

# Reflections

by Paul Ferris Smith

It is with great fondness that I remember the activities leading to the formation of the Woods Hole Historical Collection Committee in the early 1970s.

I was on the Woods Hole Public Library Board at that time. We saw the need for a separate organization to represent the historical aspects of Woods Hole and Falmouth.

Indeed, our Library Charter specifically asked us to provide, "a collection of maps, charts, surveys, medals, coins, pictures, and other objects and material of cultural, historical and artistic value." So it was an easy move to create this committee. In March, 1974, Jalien Hollister chaired its first meeting. We expected the committee to establish an organization to preserve and promote the history of Falmouth and Woods Hole, a large

task indeed. To this end, Mary Lou Montgomery spent a great deal of time and effort drafting a set of guidelines to position the Woods Hole Historical Collection and, later, the Museum, as a distinct part of the Woods Hole Public Library.

Gusty Wilson edited recipes from local residents into a classic cookbook, *Woods Hole Cooks Something Up*, and generously donated the proceeds to the Woods Hole Historical Collection. By then my wife, Mary Lou Smith, was chairman of the historical collection committee and was deeply involved in its activities. We planned to create the Historical Museum in the



Mary Lou Smith, Diane Jaroch, and Paul Ferris Smith enjoy working on *The Book of Falmouth*, successor to *Woods Hole Reflections* shown at lower left. 1985. Photo by James Hain. Courtesy Paul Ferris Smith.

Bradley House next to the library. The Bradley House had been built about 1805 and given to the library by the Fay family in 1949. We had been renting it to various tenants as a residence, artist's studio and doctor's office. It was in sad shape. Mary Lou got her tennis buddies to drop their racquets and join work

crews to scrape, plaster and paint its old window frames, peeling walls and uneven floors.

Initially, we thought we would continue to rent out the second floor while we used the first floor for office space, storage and displays. But we soon found that we needed the rooms for office and storage space more than we needed the rent. In recognition of this new effort by the Woods Hole Library, the MBL (Marine Biological Laboratory) Library offered temporary space for a fireproof storage filing cabinet. We moved the cabinet over to the second floor of the Bradley House after we had determined that the old structure could support its weight. The first floor was available for additional office space and displays. The museum opened on June 30, 1976, in good time to celebrate the Bicentennial.

To make sure that this was a vibrant organization, we determined to have new displays every year in the three rooms on the first floor. Unfortunately, this put a considerable load on the volunteers. I proposed that we build a scale model of Woods Hole Village and its surrounding waters as they looked in 1895 on a sunny August day. The model would provide a fixed exhibit that did not have to be changed every summer.

The idea of a scale model came about via my visit to the Mystic Seaport Museum where I saw its spectacular Mystic River Scale Model Exhibit. I got in touch with one of the builders of that model and arranged for two all-day workshops to train us on how to build a scale model. A large number of volunteers responded to this idea. We learned the kind of materials to use, the methods to use and how to arrange the scene. After the workshops, more than thirty volunteers met regularly to discuss and display their efforts, which, in general, were accomplished in their own homes.

We wanted to include a working train in our model. We chose a Marklin model train which uses the Z-scale: one foot represents 220 feet of the real world. All other objects in the model were then proportionately sized to the Z-scale. This is an extremely delicate model railroad to use and install properly. Henry MacDonald, a Museum member and devoted model railroader, installed, aligned, and leveled all the miniature tracks and switches. If it had not been for his painstaking and dedicated work, our Z-scale train would never have operated.

In 1895, the railroad coming in to Woods Hole ended at the ferry dock. When trains arrived, their engines and tenders were decoupled and rotated on a turntable so they could be put at the head of the train for its return trip to Boston. Because the railroad in Woods Hole was a terminus, the usual model display of simply having the train go around in a circle was impossible. Al Bradley came up with the solution. When the model train arrived at the railroad station in Woods Hole, a magnet under the first car would trip the polarity of the power to the model and the train would then start back towards Boston. When it reached the edge of the model, it would trigger another magnetic switch and reverse direction. Thus, a docent could turn on the power and the visitor could see the train going back and forth, adding realism to the model.

