

From *Spritsail*, Vol. 19, No. 2:
 Summer, 2005. Pages 17-20.
 An excerpt from the article
 "Gardeners and Caretakers of
 Woods Hole" by Susan
 Fletcher Witzell.



The Fay Homestead. Joseph Story Fay bought the house from Ward Parker in 1850. It was built about 1765 by Ephraim Manassah Swift. In this photo, taken by Baldwin Coolidge in 1896 just before the death of Joseph Story Fay, we see Fay in a wheelchair with his daughter Sarah Bryant Fay and several companions. Courtesy WHHC.



Michael Walsh. Courtesy WHHC.

FAY ROSE GARDEN Woods Hole Road

Joseph Story Fay (1812-1897) bought the 18th century Swift house across from Little Harbor from Ward Parker in 1850. He also gradually purchased many acres in Woods Hole, some adjacent to the house as well as in other parts of Woods Hole and Falmouth. A former cotton broker and businessman, he was a great benefactor to Woods Hole, replanting the stripped woodlands and giving the Cape its first Episcopal church, the Church of the Messiah in Woods Hole. Over the years he became a very much respected and beloved local gentleman.

Michael Walsh

Joseph Story Fay had a serious interest in horticulture. He brought Michael Walsh to Woods Hole to

develop his gardens. Eventually Walsh began experimenting with roses, developing a rambler rose from a white rose, the *Rosa wichuraiana*, a favorite of Joseph Story Fay, crossed with *Rosa multiflora*. Walsh won numerous prizes for the rambler rose. After Mr. Fay's death in 1897, Walsh's patron was Miss Sarah Bryant Fay (1855-1938), Joseph Story Fay's daughter, a woman of outstanding artistic ability and a fine photographer and artist. By the early 20th century, the fame of the Fay rose garden had spread far and wide. In June visitors arrived from all over the country to see the roses on the estate. Miss Fay welcomed the visitors graciously.



The Fay driveway with hydrangeas and agave, 1896. Photograph by Baldwin Coolidge. Courtesy WHHC.

Michael Walsh, who was of Irish descent, was born in Wales January 14, 1848, and died in Woods Hole April 10, 1922, in his 74th year. He came to America in 1868 and arrived in Woods Hole when he was

27. He had gardened since he was 11 years old when he became an apprentice on an English estate. It was there that he was introduced to the care of roses. Mr. Fay hired Walsh to be the head gardener at the Homestead on the harbor in Woods Hole in 1875. A small cottage was moved from the Woods Hole School property nearby to be the house for the Walsh family, and placed on the hill just above the greenhouses. Walsh planted a number of exotic trees on the estate, grew prize-winning vegetables, rows of cutting flowers and lined the drives with flowering shrubs, such as hydrangeas. It was his experimentation with roses that led to his fame, which made his name more well-known than that of his patrons.



Walsh roses in the sunken garden, Fay estate. Fay Collection. Courtesy WHHC.

In 1897, the year that Joseph Story Fay died, greenhouses were built on the hill above the house by Sarah Fay.

She hired another gardener to take care of the day-to-day gardening chores and maintenance and allowed Walsh to work full-time on the hybridization of roses. Thousands of test plants were grown in the propagating greenhouse as he worked on developing the rambler. The hillside and areas around the old Colonial house became structured with rows of shrub roses and pergolas, trellises and cedar tree pillars on which to display the results of Walsh's genius with ramblers. Michael Walsh and Miss Fay exhibited roses together at major horticultural shows and received innumerable prizes, both paper certificates and trophies. In 1905 he was awarded a Gold Medal by the Royal National Rose Society of Great Britain for 'Lady Gay.' In 1912 the Massachusetts Horticultural Society gave Walsh the George Robert White medal for eminent service to



Beds of roses in the Fay garden. Climbing roses are supported on cedar pillars. The greenhouse is at right. Photograph by Baldwin Coolidge, 1906. Courtesy WHHC.

horticulture. In 1914 he received the Gertrude Hubbell Gold Medal from the American Rose Society for 'Excelsa.' The gardens, Michael Walsh and the prizes were captured on large sepia prints by Boston photographer Baldwin Coolidge from 1896 to 1906.



Michael Walsh with a hydrangea, 1896. Photograph by Baldwin Coolidge. Courtesy WHHC.

In 1901, the New York, New Haven & Hartford Railroad was in the process of building a new depot in Woods Hole. In order to demolish the old station building, they set it on fire. The fire burned for three days; its toxic smoke destroyed Walsh's entire crop, several thousand feet away and downwind of the blaze. He tried to get railroad officials to put out the fire but to no avail. He and Miss Fay sued the New Haven for damages and settled out of court for \$20,000.

During the years 1907 - 1917, Walsh published yearly catalogs of his roses, hydrangeas and hollyhocks. The roses, especially ramblers, were shipped all over the United States and to Europe, being extremely popular in England, as well as France. A federal inspector actually lived on the Fay estate to certify the enormous number of shipments out of the state.

There was a cordial relationship between Michael Walsh and the Fays. On February 24, 1922, in a letter to Sarah Bryant Fay about coal furnaces and detailing some of the work to be done on the Fay property, he attached a P.S., as follows: "Forty Six Years ago today I commenced work for Honored & Beloved Joseph S. Fay."

Michael Walsh also purchased land along Nobska Road, or Shore Road as it was called then, and worked on roses separately from the Fay estate until his death in 1922. This land was eventually purchased by Sidney Lawrence and made into commercial farmland.

Edward Walsh

After the death of his father, Edward Walsh, youngest child of Michael Walsh, continued to care for the rose gardens and be the caretaker of the Joseph Story Fay properties, d.b.a "Estate of Michael Walsh." His sister Elizabeth Walsh (Lizzie) was the accountant. During the 1920s and 1930s Edward worked for Sarah Bryant Fay as had his father. He also did grave excavation and landscaping work for others in the area.

After the death of Miss Fay in the 1930s, the rose gardens gradually disappeared. In 1943 Mrs. James P. Warbasse conceived the idea of a memorial boulder with a plaque to commemorate Michael Walsh and his development of the rambler rose. It was erected by the Falmouth Garden Club on a piece of land given by the Fay heirs. The Fay house was sold to Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution in 1948. Eventually fences surrounded the boulder and a small selection of Walsh ramblers were grown on the fences. This memorial and garden have become part of the Woods Hole Historical Museum campus.