

Resort Hotels of Falmouth

By Kathy Lanson and Leonard Miele

The real estate boom that Robinson Crocker Bodfish anticipated in Falmouth came to pass during the last quarter of the 19th century. With the influx of tourists and the exploding values of waterfront property, many summer hotels were built along the shore facing Nantucket Sound and Buzzards Bay. From the neighborhood of Menauhant to the east and Quissett to the west, five hotels erected in Falmouth are of particular interest.

THE TOWER HOUSE HOTEL

The Tower House Hotel was built by George Tower in 1871. It was the first building to be built in Falmouth Heights. Tower bought some of the 100 acres of land which had been purchased by the Falmouth Heights Land and Wharf Company in 1870 on the site of the last salt works in Falmouth.

The Tower House Hotel was the first major hotel to be built on Falmouth Heights. Courtesy Falmouth Museums on the Green.

In 1896 L.H. Baker was the proprietor of the Tower House Hotel which could accommodate 150 guests. In brochures, it was described as a comfortable, homelike hotel for "high class patrons" who appreciated the high elevation, pure air, perfect drainage, and ocean views. The cool summer temperatures were highlighted: the noon temperatures ranged between 62 degrees and 78 degrees. Activities included bathing, boating, fishing, and steamboat excursions.

Tower owned the hotel for 30 years until his death in 1901. In May 1907, Charles W. Hadley became the new owner. He thoroughly



renovated the building and installed a system of gas lighting. He also built two bathhouses on the beach in front of the hotel. Hadley retired in 1924 and sold the hotel to George B. Moran. During World War II, in 1942, the U.S. Army took over the hotel and property so the Engineers Amphibian Command could use them for training. In 1944 the hotel re-opened, but it did not have much business because summer hotels were no longer popular in the area.



The Terrace Gables Hotel was considered the most elegant hotel to be built along the cliffs of Falmouth Heights. Courtesy Falmouth Museums on the Green.

George B. Moran's five children helped him manage the hotel. When Moran died in 1955, his daughter, Mrs. Francis P. Driscoll, continued to manage the business. Eventually the hotel closed during the summer of 1959. According to an article in the *Falmouth Enterprise* on May 15, 1959, the Moran family "announced in a letter to the clientele that a new apartment type motel" would open in the spring of 1960. Moran's son, Paul N. Moran, planned to open a new 42-unit, two-story structure that would include a swimming pool and recreational area in the center of a U-shaped plan. The hotel closed in 1960 and was razed to make way for the new motel.

THE TERRACE GABLES HOTEL

The Terrace Gables Hotel was known as the "Grand Dame" of the resort hotels in Falmouth. Built on Falmouth Heights overlooking Nantucket Sound, the hotel was first known as the Draper Cottage around 1880 before it became the Terrace Gables Hotel in 1892. Vintage hotel pamphlets describe its "homelike atmosphere" with its "reputation of courteous service" and "elegant opulence."

Guests enjoyed the fireplaced sunroom, writing room, dining room, and large sociable lounge, all adorned with Oriental carpeting and offering spectacular ocean vistas. In *Hotels and Inns of Falmouth*, Arnold W. Dyer described the Terrace Gables as a "large fashionable resort hotel. Its clientele was of the wealthier

class with liveried chauffeurs and expectations of formal dining, with live dinner music and meticulous service." Those who vacationed at the Terrace Gables Hotel could walk to the nearby wharf built by the Heights Land and Wharf Company, providing them easy access to steamship transportation and leisurely sailing parties to Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket.

The Terrace Gables Hotel catered to sophisticated guests with refined taste for nearly a century. In the 1960s and '70s, the Gables closed as a hotel and became known as Brothers 4 and Yesterdays, popular drinking destinations for a younger, more rowdy clientele. In 1988 the building was demolished and replaced with the Gables condominiums, which rise above the Falmouth Heights beach today.

THE CRAIG HOUSE

Over a span of 98 years, the Craig House summer resort, with its adjacent seven cottages, was sited on the highest point of Falmouth Heights with panoramic views of Martha's Vineyard. It first opened to guests in 1880 as the Goodwin House before it was purchased in 1891 by Henry K. Craig, a minister at Falmouth's First Congregational Church for 17 years. His family managed the hotel for 65 years, selling it in 1957. It became known as the Oak Crest Inn until it was torn down in 1978.

An early Craig House brochure describes the "congenial and homelike" atmosphere of the hotel whose "patrons are of the best class."

