



Falmouth's Village Green, 1989.
All photos by Bruce Chalmers.

Falmouth's Village Green

Bonnie Hamilton and Bruce Chalmers

To see Falmouth's Village Green is to know that Falmouth is an old New England community. Indeed the Village Green and the houses and churches around it, as we see them today, remind us of much of the history of the community which we know as Falmouth, but which at first was called Succanessett. The first settlers arrived from Barnstable around 1660. They built their houses and cultivated the soil on the neck of land between Salt Pond to the west and Siders Pond and the Herring Brook to the east, where Mill Road now runs. They had already bought the land from the Indians, having received permission from the General Court of the Colony. Very early the settlers set aside what is now the Old Burying Ground for the burial of their dead and in 1677 the Proprietors (the heads of the families) selected a site for a Meeting House, which was built three years later. It was a small building, less than 30 feet square, but sufficient for the tiny community as "Assembly Hall, fort, storm shelter and possibly a school."¹ It is not known exactly

where the Meeting House stood, but the most likely site seems to be on the open space at the western end of the Old Burying Ground, close to the gate to the graveyard from Cemetery Lane.

It was not until 1708 that the First Congregational Church was organized. From then until 1840 the Meeting House was used as the Church on Sundays and as the Town Hall on other days. The plantation prospered and its population increased so quickly that by 1715 a larger Meeting House was needed. It was built on the same site.

In 1748, the Selectmen laid out a Training Field nearly half a mile east of the Meeting House, on part of a tract of land given to the town by Deacon Moses Hatch, a son of one of the original settlers. The Training Field, about one and a half acres of unfenced open land defined by narrow dirt tracks, was for the training of the militia, although one suspects that in 1748 its value may have been as much social as military.

By 1750, when the town's population had reached about 1000, it had again outgrown its Meeting House. The question was not whether a larger Meeting House should be built, but where. One faction wanted to rebuild in the same location, but the majority favored building on the Training Field, closer to what was becoming the center of the town. The new Meeting House was completed in 1756. Again the planners had failed to anticipate the growth of the town, which numbered about 3000 by 1795. At that time work was started on yet another new Meeting House on the same site. This was a larger and more elaborate building with a bell tower, in which was hung a bell commissioned by the town and cast by Paul Revere. This bell can still be heard ringing in the bell tower of the First Congregational Church. The style of this building shows that it was regarded more as church than as town hall, although it served as both. The Training Field eventually became the Village Green, but not before the track which formed its northeast boundary had been moved a little to the south along half its length, reducing the size of the field to about one acre, and the church had been moved across what is now Main Street to its present location.

By the time of the Revolutionary War there were seven or eight houses grouped around the Green. Those of Captain John Hatch, Jr., Benjamin Sanford, Consider Hatch, Captain John Grannis and the Rev. Samuel Palmer are still standing. And the Training Field had been put to its original intended use during the Revolutionary War, when the militia trained there.

In the early eighteen hundreds what had been a small village continued to prosper, in spite of the harassment by the British during the war of 1812, and men of substance continued to build their houses around the Green. Those of Nathaniel Shiverick, Captain William Bodfish, John Jenkins and Deacon Braddock Dimmick still remain. The oldest of the trees growing around the Green today were planted in 1832 by Elijah Swift who, having received permission, planted trees all round the Green at his own expense, with the promise that he would remove them if they became a nuisance. Most

of the original trees have succumbed in recent years to Dutch Elm disease.

