

## Summer Resort Community

by Jennifer Stone Gaines

By Labor Day each year, it is hard for us to imagine a time when Falmouth was not a summer resort. As thousands of visitors stream through town it is obvious that summer is not just a season but a major business. Shell heaps and records from Gosnold's voyage in 1602 suggest that Native Americans were the first to summer on Falmouth's shores, but Joseph Story Fay is the person we generally consider our first summer resident. He arrived in 1850 to find a small hard-working maritime community. Within twenty years the area was hit with hard economic times; the salt industry had collapsed, and the whaling industry was declining rapidly. Coastal shipping had been disrupted by the Civil War and was withering as railroads took over. The only flourishing industry was the Pacific Guano Company, which would be bankrupt itself by 1889.

Although the rest of Cape Cod was even more economically depressed than Falmouth, an interesting phenomenon had been occurring in Wellfleet, Eastham, Yarmouth, and across the sound on Martha's Vineyard. This was the creation of the Methodist Camp Meetings in which as many as a thousand people traveled to an area for a revival meeting. They lived in tents on the site, and were given time and opportunity to bathe in the sea and enjoy its healthful refreshment. Some claim that this is the root of

the summer resort, a time when people learned to enjoy themselves at the seashore.

In the rest of the northeastern United States, post Civil War years brought new industrial prosperity. The rising urban middle class was the first large social group to have time and money to take vacations. Simultaneously, the cities were suffering from fatal "summer diseases": diphtheria, typhoid and dysentery. Families looked for a way to get their children away from the cities and out to healthful places. Besides fresh air, which Falmouth's 67 miles of shoreline provided in abundance, there were at least two requirements for the perfect vacation spot: transportation and accommodation.



Summer Resort Plaque by Sarah Peters. Photograph by Jacki Forbes.

The rush to provide accommodations - and to profit from them - began on the very foundation of an extinct industry. In 1870, as the railroad was creeping towards Woods Hole, several men from Worcester bought the last operating salt works and renamed it Falmouth Heights. The developers used the Oak Bluffs cottage model for their venture. Plans called for small lots centering on concentric streets in the western part of the land, while others in the east formed a grid pattern facing onto broad avenues running to the sea. The developers included open parks, hotels, a wharf and bathing areas. They added deed restrictions to guarantee peace, quiet and fresh air. The plan was

to "attract a family of moderate means" and "assure a maximum of attractiveness." The hotel, wharf and community center were finished first, along with a few charming model cottages trimmed with gingerbread. Hotel guests came to enjoy the delights of the seaside. Before year's end guests had purchased 89 of the lots for \$200 each. Six additional lots sold for \$100 each. This extensive project was greeted favorably by the town.

Other resort hotels were soon built along Falmouth's coast. They were key accommodations for attracting visitors, many of whom later built their own homes here. The new hotels offered a self-contained holiday. People were picked up at the train station by the hotel's wagon, and remained at the hotel for the duration of their vacation. In the early days, visitors spent most of their time sitting on the verandas in the shade, breathing the healthful fresh air. Many of the big hotels had their own "casinos" which were mainly

social centers for residents who could buy ice cream, have children's parties or, later, watch silent movies. Guests promenaded on the hotel's veranda and boardwalk, danced in the evening, and participated in theatricals. Local "captains" provided sailing trips onto the sound or the bay on their catboats.

Many areas were developed with a blending of hotel, wharf, open parks and small house lots. Menauhant was one such, with the hotel built in 1874 on the end of the peninsula facing Nantucket Sound. Menauhant developed slowly, and still retains its charm from the past.

All the so-called "Pond Colonies," which included the tips of the peninsulas of Maravista, Acapesket, Davisville and Menauhant, developed more slowly than Falmouth Heights. Far enough from the railroad station, they stayed rural longer. Waquoit saw the building of tasteful summer houses built by



Falmouth Heights (laid out in 1871) as shown in the Barnstable County Map book of 1908. Deacons Pond had not yet been opened to Vineyard Sound to create Falmouth Inner Harbor. Courtesy WHHC.



Old Colony Railroad advertisement poster distributed in the Boston area in 1877 encouraging people to plan vacations in Falmouth and on Martha's Vineyard by taking the train. Courtesy WHHC.

academics in the late 1890s. There the Waquoit Yacht Club, founded in 1926, provides a major social venue to this day, as do other Falmouth yacht clubs.

