vs. Town Club, at Woods Hole 3-3
- 8 Giants vs. Woods Hole, at Falmouth Heights
- No. Falmouth vs. Waquoit, at No. Falmouth
- 11 Woods Hole vs. No. Falmouth, at Woods Hole 11-2
- Waquoit vs. Town Club, at Falmouth Heights
- 15 Town Club vs. Giants, at Falmouth Heights

### SECOND HALF

July:

- 18 No. Falmouth vs. Town Club, at No. Falmouth T.C.
- Waquoit vs. Giants, at Falmouth Heights G.
- 22 Giants vs. No. Falmouth, at U.S.O. 5-0
- Town Club vs. Woods Hole, at Falmouth Hgts. T.C.
- 25 Woods Hole vs. Giants, at Woods Hole 5-2
- Waquoit vs. No. Falmouth, at Falmouth Hgts. W.
- 29 No. Falmouth vs. Woods Hole, at No. Falmouth
- Town Club vs. Waquoit, at Falmouth Heights T.C.
- 31 Giants vs. Town Club, at U.S.O. 3
- Waquoit vs. Woods Hole, at Falmouth Heights W.H.

August:

- 5 Town Club vs. No. Falmouth, at Fal. Heights T.C.
- Giants vs. Waquoit, at U.S.O. G.
- 7 No. Falmouth vs. Giants, at No. Falmouth G.
- Woods Hole vs. Town Club, at Woods Hole T.C.
- 12 Giants vs. Woods Hole, at Falmouth Heights G.F.
- No. Falmouth vs. Waquoit, at No. Falmouth
- 15 Woods Hole vs. No. Falmouth, at Woods Hole
- Waquoit vs. Town Club, at Falmouth Heights
- 19 Town Club vs. Giants, at Falmouth Heights
- Woods Hole vs. Waquoit, at Woods Hole
- 22 No. Falmouth vs. Town Club, at No. Falmouth
- Waquoit vs. Giants, at Falmouth Heights
- 26 Giants vs. No. Falmouth, at U.S.O.
- Town Club vs. Woods Hole, at Fal. Heights
- 29 Woods Hole vs. Waquoit, at Woods Hole

### PLAYOFF GAMES

Schedule to be arranged later.

Twilight League baseball schedule. Clipping courtesy Robert W. Griffin.



The Woods Hole Clippers. Kneeling from left: Noggie Eldridge, Charlie Vail, Jimmy Gifford, Bob MacMillan, and Bob Griffin. Standing: Sam Cahoon Jr., Ellie Eldridge, Jack Cavanaugh, Albert Chase, and Eugene Young. Also on the team were Thure Blomberg, Jim Cavanaugh, Dick Alberts, Warren "Whitey" Witzell, Al Graham, Dave Graham, Don Beers and Eddie Peterson. Photo courtesy Robert W. Griffin.

Other baseball players included Thure Blomberg of Woods Hole, a caretaker; Jimmy Gifford, Mr. Griffin's cousin, worked at WHOI. Whitey Witzell worked at the Fisheries and for Sam Cahoon at his icehouse. Jack Cavanaugh worked at MacDougalls boatyard and Gene Young worked at Edwards boatyard. Al Chase and Sam Cahoon Jr. worked at Sam Cahoon Sr.'s fish market. Eddie Peterson, Dick Alberts, Al Graham, Dave Graham, Don Beers, and Jim Cavanaugh were also on the team.

Along with his brother Noggie Eldridge, Elwood "Ellie" Eldridge grew up in the village and they were "outstanding athletes," according to Mr. Griffin. Both played for the Clippers, Ellie during his summer vacations from Brown University and Noggie while he worked at WHOI. Ellie Eldridge could play any position in just about any sport, Mr. Griffin remembered. A star athlete in high school, he also played football at Brown with Joe Paterno, who later became Penn State's legendary football coach.

In an interview in July 2009, Mr. Eldridge, who died several months later, talked about playing every position on the Clippers baseball team, but claimed, "We didn't have any superstars."

