

Abbott's Point

by Martha Burnham

Martha Burnham Humphrey was the daughter of Annie Abbott and Arthur W. Burnham, and the granddaughter of Martha L. Sullivan and Dr. Samuel Warren Abbott.

Dr. Abbott was a Civil War surgeon who served in the Navy aboard the ironclad *Monitor*, then *Tioga*, and finally the frigate *Niagara*. He then transferred after three years to the Army. He was introduced to West Falmouth by his wife and his sister-in-law Rebecca Cutter. Dr. Abbott was charmed by the view from first point and bought the property from Mrs. Dove. There in 1892 he built a cottage he named Driftwood. A much later rental ad describes it as having nine rooms. Concerned with the exposure to the sea, Driftwood was well anchored. It survived the 1938 hurricane. It featured wide unpaned windows, unusual for the time, and a double front door which could be held closed by a strong wooden bar in high winds. A seasonal wharf was put in on the inner harbor where flat bottomed row boats served as access to the village. In later years, Ralph Landers tended to the wharf each spring and fall and also put in the vegetable gardens for Martha Abbott.

Martha Burnham's memories of summers at Abbott's Point were written for Barbara Bunker to be published in the West Falmouth Village section of *The Book of Falmouth* in 1986. Her stories have been archived at the Falmouth Historical Society. Excerpts follow:

We went to Bourne's market for meat, groceries, and kerosene for our lamps. We waited in line at the post office for Amasa Baxter to hand out our mail, reading the postcards and telling us the news before he handed the cards over.

We tied our row boat up to [Mr. Kingman's] boat-house float when we went across for the mail, or to go to Bourne's Market. The row boats were our chief means of getting to town. In the early years of my childhood we did not have a car, and if it was too rough to row across we walked around.

We had two routes [for getting our milk in milk cans from Avery's farm], one for week-days and one for Sundays. Weekdays we crossed through Mr. Kingman's yard, past Captain Baker's and went up the road. On Sundays we may have gone the same way, but returned by walking down the Railroad track past the back of Kelly's stores, because somebody who bought a Sunday paper always discarded the comics along the tracks; and we retrieved them.

My grandmother and aunt went to the cottage for the summer on memorial day week-end and we girls followed as soon as school closed. One of our first rituals was painting the rowboats, two of them, gray inside, white, outside and dark green

on the bottom. We learned how to paint early. There were other duties shared and apportioned according to our ages and abilities, ranging from sweeping the sand off the stairway and bringing down the candles in the morning to cleaning glass chimneys and burying the garbage. There was also weeding, shelling peas or shucking corn and various household duties. All these were fit in around the schedule dictated by the tides which governed our swimming time and the times we could most easily row across the harbor. We could cross any time, but pushing a boat across eel grass for twenty feet to start was not as easy as going when it was covered.

Wash day was certainly the toughest on the adults as all the water had to be pumped, heated on the stove, and transferred to wooden tubs.

Besides people who came to stay for a while, there were also callers at the point,