On the Buzzards Bay side, The Quissett Harbor House opened in about 1874 and lasted more than one hundred years. In 1898 Sippewissett House (later named the Cape Codder) was built. One of the areas largest hotels, it was famous for its swimming pool and bowling alley. The hotel's developer also divided the land on the neighboring hillsides into half acre house lots, though only the lots on Sippewissett Road and Gunning Point were built on at that time.

Speculators bought up other large tracts of shore front which had previously been considered unimportant for farming or year-round homes. Land that sold for \$5 an acre in 1870 sold for \$2,000 twenty years later. In 1890, the historian Deyo said that "the prominence of [Falmouth] as a summer

resort is steadily increasing and rapidly becoming the chief characteristic of the town."

Further north, fields on the shore of Wild Harbor were bought in 1889 by a Boston family who quietly built seven large shingle style cottages and sold them to relatives and friends. In 1890 the cow pastures at Megansett were bought by developers from Watertown. By 1901 the Megansett wharf, casino and boarding house were built and a tea room was added in 1912.

In 1898 an ox pasture at the shore to the south was bought by a Brockton group who renamed it Silver Beach. A year later in the flashiest sales pitch of the Falmouth resorts, they advertised their lots in Brockton, luring potential buyers down by train to a free clam bake featuring oysters, clams and quahogs, "all from our own premises." More than 350 people came down for the event. They found the Silver Beach Hotel surrounded by 500 small lots extending from the wooded hillside to the beachfront.



Steamer arriving at the pier of the Menauhant Hotel at the turn of the century. Courtesy Falmouth Historical Society.

Even as the big hotels were built, other entrepreneurs were buying land and planning exclusive enclaves for the well-to-do. In 1872 an island at the mouth of West Falmouth Harbor, which had previously been used as a place to fatten hogs for slaughter, was bought by a Boston developer. His first plan was to build a summer community much like Falmouth Heights, but the plan was delayed by weak economic conditions. In 1890 a new plan was put into place. This time the site, newly named Chapoquoit, was landscaped to provide large lots; deed restrictions guaranteed that the houses would be large and built by the wealthy. The developer sold lots gradually over the succeeding years, and only to friends and family from the Boston area. Chapoquoit still retains the air of close friends enclosed in their own summer colony.

In Woods Hole, after the Pacific Guano Company went bankrupt, a Boston real estate developer bought the peninsula and renamed it Penzance Point. He immediately sold large lots, from 1.5 to 9.5 acres. Many of these stretched from the shore of Buzzards Bay to the shore in Great Harbor. The purchasers, mostly wealthy bankers from New York, built large



Beachstone House on Chapoquoit was built for Charles H. Jones, a shot manufacturer from Brockton, in 1890-91. The water tower on the right was built in 1895. Courtesy WHHC.



Joseph Story Fay in wheelchair outside his home in 1896 with his daughter, Sarah Bryant Fay (seated), and two other young ladies. The house dates from before the Revolution, and is now called Challenger House and is owned by W.H.O.I. Photo by Baldwin Coolidge. Courtesy WHHC.

houses to enjoy the views and elaborate boat houses on docks stretching into Great Harbor to accommodate their large yachts.

Wealthy individuals had built their private vacation homes in Falmouth as early as the 1870s. The Beebe family, invited by their friends, the Fays, to visit, bought large pieces of land in 1875 both on the flat land between Main Street and Vineyard Sound, and on the hills to the west of town. The first home the Beebes built (in 1876) was a large house on Shore street overlooking the sea. In 1878 one son built Highfield Hall on a western hill. The next year another son built the adjacent manor house, Tanglewood.

Our Victorian visitors arrived dressed in layers of modest and fashionable clothes. Social mores of the time dictated that a sun tan was coarse, exercise unladylike. Before the 1880s, visitors were advised to spend no more than 20 minutes a day bathing in the sea, and then only

when well clothed. It was not until the 1890s that actual swimming was practiced. Of course women were in a quandary; "they couldn't move well in all their clothing, yet it would be scandalous to bare any flesh. As Margaret Lillie Gildea remembered the years before World War I in Woods Hole, "My grandmother was a little, small, slight, slender woman, and she wore an enormous black bathing suit covered in black bombazine down to her ankles, and stockings and bathing shoes. She used to lie on her back and paddle her hands, and paddle all the way around the wharf, accompanied by one of her sons. She insisted on having a son, one or the other of them... accompany her... Her paddling was done entirely from the wrist, just her hands."



