



## Morning Errands and Recollections

*James P. Warbasse, Jr.*

Depot Square, Woods Hole, a favorite watering place for man and beast, ca. 1910. Courtesy Florence Gordon, WHHC.

Thinking back to going over to town from Penzance Point to do some errands, many years ago, brings back much in the way of fond memories. Woods Hole has changed and what has been will never be again. Yet I can recall what it was like, and some of the things to be seen back in about 1915. In doing those errands, I was permitted to go along "just for the ride" and perhaps to be of some help. It might have been on a July day, a day when the sun rose over Nobska Point and its rays were trying to find their way through the early mist that hung over the harbor. You could tell that it was going to be a warm day, once the haze had burned off. But still it would be enjoyable and enviable, as were almost all Woods Hole days as I look back then with pleasure. "Gladheim," our house on the tip of Penzance Point, was indeed well named. It was a home of gladness, set in the shining waters.

Down at our garage, John Barry the chauffeur was just finishing some work on one of the cars. One of them was a 1910 Peerless touring car that seemed huge to me. As was usual in those days, a tank of acetylene mounted on the running-board supplied the two mas-



Agnes Warbasse ready for a drive in the family town car. Warbasse photo album. Courtesy WHHC.



Woods Hole, the passage between Penzance Point and Nonamesett Island, ca. 1930. Three Coast Guard vessels are aiding a fishing boat aground in the Hole. Gladheim is the large house at the end of the point. The Anchorage with its dock and boat house are just below on the point of land extending toward Ram Island in Great Harbor. There are two cars in the turnaround at the Hibbard house. Its boat house is across the road on the harbor side. The Strong houses are just above the Hibbard house, their shingled roofs shining in the sun. At the lower left is the Harding house, later owned by the Prossers. Photo by Howard M. Wood. Courtesy F. V. Lawrence. WHHC.

sive brass headlamps. The little tail lamp burned kerosene. There was a folding top that was put up in inclement weather. The other car, of similar vintage, was a small Buick runabout. There were two bucket seats in front and a little "jump-seat" behind them on the lid of a good-sized toolbox. John drove the Buick up to the house to get his orders and we then headed off for town.

On the way, we went past "The Anchorage" which originally had been the summer home of my grandfather Henry K. Dyer. It had been rented for the summer to Seward Prosser and his wife and three daughters. On many a summer day I would see Mr. Prosser off for a sail at the wheel of his handsome white sloop the *Pelegrina* (or was it the *Peregrina*?). She was later replaced by the shiny black *Medora*, a gaff-and-topsail rigged sloop of very graceful lines.

We next came to the Causeway, as we called it, the narrow strip of land between Buzzards Bay on the North and a little pond on the south. The pond connected with the harbor by a creek that wound through a boggy area teeming with fiddler crabs. We used to catch them by the pail-full to use for bait. At the next bend in the road were the homes of Ben and Will Strong. Up ahead was the Hibbard house on the Bay side of what at that time was a dirt road. The Penzance road was not paved until a few years later when the telephone and power lines were put underground and the old poles taken down. The Hibbard boat house was



Main Street (now Water Street), looking west, ca. 1912. Community Hall on left beyond barbershop, Candle House in distance on right. Postcard collection, WHHC.

the fanciest one on the Point, the only one that had not only a wide first floor porch overlooking the harbor, but also a small second floor porch and third floor tower.

Next to the Hibbard's came the Harding house, set on the highest hill on the Point. It was later acquired by the Prossers, who had become enamored of Woods Hole after renting "The Anchorage" for two summers. The Prosser house stood for many years, not only as a landmark visible from afar but often as a social gathering point. It was demolished in the late fifties, but the property remained in the family.

Down the road a bit was the Wilbur house. Their cow was usually tethered in a field across the road towards their boat house. She was always at least a mental hazard if we ever decided to walk over to town and took a shortcut across that field. Around another bend in the road was the home of Prof. James Jewett. He was often seen going for a sail, which he considered an ideal pastime. One of his boats was the *Marilyn*, but I am not sure how early she came onto the scene.