One of the most gratifying effects of this whole project was the energy and devotion of the volunteers who built the buildings, did the landscaping, and painted the background wall images. One of the wonderful things about the volunteers working on this model was the diversity of the group - there were housewives and Harvard professors among them and everyone seemed to be having a great time. A real community effort!

Of course, while all of this was going on, the archives were being created and organized by Jennifer Gaines, now employed as the Museum's Executive Director. Susan Witzell joined the team in 1992 and gave Jennifer invaluable assistance. Susan is now the Archivist.

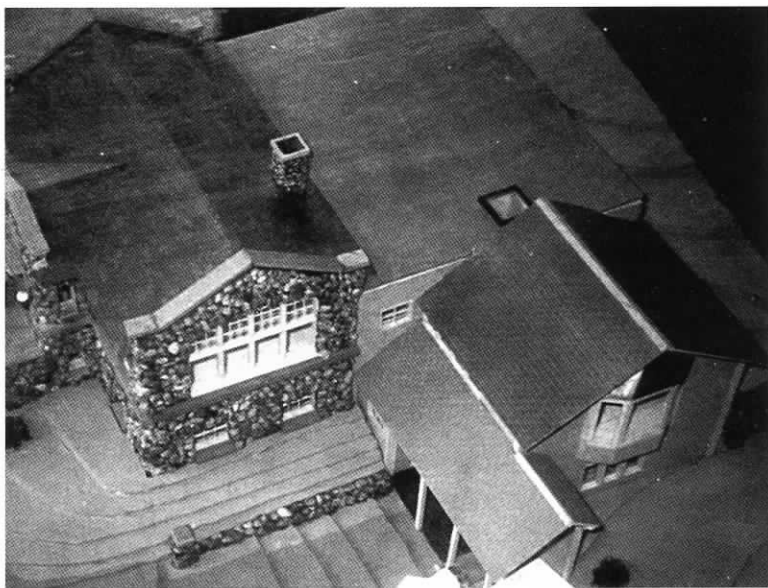
The Bradley House officially became a Museum in the 90s with the arrival of two new buildings. I organized the acquisition of the Swift Barn from WHOI and its move to the Bradley House property to display our collection of historic boats and tackle. Later, the Yale workshop, donated by Charles McGowan, was moved in and stocked with original artifacts.

In the 1970s, Mary Lou was managing the Market Bookshop branch in Woods Hole. When customers asked her for a history of Woods Hole, she had to tell them that none existed. Characteristically she then started a committee to create such a history! It was to be based on good historical research, but would also include recollections, oral history, old letters, diary entries and photographs from many contributors. *Woods Hole Reflections*, edited by Mary Lou Smith, was published by the Woods Hole Historical Collection in 1983. It was designed by Diane Jaroch who had stressed the value of excellent layout and plenty of white space on the pages. The book was a prize winner.

The Selectmen wisely appointed Mary Lou to the Falmouth Historical Commission, and she promptly persuaded the commission to sponsor a similar book for the whole town in honor of its approaching tri-

centennial. *The Book of Falmouth* was produced by the prize-winning Smith-Jaroch team and published by the Falmouth Historical Commission in 1986.

Red (W. Redwood) Wright pointed out that there was more material than could fit into even that



Scale model of the Woods Hole Library. Paul Ferris Smith designed and constructed this model in 1989 as part of the library's major fundraising effort for a new addition. The model is located in the Children's Room at the Woods Hole Public Library. Photo by Paul Ferris Smith. Courtesy Paul Ferris Smith.

large volume, and there was still enthusiasm on the editorial committee. He suggested starting a journal of local history. The board decided to publish a semi-annual journal. Mary Lou led this new project. In 1987, the first issue of *Spritsail* was published by the Woods Hole Historical Collection. From 1987 until her retirement in 2005, Mary Lou edited *Spritsail*, the semiannual *Journal of the History of Falmouth and Vicinity*.