"You were!" interjected Mr. Griffin.

Both men recounted the details of the games and players as if it were yesterday, not 50 years ago. "There was that pitcher, Ernie Upton, who I couldn't hit. Well, once I did go three for four against him," Mr. Eldridge said.

"And I loved that house at the Heights field next to the corner of Grand Avenue and Central Park Avenue. If I got a fastball that I couldn't hit, I'd swing late and it would hit that house. Automatic ground rule double!"

"The Woods Hole ball park field bordered the marsh. I hit the ball," recalled Mr. Eldridge, "and Eddie Moniz of the Town club ran back and caught it, but landed in the marsh. Squish. Eddie told that story for 50 years!"

The left field at the Bell Tower field had indeed been gradually sinking into the swamp. One day, the contractor in charge of dredging trenches on East St. (now MBL St.) for the Woods Hole sewer project asked Mr. Griffin if he knew any place to dump the excess fill. A short time later, the outfield in the left field corner grew by about 30 feet.

Playing in the Twilight League had its challenges. There were no lights, of course, and some evenings the umpire would call the game for darkness. At the top of the sixth inning one night, Clippers catcher Charlie Vail complained that he couldn't see the ball. The ump called the game, which was tied 4-4. Their arch rival, the Falmouth Townies, entered an official

protest. *The Cape Cod Standard-Times* reported that at the time the game was called off, the Townies had one man on second, two out and the count was two balls and two strikes.

Foggy, wet conditions were frequent problems. "Some days we had to have someone toss the ball in the air before the game to see if it could be seen," Mr. Eldridge said.

An 11-0 Clippers win against the Falmouth Giants, in which Jack Cavanaugh pitched a perfect game, was protested by the Giants, who charged the "grounds were wet."

The Clippers played baseball through the summer months, then shifted their focus to basketball.

The Clipper basketball squad played teams from Barnstable, Osterville, New Bedford, Wareham, Middleborough, Westport, Yarmouth, Mashpee, Sandwich, Bourne, Wellfleet, occasionally Vineyard Haven, and two Falmouth teams. There were 18 players on the squad, and sometimes they played both varsity and JV games. Most of the Clippers baseball players played basketball, and Mr. Griffin managed the basketball team as well.

The Clippers developed a special rivalry with the Falmouth Giants in basketball and baseball. The Giants were made up of players from different parts of Falmouth and managed by John Pena of West Falmouth. His two brothers, Manny and Carlos, played for him. One of his players in both sports was Roche Pires. Roche never played in high school, but was one of Cape Cod's great athletes.

The startup costs for a team required money for uniforms and equipment. In baseball, the town provided its Twilight League teams with uniforms

and equipment, but in basketball the teams had to come up with their own. "We managed the equipment, but had limited money to buy uniforms," recalled Mr. Griffin. "At that time, Eastman's Hardware sold athletic equipment. Possibly because of the post-war reduction of armed forces, a team from Cape Edwards that had ordered uniforms no longer needed them. Eastman's gave us a good deal. It's been said that when Martha's Vineyard Regional High started football, they got some ex-Holy Cross purple uniforms. The Woods Hole Clippers became Orangemen like Syracuse University."

The first basketball season (1946-47) started with eight wins. There was a big buildup for a showdown with the Barnstable team at Hyannis. "We thought we were pretty good," Mr. Griffin said. "Seven straight wins so we scheduled a game against the Barnstable Townies." The game was at the Barnstable High gym, which was a combination gym and auditorium. The stage was also the basketball court. "The Townies were a veteran independent team, the best on the Cape. We plunged. The score was 79-37." *The Falmouth Enterprise* commented, "How low did the mighty fall."



The Woods Hole Clippers. Front from left: Sam Vincent, Newcomb Cassick, Pete Bailey, Bob MacMillan, Thure Blomberg. Middle: Jimmy Gifford, Dick Alberts, Noggie Eldridge, Ellie Eldridge, Jack Cavanaugh, Whitey Witzell. Back: Bob Griffin, Dave Casiles, Sam Cahoon Jr., Richie Cahoon, Marshie Douthart, Bob Pratt, Bill Thayer. Photo courtesy Robert W. Griffin.