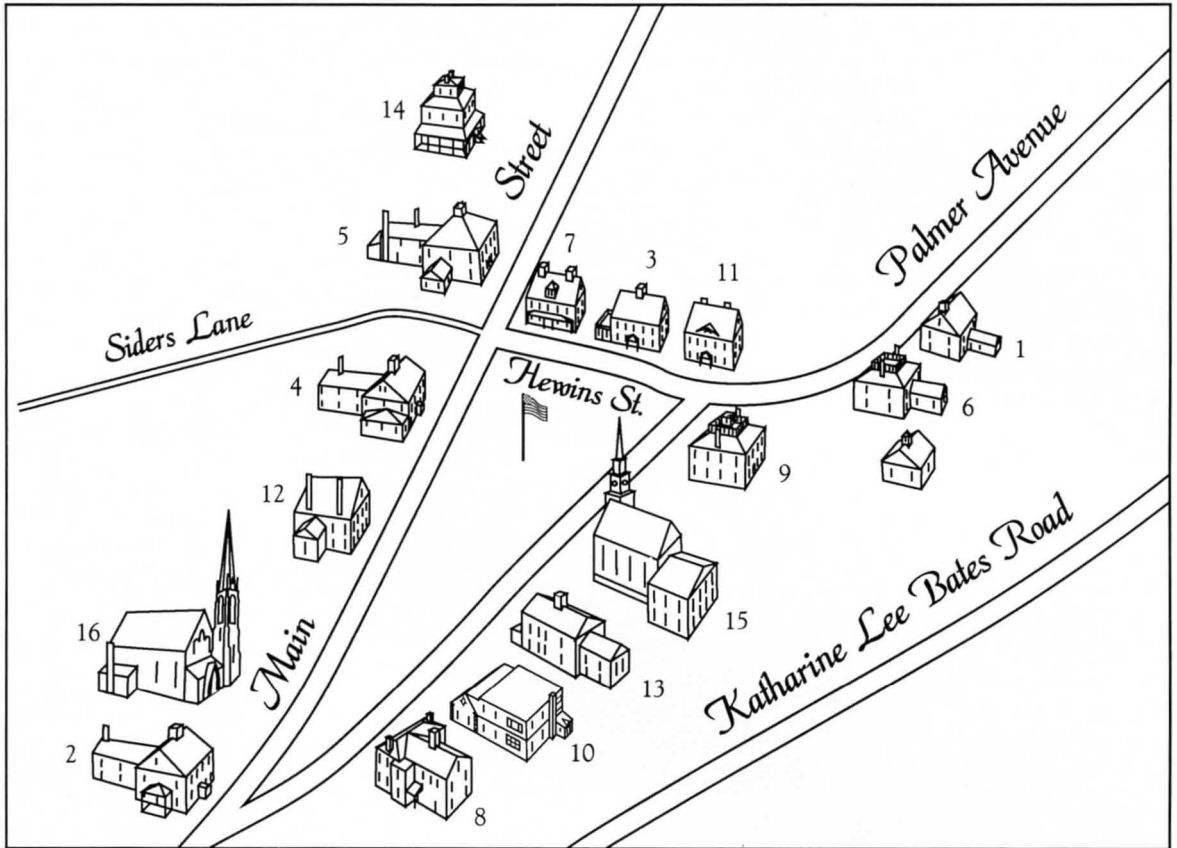
Although the "Separation of Church and State" had been mandated in 1791 when the Bill of Rights was adopted, the Meeting House served as both church and town house until 1840, when a separate "Towne House" was built to the east of where the Congregational Church now is.² From then on the Meeting House was used only for church purposes. It was the church. A new town hall was built in 1881; the old Towne House was moved to Depot Avenue in 1880 and was later demolished.

In the 1850s, commercial buildings were starting to replace homes to the east of the Green, while the houses surrounding it remained mainly residential. The only exceptions were two shops, an office and an inn which was also a livery stable, all of which were later removed, and the bank and the church, which remain. Saint Barnabas Episcopal Church has replaced the inn, but apart from this the Green still looks very much as it did a hundred and thirty years ago.

In 1857, history repeated itself once more. This time the Congregational Church was dismantled and rebuilt on its present site, the land having been donated by the Shiverick family. Again the new building, the present church, was larger than its predecessor and it was placed on a high stone foundation to accommodate the large meeting room underneath.

In more recent times, the Green has continued to play its part in the town's history. At the time of the National Bicentennial in 1976 a Time Capsule was buried there; its site is marked by a stone inscribed with instructions to open the capsule in the year 2076. And more recently, the Town's Tricentennial Celebration in 1986 included ceremonies on the Green, during which a Proclamation was read and a commemorative plaque was unveiled.

In the accompanying photographs the houses are arranged in the order in which they were built, to illustrate how house design kept pace with increasing prosperity in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.