Harding home was the first of the "summer cottages to be built on Penzance Point, ca. 1892. Courtesy WHHC.

Exercise and enjoyment of the outdoor life became a national avocation following President Teddy Roosevelt's example. Soon after 1900 people learned the Australian crawl. The appearance of the first woman's one-piece woolen knitted bathing suit in 1907 scandalized many, and men still wore knitted woolen tank tops. At the insistence of Mrs. H. H. Fay, a local grande dame, Nobska beach kept to the Victorian ethos well into the 1930s. A story is told of a visiting gentleman on the beach in the 1930s being severely chastised by Mrs. Fay for being so crass as to remove his top in public.

Several big hotels created semi-pro baseball teams which played in a league - the precursor of the Cape

Cod Baseball League. A game between the communities of Menahaunt and Waquoit was traditionally played on the Fourth of July. Hollis R. Lovell recalls, "...a pitcher they had by the name of Hamlin...With all our practicing, even our better ball players couldn't touch him. It was one strikeout after another, much to the pleasure of the Waquoit and East Falmouth rooters."

During the hotel and resort building boom, transportation facilities worked to keep up with demand.

By 1872 the railroad had extended into Woods Hole, mainly to ship fertilizer. This provided direct links to passenger lines from Boston, and later New York,

and also to the ferries in Woods Hole, connecting to Nantucket and Martha's Vineyard, as well as to New Bedford, Fall River and New York. On the Buzzards Bay side of town, the North Falmouth train station provided easy accessibility to the shore.

Beginning in 1884 and continuing through 1916, another convenience was available to the wealthy summer people from the Boston area. The Flying Dude, a private train which several families hired for the season, allowed men of the households to become the first to commute between Boston and Woods Hole. It left Woods Hole at 7:40, stopped wherever passengers/subscribers waited at stations along the way, and arrived in Boston at 9:35. The return trip



This photograph from the Marshall Family album shows children's bathing costumes ca. 1910. From left to right, is John Marshall, Eleanore Marshall, Helen Spader and Margaret Marshall at their family's beach house on Quissett Harbor. Courtesy WHHC.

left Boston at 3:30 in the afternoon. Families and guests often used this weekday-only train to visit, but guests were required to have a signed invitation from a householder who was a member in order to board the train.

Hollis R. Lovell writes of arriving at Menauhant for the summer, "Most people chose to come by train. It was still a long ride of several hours. In those days families came for the season, not for a month or week as they do today. Trunks were put in the baggage car and unloaded at the far end of the Falmouth passenger station, with much confusion on the part of a grumpy baggage master, who made a complete chaos out of every load. Those of us going to Menauhant were loaded into a large stage coach — trunks and all - and started forth. It was necessary to take the long route through Teaticket and East Falmouth because at that time no bridge crossed Green Pond between Acapesket and Davisville."

As the years passed, changes came to our resort communities. More than twenty-five years after Silver Beach had been developed, the town of Falmouth

bought the next large beach to the south. Soon a bathing pavilion and the adjacent Old Silver Beach Park and Club with its restaurant, dance hall and club room followed. This facility, without a hotel, reflected the onset of the automobile and the ability of summer visitors to travel around looking for amusements rather than being bound to one site for their Cape Cod vacation.

The tremendous development of Falmouth's shoreline in the 1870s through 1900 marked the beginning of our commitment to the "resort industry." Although the hurricanes of 1938 and 1944 wiped out many of the shoreline cottages, the pattern of summering in Falmouth was here to stay. From the war years in the 1940s when every cottage and hotel was filled with Cape Cod-based military men and their families, through the '50s and '60s with the boom of motels, followed by bed and breakfasts, inns and hotels (again), we find ourselves today firmly ensconced as a summer resort town. We are now struggling to conserve the beautiful wild lands and seaside which have attracted visitors to our area for well over one hundred and fifty years.



The covered porch of the Marshall family summer home in Quissett at the turn of the century. Even the porch furniture was elegant according to today's standards. Courtesy WHHC.