## Clippers Claim Falmouth Title

Woods Hole Tops Giants by 44-43

FALMOUTH, Jan. 24—Woods Hole Clippers were the high riding town champions today after defeating the Falmouth Giants, 44-43, in Hall School gym last night.

The Giants held a slim margin of one point over the Woods Hole team throughout most of the fray, but in the last two minutes of the game Whitey Witzel of the Clippers sank two spectacular baskets to win the game for the Clippers.

Clippers		Giants	
E. Eldridge	17 3 13	Douthart	17 4 11
W. Witzel	11 4 3 16	L. Santos	11 4 3 14
N. Eldridge	4 2 14	Pires	1 3
Blumberg	11 3 1	Pena	11 3 6
L. Cavanaugh	11 3 6	E. Santos	1 6 2
		Baker	1 2
<b>Totals</b>	<b>16 8 44</b>	<b>Totals</b>	<b>17 8 43</b>

## 8-3 Triumph For Clippers

Woods Hole Beats Falmouth Townies

WOODS HOLE, July 10—Eldridge pitched the Woods Hole Clippers to an 8-3 victory over the Town Club in a playoff of a rained out Falmouth League game.

Eldridge spaced 6 hits while his mates found Marks for 9. Beers, Vail and Stewart each collected a pair of bingles as Woods Hole grabbed a 4-3 lead and exploded for 4 runs in the fifth to ice the game. Box score:

Woods Hole		Town Club	
Beers, cf	4 1 2	Marks, cf	1 0 1
J. Cavanaugh, c	2 0 0	R. Marks, cf	3 1 3
Vail, 3b	3 2 2	Perreira, ss	3 1 1
Eldridge, p	3 1 1	A. Marks, lf	3 1 1
Stewart, rf	4 1 2	Ponsica, lb	3 0 1
Blumberg, cf	1 0 0	E. Marks, c	1 0 0
Cross, cf	2 1 1	R. Marks, 3b	1 0 0
Lawrence, 2b	3 1 1	T. Marks, rf	2 0 0
Graham, ss	2 1 0	F. Marks, 2b	2 0 0
J. Cavanaugh, 1b	3 0 0	H. Marks, p	3 0 0
<b>Totals</b>	<b>37 8 3</b>	<b>Totals</b>	<b>21 3 4</b>
Woods Hole	228 64		
Townies	601 60		

## Waquoit Bows To Woods Hole

Peterson Pitches Two-hit, 4-0 Win

FALMOUTH HEIGHTS, June 27—Eddie Peterson, former Lawrence High ace hurler, last night pitched Woods Hole Clippers to a 4-0 victory over Waquoit in a Falmouth Twilight League contest here.

Peterson allowed Waquoit only a pair of bingles as he set down 12 batters via the strikeout route. Woods Hole nicked Roberts for six safeties, scoring their runs in the 3d, 5th and 6th innings. Box score:

Clippers		Waquoit	
Gifford, 1b	4 1 0	Roberts, p	3 0 0
Paige, rf	2 0 0	Perreira, cf	3 0 0
Vail, lf	2 1 0	Santos, ss	1 0 0
Eldridge, ss	3 0 0	Peters, rf	1 0 1
Alberts, 3b	3 1 0	Marshall, c	3 0 0
Cavanaugh, c	3 0 1	DeMello, lf	3 0 0
Chase, cf	3 1 1	Cantwell, lb	3 0 0
Peterson, p	3 1 1	Pimental, 2b	3 0 0
Blumberg, cf	3 0 0	Silva, 2b	2 0 0
Cross, 2b	1 0 0	Baloney, rf	2 0 1
N. Eldge, ss	1 0 1		
<b>Totals</b>	<b>27 4 0</b>	<b>Totals</b>	<b>23 0 2</b>
Woods Hole	601 612 0-4		
Waquoit	600 600 0-0		