In 1997 I launched a new project to raise money, attendance and excitement for the Woods Hole Historical Collection: a model boat show. Following the example of the Wooden Boat Show put on by the Mystic Seaport Museum, we included model boat exhibits, races, and demonstrations. The races were held in Eel Pond, but we also set up a pool in front of the Bradley House where children could sail model boats they had made as part of the boat show.

We were impressed by how many modelers responded to our initial request for exhibits. The Vintage

The models were exquisite. For example, one model that had been commissioned by a yacht owner was equal in value to the yacht it modeled. Because we could not afford insurance for all these precious models that first year of the boat show, volunteers stayed in the various buildings each night. Some buildings were considerably more comfortable than others for overnight guard duty. So far there have been eight of these model boat shows, all very successful and financially beneficial to the Museum. One year, Phil Hale actually sailed his ship model across Vineyard Sound to Woods Hole for the show.



Model Boat Show. Photo by Paul Ferris Smith. Courtesy Paul Ferris Smith.

Model Yacht Group and other modelers such as Sue and Fred Abbe of Cataumet were among the respondents. The Abbes rented a closed trailer to bring their models to the exhibit. Earl Bobert of the Vintage Model Yacht Group came with his wife all the way from Santa Fe, New Mexico. Models were exhibited in nearly every building in the center of Woods Hole. This included WHOI and MBL buildings, as well as the old Fire Station, Community Hall, the bank, library and museum.

The most recent show, the 8th Biennial Woods Hole Model Boat Show, took place in the Spring of 2011. It presented a marvelous collection of models, most accompanied by owners eager to show and tell how they made their models and to relate the histories of the original full-sized vessels. Gerald Ward, Senior Curator of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, was invited to speak at our annual meeting that summer as a follow up of our Model Boat Shows. He gave a wonderful presentation about the MFA's impressive collection of ship models and showed slides of many of them.

In 2003 I started an Outreach Program for small boat builders, another project that still has a strong presence today. Experienced boat builders and students work together in the boat restoration barns near the museum on Saturday mornings. They build and rebuild many types of small craft, practicing the fine skills of boat building and boat repair. The finished boats are sold outright or raffled to provide funds for the museum. The outreach program preserves artifacts and skills. It is also very rewarding for both

teachers and students. Al Lunn, one of the original and most faithful teachers, said "Boat building and repairing boats is a disease that you never get over."

We still cherish the memory of Bill Cooper, a skilled and dedicated craftsman. We were fortunate to enjoy his extremely accurate and detailed knowledge of boat design and construction, which he generously and thoughtfully shared with us, along with his wonderful stories.

It is with these special memories and great pride to have been a part of the monumental efforts that I find myself at a stage of life and health where I must step down from any active role in these remarkable institutions which have grown up before my eyes as the viable and impressive organizations they are today.



Boat Outreach Program. Paul Ferris Smith, Ted Tavares, and Alan Lunn in the boat shed behind Bradley House. Photo by James Anderson. Courtesy Paul Ferris Smith.



Boat Outreach Program. Bob Leary deep in his work restoring a Rookie in the boat shed. Photo by Paul Ferris Smith. Courtesy Paul Ferris Smith.

So I am saying goodbye for myself, but I am also saying goodbye for my wife, Mary Lou, who is now suffering from Alzheimer's Disease. Her contributions to the Woods Hole Library and Museum were/are impressive and invaluable.

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*Paul Ferris Smith has lived in Woods Hole since graduating from Yale University in December 1943 receiving a BE (Bachelor's of Engineering). He has worked at the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution, Marine Biological Laboratory, and private industry. He has been involved in local singing groups and has been involved in the programs sponsored by the Woods Hole Historical Collection and Museum.*