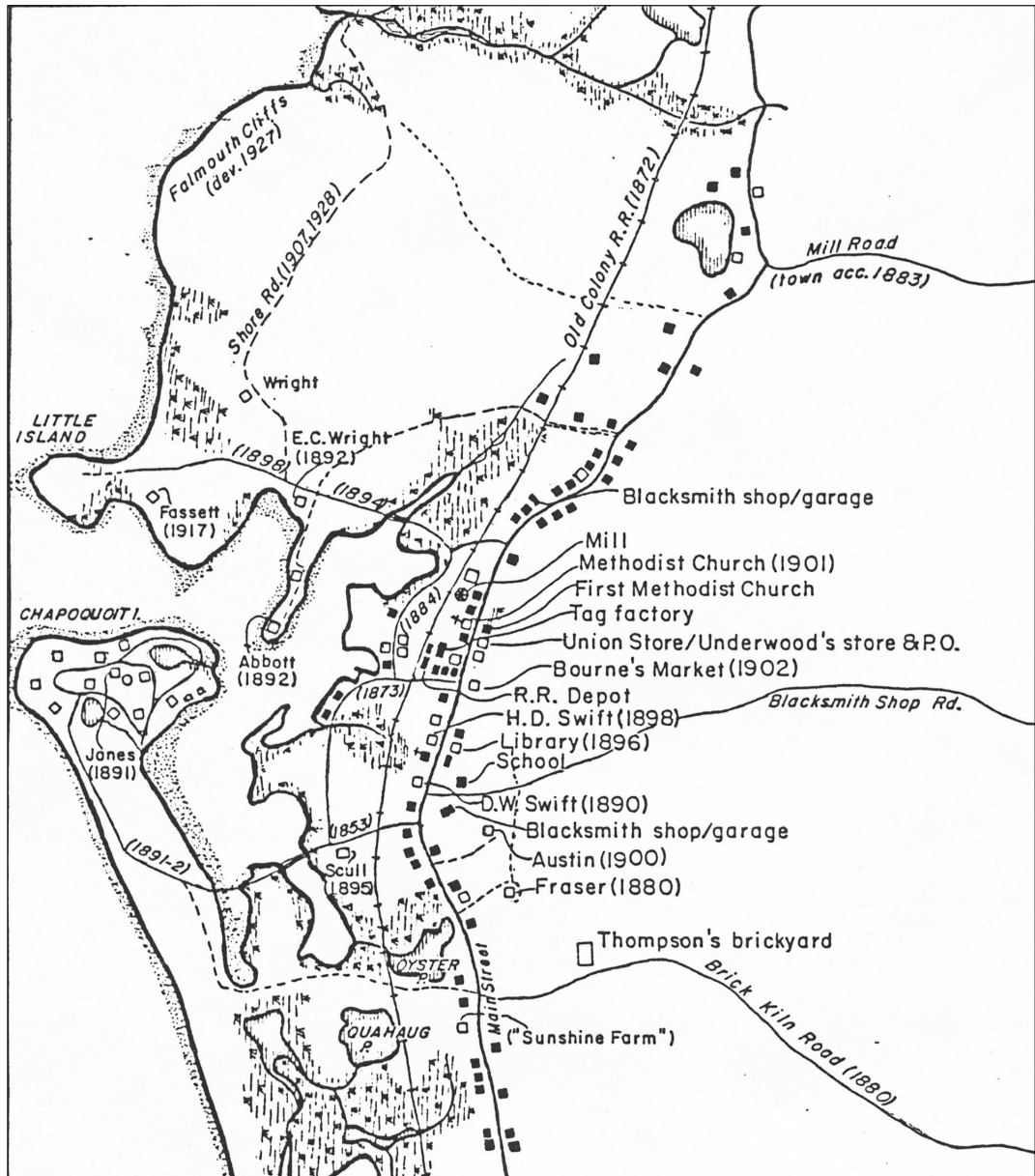
on business or otherwise. There was an organ grinder with a monkey, a man who came selling laces, tablecloths and such. Once two Indians in full regalia came advertising a medicine show, and once someone left a gate open in the pasture at the head of the lane and a cow wandered down onto the point.

Regular visitors included Mr. Pena who brought us fresh fruit and vegetables to supplement those we grew in our own garden. Another regular was Mr. Burke, the ice-man who came with his horse Billie. She was a pretty chestnut mare whom we happily fed grass while Mr. Burke was cutting and taking in the ice.

Long before my time there was another 'almost visitor', a stout gentleman who was seen fishing with a companion off the end of the point. A discreet check with the spy glass verified that it was President Grover Cleveland, who summered at Gray Gables.



West Falmouth harbor from the air. Courtesy Falmouth Historical Society.



West Falmouth harbor and environs, ca 1928. Courtesy of Falmouth Historical Society.