## Giants Protest Woods Hole Win; Waquoit Beats North Falmouth

Waquoit		North Falmouth	
Santos, c	3 0 2	R. D'Elia, 1b	4 2 3
Roberts, p	4 0 1	Oliver, cf	1 0 0
Perreira, rf	2 1 2	Perry, 3b	4 0 0
Medeiros, lf	2 1 0	Towers, c	4 0 0
DeMello, cf	2 1 1	Jennings, ss	4 0 1
Cantwell, 1b	3 1 2	Bruce, rf	2 1 0
Beirona, 2b	2 1 1	M. D'Elia, p	2 0 1
Pimental, ss	2 0 0	Bakery, 2b	2 0 0
Silva, 3b	3 1 1	Craft, lf	2 0 0
		Bowman, p	0 0 0
<b>Totals</b>	<b>25 6 10</b>	<b>Totals</b>	<b>26 3 3</b>
Score by Innings:			
Waquoit	000 000 0-4		
North Falmouth	110 100 0-3		

Woods Hole		Giants	
Paige, cf	2 1 1	C. Pena, 3b	2 0 0
Blumberg, cf	0 0 0	M. Pena, c	0 0 0
Vail, c	2 1 1	J. Rose, cf	2 0 0
E. Eldge, 2b	3 2 0	Jonas, ss	2 0 0
Alberts, 3b	3 2 0	R. Pires, p	2 0 0
Cavanaugh, p	2 0 0	Santos, 2b	2 0 0
Chase, lf	2 1 2	W. Rose, lf	2 0 0
McMillan, lf	0 0 0	J. Santos, rf	1 0 0
N. Eldge, ss	1 0 1	J. Pires, 1b	2 0 0
Young, rf	3 2 1		
Cahoon, 1b	2 2 1		
Gifford, 1b	1 0 0		
<b>Totals</b>	<b>12 11 11</b>	<b>Totals</b>	<b>15 0 0</b>
Score by Innings:			
Giants	000 00-0		
Woods Hole	000 00-11		

## Woods Hole 79, Yarmouth 68

Clippers' Attack Paced by Borden

FALMOUTH, Feb. 26—Woods Hole Clippers provided their biggest local upset to date when they defeated the highly-rated Yarmouth Legion five, 79 to 68, in a hectic battle in Hall School last night.

Woods Hole held a slight edge at the end of the first period, with Yarmouth springing back into the lead at halftime. The lead saw-sawed through the third period, but Woods Hole put on a last-minute drive to clinch the game. Highest scoring performances were put on by Borden of the Clippers with 29 points and Ingraham, Yarmouth center, 24.

In a preliminary battle, Yarmouth Legion had no trouble defeating the Clippers Reserves, 63 to 41.

The Clippers are scheduled to meet the Westport Terriers of the New Bedford Church League in the Hall School gym at 8 tonight.

Woods Hole Clippers		Yarmouth Legion	
Borden, rf	12 1 28	Hamblin, lf	7 3 16
Witzel, lf	8 1 17	Sprague, lf	6 2 14
Castles, c	5 3 12	Ingraham, c	6 6 24
Bailey	0 0 0	Rich-Donner, 2b	6 4
Cavanaugh, rf	3 0 0	Johnson, 3b	0 0
Alberts, lf	3 1 1	Livesley, lf	2 0 4
Sullivan	3 1 7	Tripp	0 0 0
<b>Totals</b>	<b>34 11 79</b>	<b>Totals</b>	<b>29 10 68</b>
Score by periods:			
Clippers	19 18 22 17-79		
Yarmouth	15 24 12 13-68		

## Clippers Edge Giants by 2-1

WOODS HOLE, June 13—Eddie Peterson, pitching his first game in the Falmouth Baseball League this year, held the Falmouth Giants to four hits and one run as the Woods Hole Clippers defeated the Giants 2-1 here last night.