Just inside the gateway to the Point was "Driftwood," the home of Charles Choate, a Boston barrister. His daughter Josephine often sailed with us, with others or by herself. I believe the house was originally built in the late nineties for the Ginn family of Ginn & Co., the book publishers. When Grandfather Dyer built "The Anchorage" in 1895, there were only four other houses on the Point: the Jewett, Wilbur, Harding and Hibbard houses. In the next eighteen years, only the Ginns, Strongs, and our house were added, bringing the number up to nine in 1913. Today there must be at least twenty-five.

After leaving the Point, we came to the low rambling Breakwater Hotel facing the harbor. It always had fragrant honeysuckle climbing up the columns of the roof over the long porch that ran the full length of the

Gladheim, the Warbasse estate, on the tip of Penzance Point, a Woods Hole spritsail boat at the end of the dock.

Warbasse photo album.

Courtesy WHHC.



Breakwater Hotel, facing Great Harbor, at the entrance to Penzance Point. Postcard collection, WHHC.



Woods Hole Road, looking southwest, Little Harbor on left. Postcard collection, WHHC.

The *Gresham* tied up at Fish Commission pier. To the left, the Forbes family steam yacht *Merlin*. Warbasse photo album. Courtesy WHHC.

building. It faced the pier used by the Revenue Service cutters and later the Coast Guard vessels. On that particular day, one might have seen the *Acushnet* berthed in her usual place on the southwest side of the pier. The pier continued to the south as the Fish Commission pier. Tied up there one would often see one of the large ocean-going Fisheries boats such as the *Albatross II*, the *Fish Hawk* or the *Gresham*. For local use in shallower waters the Fish Commission also had a much smaller steam launch, the *Phalarope*.

Next to the Breakwater was the house where Charlie Grinnell lived. Charlie was one of the best boatmen around. He was often seen out tending his lines of lobster pots in the Bay or the Sound. I don't know when he first got her, but he had a white, roughly 25-foot catboat named *Restless*. He used her to take out fishing parties, to haul his pots, or to tow in hapless sailors he chanced upon who were victims of insufficient wind or adverse tides. In later years he had the *R. J.*, named for his sons Russell and John. Another well-known boatman of the time was Ned Gifford who did a lot of fishing as well as lobstering in his boat



U. S. Fish Commission buildings, docks and small boat basin. Postcard collection, WHHC.





Traffic on Penzance Point beyond the Breakwater Hotel, ca. 1912. Postcard collection, WHHC.



Steamer *Gay Head* leaving Woods Hole. Postcard collection, WHHC.



Richard Warbasse, Barbara Prosser, Agnes Warbasse, Anna Fay Prosser and James Peter Warbasse, Jr. on the float at The Anchorage, 1915. Warbasse photo album. Courtesy WHHC.



Eaton's Lunch on Depot Square, later James' Grill, then the Leaside. Building torn down in 1989 to make way for the new Leaside. Postcard collection, WHHC.

the *Ne Plus Ultra* that looked like a present-day bass boat.

We moved along to Main Street (now Water Street) and up towards the Marine Biological Laboratory. Tied up on the west side of the MBL pier that jugged out into the harbor was the lab's motor launch *Sagitta*. Just beyond it was the sturdy steam launch *Cayadetta* with Captain Veeder up on the bow polishing some brass. She was a bit smaller than the *Phalarope* but built along the same general lines. Next to the MBL was the old candle works building, at the time used as the Laboratory's supply center and presided over by Mr. George Gray. Across the street, out at the end of the next pier, was the bright yellow Woods Hole Yacht Club building. It was later moved in onto the shore, became the MBL Club, and the pier was removed. In

its earlier days, when the spritsails raced, it was a festive and active center.

Our first errand, to get some window screening, was a stop at Sydney Peck's hardware and carpenter shop, just east of the Yacht Club area. Sydney was slight of build and wiry, with an impish broad-faced smile most of the time. Then it was back across the street to Sadie Snow's dry-goods store for something or other. In addition to her dry goods, she had many another item such as soda-pop, a case full of penny candy, stationery, cigars, sneakers and so on, all in rather cramped quarters. Her snow-white hair befitted her name. A little further on would be (if not then, some time later) the Ten Acre Farm's fruit and vegetable store, subsequently taken over by Nicholas Tsiknas who had it for many a year thereafter.