Map courtesy of The Village Printer

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| 1. Palmer (Conant) House | ca.1730 |
| 2. Captain Jonathan Hatch House | ca.1760 |
| 3. Captain John Grannis House | ca.1765 |
| 4. Benjamin Sanford House | 1750-1775 |
| 5. Consider Hatch House | ca.1767 |
| 6. Dr. Wicks (Julia Wood) House | 1790 |
| 7. Deacon Braddock Dimmick House | 1804 |
| 8. Nathaniel Shiverick House | 1812 |
| 9. Captain William Bodfish House | 1814 |
| 10. Falmouth National Bank | 1821 |
| 11. John Jenkins House | 1822 |
| 12. Thomas Lawrence Swift House | 1844 |
| 13. Erasmus Gould House | 1844 |
| 14. Mostly Hall | 1848 |
| 15. First Congregational Church | 1857 |
| 16. St. Barnabas Church | 1890 |

The sequence starts with the Palmer (now Conant) house, which was built in about 1730 as a Half Cape at a time when houses were "built" rather than "designed." By 1760, the very simple, unadorned and unostentatious Cape was evolving into the somewhat more imposing Colonial style, still of simple form but larger and more elaborate than the Cape and with two stories instead of one. Examples around the Green are the Capt. Jonathan Hatch (ca.1760) and Capt. John Grannis (ca.1765) three quarter Colonials, and the Benjamin Sanford (1750-1775) Colonial. The Consider Hatch (1767) and the Wicks, now Julia Wood (1790) houses show the beginning of the transition to the still more elaborate

and more self conscious Federal, Greek Revival and Victorian styles, of which all the other houses shown (except the bank) are examples. The additions to and "modernization" at various times of almost all the houses around the Green also throw some light on the flow of history since they were built.

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1. The Palmer (Conant) House. ca.1730. (65 Palmer Avenue)

The Rev. Samuel Palmer was the town physician as well as the fourth pastor of the First Congregational Church. Palmer Avenue was named for him. Now known as the Conant House after later owners, this building houses the Falmouth Historical Society's archives and part of its collection. It was originally a "Half Cape," but it has been added to until it is now a two and a half story Colonial house. While there have been many changes over the years, this house, more than most of its era, still has the early settler look.³





2. The Captain Jonathan Hatch House. ca.1760. (103 Main Street)

This house has been known for many years as the John Hatch House. This Jonathan Hatch was a descendant of the Jonathan Hatch who was one of the two original settlers of Falmouth. In 1871 it was sold to R.C. Bodfish, who was for many years secretary of the Falmouth Historical Society. In 1901, it was bought for \$6,000 by E. Pierson Beebe to be the rectory for St. Barnabas Church. He then spent more than \$12,000 to restore it to its original condition. This is a three-quarter Colonial, which still looks like an early Colonial house, although the windows have been replaced, ells have been built on to the back and the small side porch and perhaps the open portico have been added.⁴

3. The Captain John Grannis House. ca.1765. (12 Hewins Street)

Capt. Grannis was an ardent patriot. In the Revolutionary War he commanded an expedition to protect the stock on the Elizabeth Islands from the British fleet; and in the War of 1812 he was active in the defense of the town when it was shelled by the British ship "Nimrod." Later owners included Thomas Lewis, who was the Town Clerk and Treasurer for 28 years. This was originally a simple three-quarter Colonial house, but there have been several additions. There are now two windows on each side of the front door, making the chimney off center. An open portico and a one story side addition have further changed the facade, but the basic Colonial style remains.⁵





4. The Benjamin Sanford House. 1750-1775. (57 Main Street)

The town records for 1811 show Benjamin Sanford as a hatter, owning both dwelling and shop. In Deyo's *History of Barnstable County* he is described as "a soldier of the Revolution, customs officer in Falmouth, and cabinet maker, with samples of his work still to be seen in the town in 1890."⁶ A contemporary, Davis Hatch, wrote a letter in 1842 describing "Uncle Ben Sanford" as "postmaster, revenue officer, cabinet maker, painter, and undertaker. He was scrupulously exact but eccentric."⁷ His house on the Village Green has long been an excellent example of a typical Colonial house, and is an important part of Town history. This is one of the few houses on the Village Green that predates the Revolutionary War. It was originally a simple two story Colonial. It has been changed and added to over the years with an enclosed front entryway, side wings and an ell at the back. But it still retains its original Colonial simplicity.⁸