Woods Hole's first score came in the opening inning when Paige singled, stole second and scored on a Giant error. In the sixth frame Chase reached on an error, stole second and scored on another miscue.

Giants' only tally came in the second when Manny Pena reached on a free pass and come home as the result of singles by Rose and Santos. Box score:

Clippers		Giants	
Paige, cf	1 2 0	Rodick, 2b	2 0 0
Vail, c	4 0 0	Perreira, 3b	4 0 0
E. Eldge, 2b	3 0 1	C. Pena, rf	2 0 0
Alberts, 3b	4 0 1	Jonas, ss	3 0 0
Cavanaugh, lf	4 0 1	Pires, p	3 0 0
Peterson, p	3 0 0	M. Pena, c	2 1 1
N. Eldge, ss	2 0 0	Rose, cf	2 0 2
Young, rf	2 0 0	Santos, 1b	3 0 1
Cahoon, lf	2 0 0	Ferry, lf	3 0 0
Chase, lf	1 1 0		
<b>Totals</b>	<b>30 2 5</b>	<b>Totals</b>	<b>25 1 4</b>
Score by Innings:			
Clippers	100 001 0-2		
Giants	010 000 0-1		

Both baseball and basketball games were well covered by *The Falmouth Enterprise* and *The Cape Cod Standard-Times*. The clippings above are from *The Cape Cod Standard-Times*, 1946-50. Courtesy Robert W. Griffin.

"This loss brought the Clippers down to earth. The season was still successful, but there were no other teams on the Cape of the caliber of the Barnstable Townies," Mr. Griffin said.

Because gyms varied a lot in size and quality in those times, the teams frequently had to adjust their playing styles. Falmouth games were played in the Falmouth Junior High (later called Hall School) gym. This was the gym used by Lawrence High School. The junior high building had been built under a low bid contract in 1924, according to Mr. Griffin, and had defects in quality and design. The gym ceiling fell in several times. In the gym there was a double row of bench seats on the sidelines and some rows of bench seats at one end. There were exposed girders at the top. These caused some problems. Ellie Eldridge, the star athlete in high school, college and then the Clippers, frequently took long arcing shots and some hit the girders.

One gym in Wellfleet was in a small wooden building heated by a large pot-bellied stove, somewhat perilous for running athletes and bouncing basketballs. The high school gym in Wareham had covered pillars on the base line that were not quite far enough from the basket. In Middleborough, the court was small and also sunken, resembling a handball court.

The Clippers traveled to Martha's Vineyard to play the Vineyard Haven team several times. "The steamship schedule would not have gotten us there in time for the game, so Jared Vincent took the Clippers over

in his fishing boat, the *Priscilla V.* The fishermen were our number one fans. They and Sam Cahoon, who owned the fish market, came to as many games as they could," Mr. Griffin said. *The Falmouth Enterprise* report of a Clippers game against Mashpee noted, "On hand as usual were the Woods Hole fishermen and their families, the most loyal supporters any team ever had."

The Woods Hole Clippers baseball and basketball teams ended in 1951. By that time, Mr. Griffin noted, the country was well on its way to post-war recovery. "The lack of sports and recreation during the war had built up a strong desire, partly nostalgic, to get going again, so, some things, including baseball and basketball, made a strong restart," said Mr. Griffin. Five years later, many of those longings were "fairly well satisfied," he said. "Television was really springing up, providing entertainment that included lots of sports. The local athletes and spectators were moving and starting new careers. The post-war novelty of returning to happy days of yore was wearing off, and new peacetime ventures were changing the scene."

Deborah Griffin Scanlon is the daughter of Woods Hole natives Robert W. Griffin and the late Martha Vincent Griffin. She is an 11th generation Cape Codder and a descendant of the Gifford and Hatch families. A graduate of Syracuse University with a double major in English and Journalism, Deborah is currently the communications coordinator for the MBL Ecosystems Center. She has written for *The Falmouth Enterprise* and other publications. She and her husband Jack Scanlon live in North Falmouth.