MBL motor launch *Sagitta* at Fisheries landing. Photo by Baldwin Coolidge. Courtesy WHHC.

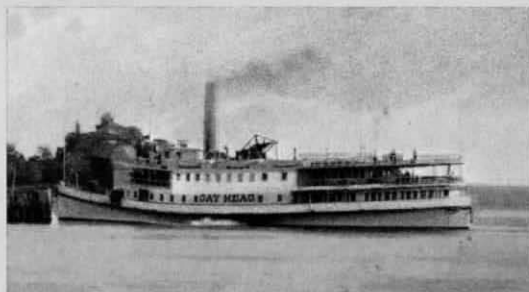


Mrs. Snow's dry goods store on Water Street. "The Quality" sold "toys, books, underwear, ribbons, fancy goods, cigars, Moxie, tennis and bathing shoes," among other things. Courtesy WHHC.

This is the story, as told to me by my mother. With the innate curiosity of a youngster, I chanced upon an old photograph album. Noting something out of the ordinary, I asked my mother what had happened to the *Gay Head*. Her answer was somewhat along the following lines. I cannot vouch for its accuracy.

The *Gay Head* pulled up and made fast at the Woods Hole steamboat pier one day in the late nineties. She was on her way from New Bedford out to Nantucket. A very early vintage gasoline-engine truck was to go to Nantucket. It was carefully guided up the gang-plank and got onto the boat. However, instead of stepping on the brake pedal to halt its progress, the neophyte operator hit the gas pedal by mistake. The truck went through the other side of the good ship *Gay Head* and out into Woods Hole harbor. This left a gaping hole in the side of the boat. Fortunately, the driver of the truck escaped as it sank. Grappling hooks and a derrick retrieved the truck. As far as the *Gay Head* was concerned, each night when she got back down to Nantucket, a repair crew went to work and did as much as they could before she had to take off again in the morning for her run to New Bedford. Eventually the hole was repaired. The incident is said to have occasioned considerable hilarious comment.

J. P. W. Jr.



Steamer *Gay Head* at Woods Hole steamship dock, ca. 1905. Postcard collection, WHHC.

Oscar Hilton's carpenter shop came next, and across the street was the Penzance Garage where we had to go for some gas. I think the fellow who first ran it was named Hallett. Later on it was managed by Philip Wilde who used to be the superintendent over at the buoy station in Little Harbor. The Coast Guard buoy tenders were based there, many of them named for flowers beginning with the letter "A" such as *Anemone*, *Arbutus*, *Azalea* and others. Mr. Wilde's sister Mercedes was later to serve as a clerk when the new brick Post Office was built and Ben Gifford became postmaster.

Beyond the Penzance Garage were the fire station and Community Hall. At that time there was a rather low degree of civic activity and the hall wasn't used for much of anything. There was much more activity across the street where Madeline Rohmling and her father ran an ice cream parlor. Later on it was run for many years by Harry Daniels to the delight of those from near and far.

Just on the other side of the drawbridge, on the south side of the street, was Eldridge's Barber Shop. Mr. Eldridge was also the drawbridge tender. It didn't seem to bother him very much to leave a customer who had his face all soaped up for a shave and to go out to open the bridge so some boat could get in to the Eel Pond. I was quite embarrassed one time when he told me that haircuts had gone up to thirty-five cents and I only had his usual quarter in my pocket.

We rounded the corner onto Depot Avenue, later to be named Luscombe Avenue after William O. Luscombe. We passed the Western Union office and the pier for the boat of the Forbes family on Naushon, then on to Sam Cahoon's fish market to pick up the order phoned over there earlier. Sam usually had on one of those long-peaked swordfisherman's caps, either to keep the sun out of his eyes or perhaps just from habit. Back at





E. E. Swift house and hardware store (in barn), 1885. Left to right: Al Cornell, Helan Swift, Edward E. Swift. Courtesy Florence Gordon, WHHC.

the Naushon pier the *Coryell* had just come in. She was a neat steam launch skippered by Captain Charles W. Olson who had a house on the point of Buck Island that protruded into the middle of Hadley Harbor. The *Coryell* would stay at the pier until the mail and any passengers from the morning train or elsewhere were all aboard, and then head back through the Hole to her home pier at the head of Hadley Harbor. When she finally could serve no more, she was replaced by the steam launch *Iduna* which was somewhat more bulky, had more power, but was of a little less classic profile.