5. The Consider Hatch House. ca.1767. (37 Main Street)

Consider Hatch was a direct descendant of Jonathan Hatch, who, with Isaac Robinson, started the plantation that grew into Falmouth. Named after him, this house had been known as 'Sider Hatch's House; the pond at the rear, earlier called Fresh Pond, was renamed Sider's Pond for him. At the time the house was built the Training Field was becoming the center of the village, since the new Meeting House had been built there in 1756. (But not all the activity was around the Meeting House. There was a tavern run by Shubael Hatch, 'Sider's great uncle, at the corner of Main and Locust Streets.) For its time the house was an imposing structure, built by one branch of a family that settled and built so much of early Falmouth. This house is an excellent example of a late Georgian style Colonial house. It is two stories high, with a massive central chimney, steep hip roof and balanced facade. The doorway has sidelights, transom lights, pilasters and hip roof portico with Doric columns. The windows have been replaced and a side porch and extensions to the back have been added over the years, but the basic Colonial structure is still dominant.⁹





7. The Deacon Braddock Dimmick House. 1804. (40 W. Main Street)

The original owner was Deacon Braddock Dimmick, a respected town father; he was an officer of the Church, Town Selectman, Representative to the General Court and State Senator. He was the son of General Joseph Dimmick, who was a Colonel in the Revolutionary War and a General in the War of 1812. Later owners included John H. Crocker, the "Cranberry King," Dr. Edwin Tripp and his son Dr. Edwin Tripp, Jr. The Tripp family owned the house for 60 years. This Federal Colonial was "modernized" in 1894 to conform to the Victorian style; the wraparound porch was added along with decorative shingles and a turret-like dormer. It was also moved farther from the street. It is now an excellent example of Colonial made to look like Queen Anne style Victorian. It typifies the local custom of moving, adding to or embellishing an old house.¹¹

8. The Nathaniel Shiverick House. 1812. (96 Main Street)

The Shiverick family history in Falmouth started in 1687, when Samuel Shiverick was named town Minister, well before the First Congregational Church existed. The Nathaniel Shiverick House is on land which was part of the original homestead, which included Shiverick's Pond and the land on which the Congregational Church now stands. Nathaniel's son, Nathaniel Jr., and his son Andrew also lived in the house. The square shape, the twin end chimneys and the portico with pediment label this house as a very simple Federal style Colonial, somewhere between Georgian and the more elaborate Federal styles.¹²



9. The Captain William Bodfish House. 1814. (54 Main Street)

At the age of 19, William Bodfish may have been the youngest man on the Cape to be given command of a large vessel. He went on to become a successful whaling captain. He married Deborah Hatch in 1812, and built this magnificent house for her in 1814. In 1826 it was bought by Elijah Swift, the "kingpin," one of early Falmouth's most successful businessmen, for his son Oliver Swift, also a successful businessman. It is now the Parsonage for the First Congregational Church. Described as a fine example of whaling period architecture, the Bodfish house is a Federal style Colonial with hip roof, widow's walk, twin chimneys, one story open portico topped by a balustrade, and front door with side lights.¹³



10. The Falmouth National Bank. 1821. (84 Main Street)

In 1820 the founders of the bank bought the old Bassett homestead to be the cashier's home, and in 1821 a building to house the bank was added. The addition consisted of two rooms at the side of the existing building. In 1926, a new bookkeeping room was built on to the rear of the building, but "to-day (1926) the bank faces the Village Green with the same white-painted front, many-paned windows and green shrubbery on its lawn as it did before the alterations were begun; its front is the original shell of the bank built 105 years ago."¹⁴ In 1951, the bank's outward appearance was completely changed and the interior was substantially remodeled, and in 1957 a second story was added. The present building is of the "American Bank Neo-classical" style.¹⁴