These patrons were offered boating, bathing, steamship excursions, long distance telephone service, orchestral entertainment, and exceptional meals in a dining room that could accommodate 100 people. As the owners noted,



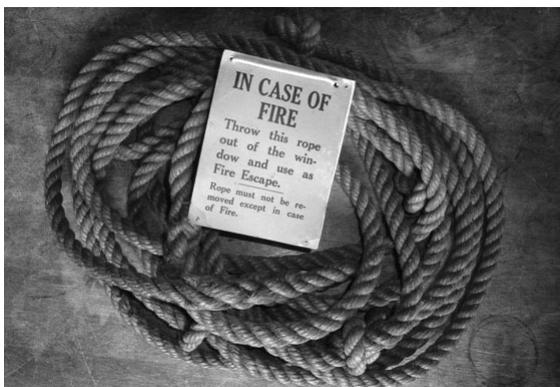
The Craig House offered picturesque views of Nantucket Sound and exceptional accommodations from 1880 to 1978. Courtesy Falmouth Museums on the Green.

"We aim to set an exceptionally fine table, with homemade preserves and jellies, also eggs, cream, and vegetables from our own farm. Our rooms are large and comfortable, and our sanitary arrangements are of the latest and most approved system."

One of the most famous residents of the Craig House was Joseph P. Kennedy, the future ambassador to Great Britain and father of President John Kennedy. He stayed at the Craig House a number of times beginning in 1910 while he courted his future wife Rose Fitzgerald, whose family rented cottages near the Craig House for several years.

THE QUISSETT HARBOR HOUSE

Located on 50 acres in the northwest corner of Woods Hole, the neighborhood of Quissett facing Buzzards Bay was the site of the Quissett Harbor House. This hotel began accepting guests in 1874, but it was unlike any of the other finer hotels in Falmouth. According to a 1942 article in the *Falmouth Enterprise*, "Modern convenience is anathema to the interior of the Harbor House...if the hotel were modernized it would lose more than half of its present clientele to whom the status quo is cherished and inviolable." Since there was no running water in the hotel, guests were provided with chamber pots and pitchers of hot water and ice water each morning. Kerosene lamps and candles were used for reading and by the window in each room there was a coil of rope with the following instructions: "In case of fire, throw this rope out of the window and use it as a fire escape."



One of the original ropes from the Quissett Harbor House used as a fire escape. Courtesy Woods Hole Historical Museum.

Arnold W. Dyer notes that "there were three toilets and no bathtubs to accommodate the 100-capacity hotel as advertised in the 1892 railroad booklet. The rates were \$15 to \$20 per week." The hotel was purchased by Stephen W. Carey in 1881 for \$9,675 and remained in the Carey family for nearly 100 years until the hotel closed in 1975. Although the hotel was "more ramshackle than the average" hotel, the same families and guests came year after year to enjoy the view of Quissett Harbor and the environs of Buzzards Bay.



Along Buzzards Bay, the Quissett Harbor House offered a less formal summer experience for its guests. Courtesy Falmouth Museums on the Green.

THE MENAUHANT HOTEL

Seven jewelers from Attleboro, along with John Tobey of East Falmouth, formed the Menauhant Land and Wharf Company in 1874 to create a summer cottage colony on 125 acres of land at the southern end of Central Avenue in East Falmouth. Between 1875 and 1880, they built the Menauhant Hotel with six cottages and a 120-foot wharf as part of this community on the eastside corner of Central Avenue and Menauhant Road.



The Menauhant Hotel in East Falmouth provided visiting families with an assortment of oceanside activities. Courtesy Falmouth Museums on the Green.

The hotel was a true family resort, accommodating 150 guests with panoramic views of Bournes Pond, Eel Pond, and Nantucket Sound. There were tennis courts, a baseball field, and a stable for horseback riding on the property as well as an amusement building where guests could play billiards and shuffleboard, bowl, and dance to an orchestra on Saturday evenings. The guests also had use of the telegraph, telephones, and the on-site post office with two mails a day each way.

Historian Helen Wise noted that “consumption and rheumatic sufferers have long known well the soothing and helpful influence of just this locality on Nantucket Sound. Boston catarrh and the minister’s sore throat are almost annihilated by a few weeks’ breathing of this air” at Menauhant. According to the hotel’s 1881 brochure, “the location is unsurpassed by any on the coast for agreeable temperatures and pure water.” At this time, furnished cot-

tages rented for \$50 a season, or \$30 monthly. Room and board in the hotel, according to the location of rooms, ranged from \$8 to \$15 a week.

Although the hotel was destroyed by fire on June 17, 1918, only 37 years after it first opened, the quaint neighborhood of Menauhant still remains at the east end of Menauhant Beach with its appropriately named Jewelers Avenue running parallel to Central Avenue.

About the Authors

Kathy Lanson is a new member of the *Spritsail* editorial board. She was the Director of Academic Services at the Brimmer and May School in Chestnut Hill, MA.

Leonard Miele is the co-editor of *Spritsail*.

Sources: *The Falmouth Enterprise*; *The Book of Falmouth*; *Hotels and Inns of Falmouth*; Meg Costello and the archives of The Falmouth Museums on the Green.