Out in the middle of Depot Square were a cast iron fountain and watering trough for horses. The yellow Stanley Steamer bus that ran from Woods Hole up to Falmouth, then on to Falmouth Heights and back down to Woods Hole again, was parked there getting its water tank filled through a hose from the trough. Although the Stanley Steamer was capable of much higher speed, it rarely exceeded twenty-five miles an hour, or thirty at most.

You couldn't miss Mrs. James' lunch room and soda fountain on the northeast corner of the square. The



Woods Hole Post Office, now the Woods Hole branch of the Falmouth National Bank. Postcard collection, WHHC.



Hibbard boat house, "the fanciest one on the Point," with Woods Hole village in background. Postcard collection, WHHC.



Diving off the float at The Anchorage. Warbasse photo album. Courtesy WHHC.



Summertime on Penzance Point. Diving off the float at The Anchorage. Warbasse photo album. Courtesy WHHC.



crew of the morning train down from Boston would often have lunch in there and then patiently wait for the *Sankaty*, skippered by Captain Sylvia, to come back up from Nantucket so they could run the late afternoon train back up to Boston. James' Grill was a popular place for anyone to get a bite to eat while waiting for one of the boats. It was also a good place to get something like a cooling ice cream soda (only 15 cents) on a warm summer day.

Down at the pier-head, Mr. Veasy, the freight agent, was supervising the unloading of some things from a freight car that were to go over to the Vineyard that afternoon on the reliable old side-wheeler *Gay Head*. At the railroad station, with the customary Seth Thomas clock ticking away on the wall, the ticket agent was a woman who also handled the railroad's messages in Morse code on the telegraph set.

Then up Railroad Avenue we went to get the mail at the Post Office. You went in a door right at the point of the block where Railroad Avenue joined Main Street. On the right was a wall desk with inkwell and pen. Straight ahead were the service windows and along a passageway to the left were the postal patrons' mail boxes. The Postmaster was George Look, who later ran the Woods Hole Market, next door down Main Street. A few doors further down Main Street was Howe's Meat Market, the place to get a rib roast for Sunday dinner. We scuffed the sawdust on the floor, admired the big chopping block against the wall back of the counter and greeted Mr. Howe, cheerful and ruddy, in his once white apron and hard straw hat.

Next stop was around the corner on School Street at Ed Swift's shop to get a marine hardware item not available at Sydney Peck's place. I guess we got there at his lunch time, as he came out of the house wiping his mouth and whiskers with a 'kerchief. With his bouncing bow-legged gait, he led the way to the building

back behind the house. He carried almost everything you might want in the way of marine and household hardware. He'd say, "Oh! Yes! I have what you want, somewhere around here." And then he invariably could put his hand right on it. How he could remember where everything was, considering the extent of his inventory, boggles the imagination. He also had one of the kindest dispositions in town and always a cheerful word or two.

Up School Street a little way was the schoolhouse. In the fall of 1915 there was a polio epidemic, or something, in the New York area and we did not return to our winter home there. We remained at Woods Hole and the older children in the family attended the village school. I still have an old report card that indicates I was in the sixth grade for the first quarter of the 1915-1916 school year, and that J. Orville Wood was the teacher. A few years later, when I was in the summer Science School there, the distinctive schoolhouse smell still persisted, one that you never forgot.

Our errands done, we headed back home. On reaching the Penzance road, we saw that J. P. Morgan's beautiful black clipper-bow steam yacht *Corsair* had come in and dropped anchor in the harbor. When the United States entered World War I, she was commandeered by the Navy and earned a service chevron. It was proudly displayed on her smokestack when she returned to Great Harbor in post-war days.

Back at "Gladheim" our various acquisitions were appropriately deposited in the sewing room, work shop, kitchen and elsewhere. About then the *Uncatena* came through the Hole on her run from New Bedford to the Vineyard. Her alerting toot to the Woods Hole pier dockhands also suggested to me that it was time to go for a swim.

Dr. James P. Warbasse is a retired physician now living in New Bedford who spent boyhood summers at his family's home on Penzance Point in Woods Hole.