11. The John Jenkins House. 1822. (20 Hewins Street)

John Jenkins was the son of Captain Weston Jenkins, who played an important part in defending the town against the British during the War of 1812. John Jenkins married Harriet Swift, daughter of Elijah Swift, and built this elegant house at the head of the Village Green. Next door was his whaling supply shop, through which probably passed every Falmouth lad who went to sea. John Jenkins was for nine years president of the Falmouth National Bank. He was a loved and respected town leader. The John Jenkins house is a Federal style colonial with twin chimneys, open portico with flat roof and balustrade and front door lights. Its cornice extends around the sides of the house making pediments on the gable ends. A third pediment on the front of the roof has a fan window.¹⁵

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12. The Thomas Lawrence Swift House. 1844. (71 Main Street)

The style of this house, and its size and location, are indicators of the growth of the community by 1844 when it was built. It also reflected the prosperity of the Swift families of Falmouth. T.L. Swift, like his father Elijah, was one of the town's prominent businessmen. Although it has been modified somewhat over the years, the Swift house remains as an excellent example of the Greek Revival style. The gable end faces the street; the house originally had two slender wings.¹⁶



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13. The Erasmus Gould House. 1844. (78 Main Street)

Erasmus Gould, a successful business man, bought an older house on the Village Green, tore it down and built in the newest, most elegant, Italianate Victorian style for his bride. In a town where houses were frequently moved but seldom torn down this is an indication of Erasmus Gould's prosperity, and therefore that of the town in general. He established a successful shoe business, and later was President of the Falmouth National Bank. This charming house, with its square shape, roofline brackets, square pilasters, brown shingles and white trim is an example of very early Victorian architecture in Falmouth. It is really a combination of a basic Colonial house with Victorian Italianate bracket style embellishments.¹⁷

14. Mostly Hall, the Albert Nye House. 1849. (27 Main Street)

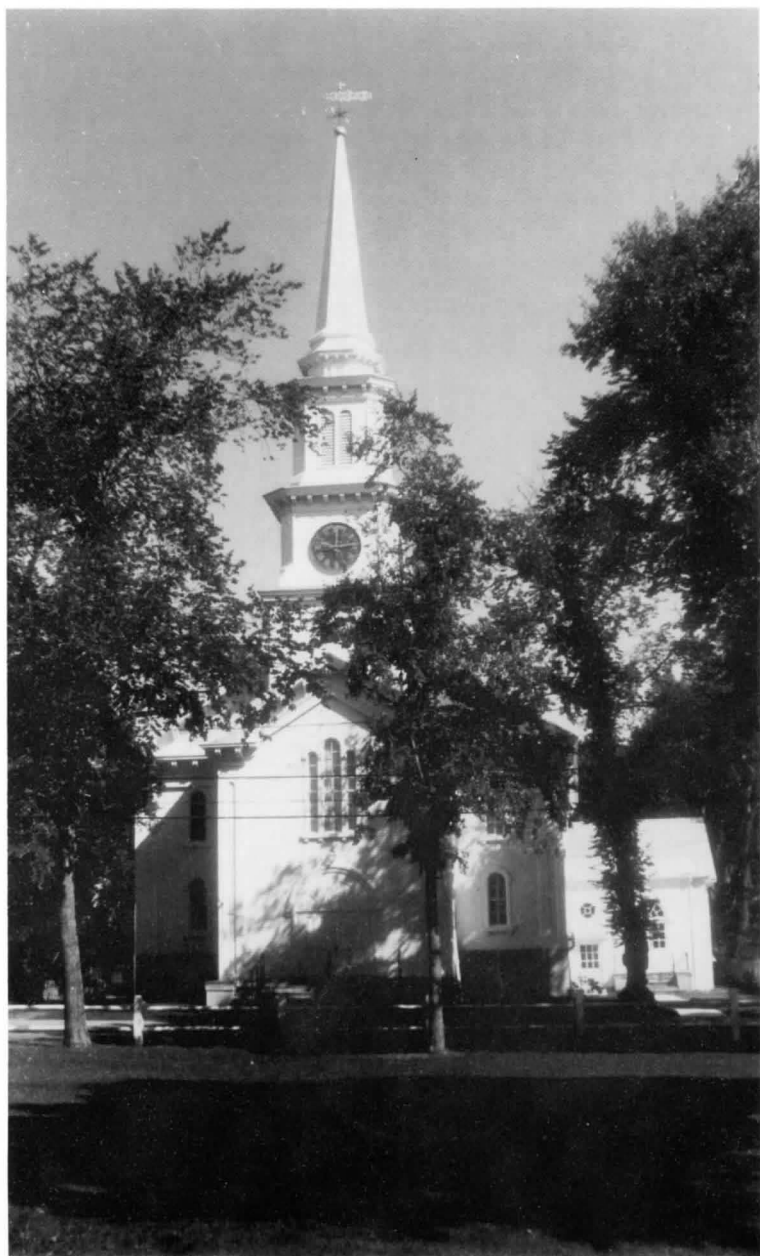
Albert Nye was the son of William Nye, Jr., who was a prominent Falmouth businessman, Town Clerk, Town Treasurer and a Selectman for 21 years. Albert was a wealthy merchant with shipping interests in New Orleans. His wealth was displayed in the magnificent summer home he built to escape the summer heat, and in the lifestyle he maintained whenever the family was in residence. His business failed in the Panic of 1857, and in 1872 the house was sold to Captain John Robinson Lawrence, a retired whaling captain turned businessman. It was Capt. Lawrence's family who named the house "Mostly Hall" because of the 30 foot halls upstairs and down and the wide verandas. He was a community-minded civic leader as well as a successful businessman. His son

H.V. Lawrence lived in the house until his death at age 92 in 1953. Mostly Hall is a very unusual house, possibly unique; it has been described as a "striking Southern-style plantation house with typical wide verandas all around."¹⁸ Certain features are characteristic of a southern plantation, such as the wide porch surrounding all four sides of the house, the elevation of the first floor with kitchen, dining and service rooms on the ground floor, the 13-foot high ceilings (very impractical for the cold north), and the front to back central hallways. However, the basic style is Italian Villa, bracket-style Victorian, with square shape, hip roof, tower, and roofline brackets on all three levels. The square tower on the third floor is typical of the Italian Villa style. This cupola is larger than most, in keeping with the size of the building; and it provided a view of Vineyard Sound. Altogether it is an early example of the Victorian style, modified to suit the demands of Mr. Nye, who wanted to provide familiar comforts for his southern bride. "It was the first summer residence ever built here, and was at that time a wonder to the people of Falmouth. The house was heated by a furnace, I presume the only furnace in Falmouth then. He had a private gas plant, and the house and grounds were lighted with gas."^{19 20}



15. The First Congregational Church. 1857. (68 Main Street)

The church built on the Training Field, now the Village Green, was the second built on that site and the fourth Meeting House to be built in Falmouth; in 1857, it was dismantled and moved across the street to its present site. The structural framing timbers and many of the original pews of the 1796 building were incorporated into the present somewhat larger building, as was the bell, commissioned from Paul Revere in 1796. The church today looks much as it did in the mid-nineteenth century except for its color. Although New England churches are thought to be traditionally white, this one was originally a buff color with brown trim. Its architectural style incorporates elements of both Greek Revival, with quoin blocks, pilasters and heavy cornice work, and Victorian with rounded windows, and recesses and heavy brackets at the cornices.²¹



16. Saint Barnabas Memorial Church, 1890. (Main Street)

St. Barnabas Church with its traditional English design and stone fabric stands out among the clapboard and natural shingle of the other buildings around the Village Green. It is a reminder of the wealthy businessmen who came to Falmouth in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, building substantial houses, often on spacious grounds, and bringing a new way of life to what had become a village in decline. It stands between a traditional center chimney Colonial (the Captain Jonathan Hatch house) and an impressive Greek Revival (the Thomas Lawrence Swift house). The contrast between these three buildings is a reminder of the beginning of the growth of Falmouth from a sleepy New England village into the bustling, almost metropolitan, summer resort and year round scientific center and retirement haven it has become.²²

