

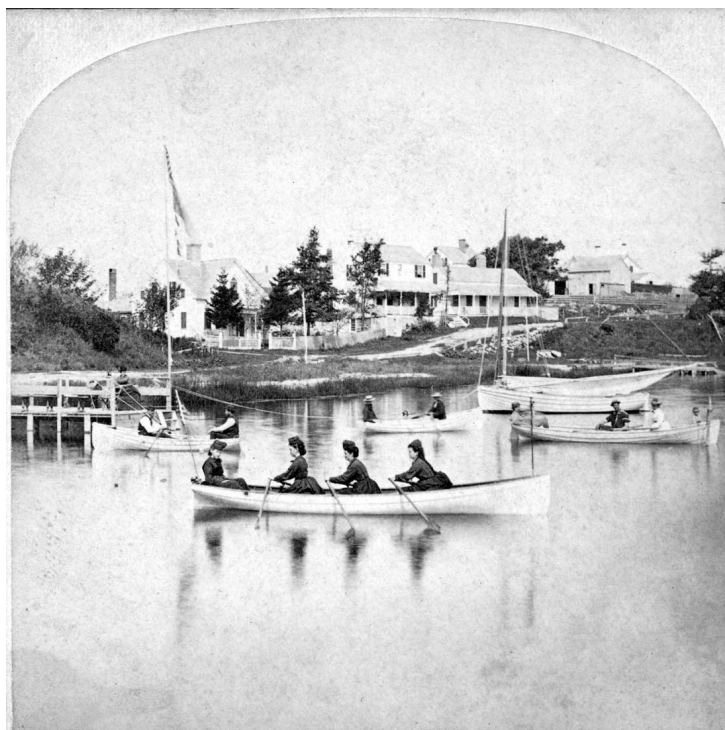
## *From the Archives: HOUSES ON THE UPPER SECTION OF LITTLE HARBOR ROAD*

*Susan Fletcher Witzell*

Little Harbor Road was formerly called Government Road. From the time the Lighthouse Service was established in 1789 and the Revenue Marine in 1791, the western side of Little Harbor was occupied by branches of the United States government. In 1939 the Lighthouse Service was merged with the Coast Guard, which took over the buildings on Little Harbor and is there to this day. A bridge to Government Road went directly across from the main road to the top end of Government Road. A new bridge, further west, was built to the steamship dock and railroad by the state in 1955 (?) and the old bridge demolished. Presumably this is when the name was changed to Little Harbor Road.

The uppermost site (now **No. 3 Little Harbor Road**) was occupied in the 18<sup>th</sup> century by a center-hall Colonial built in 1700. During the Revolution it was known as Joseph Parker's Tavern and was said to be a favorite rendezvous of British soldiers. Later it was owned by John Webster and called "Webster House". The next owner was Mr. Hopkins who ran it as "The Nobska Inn". Following Mr. Hopkins was Mr. Blossom under whose ownership the inn was called "Naushon House". In 1858 Naushon House burned to the ground.

The first photographic record we have of this site was produced as a stereo view called "After the Regatta" by Kilburn Brothers of Littleton, N.H.. It shows 4 ladies in matching dark silk dresses and matching pillbox hats, 3 rowing and 1 acting as coxswain in stern of a skiff in Little Harbor. In the background are the Davis house, the Hatch house, a house built on the site of the Naushon House, and across the road a barn probably belonging to the Thomas G. Davis house (later the "The Job Shop"). Behind that is the Azariah Crowell house, built in 1871. Crowell was the chemist for the Pacific Guano Company.



The uppermost house shown in this view taken after 1871 is a Cape Cod house with a porch across the front; it is 1 ½ stories high. In the 1890s, Augustus Messer, the conductor on the Old Colony Railroad's Dude Train, built a large 2 ½ story house with a cupola on this site, adding to an existing Mansard-roofed ell extending west. The ell served as a store. The main house was a boarding establishment for railroad personnel and exists to the present day with its cobble or field stone foundation and asbestos-shingled side walls. The ell was photographed in a photo of a couple walking up Water Street, taken about 1890, where it is shown without the larger house behind it. Baldwin Coolidge used the roof of Messer's house to photograph the railroad yard below it in 1902. Its distinctive cupola appears in the background of many photos of the railroad yard and station.

Other residents have been Dr. Safford, William Hamblin, Henry Phinney and Abby Eldridge. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century it was run as a boarding house by a Miss Kitty Egan. Kitty Egan's estate sold it to Lon Hocker in 1967. It was sold to the Penikese Island School for a period of time and then sold to WHOI who owned it until 2012-2013. The house was purchased by Brian Von Herzen in 2013. It is called "Climate House," where scientists and researchers can live while they investigate climate change.

**No. 4 Little Harbor Road** (Ballantine house). The original building in the northwest corner of Little Harbor was bought at an unknown date by Frederick Ray who was the lighthouse keeper at Nobska. In 1871 it was torn down (in the stereo view mentioned above it is not present). About 1878 Eliel Fish (son of Elihu Fish) built a one-story building on the site as a chandlery. From 1885 to 1889 it was used as the Post Office and a drug store was added. There may have also been a restaurant there run by A. W. Whittemore. In 1892 it became the Woods Hole Social Library (predecessor of the Woods Hole Public Library). Later it was run by Eliel Fish's brother-in-law Charles W. Davis as a store again. In 1900 it was bought by Dr. George Moore.

### Number 4 Little Harbor Road, continued.

The house was rented from 1913 to 1923 by the Thomas Ratcliffe family during the summers. In 1915, the roof was raised by Dr. Moore to make it a two story dwelling. In 1937 it was inherited by Moore's daughter B. Rhodes and further modified as a dwelling. In 1955 it was sold to Markus Ravinus and in 1965 it was bought by Henry Thomas Ballantine, Jr. and his wife Elizabeth Eliot Mixter (a descendent of Joseph Story Fay). The Ballantines also purchased the entire waterside end of Little Harbor which included the site of Sarah Bryant Fay's painting studio (washed away in the 1938 hurricane) and the stone dock. The house is still in the family, owned by Dr. Elizabeth Ballantine Gardner.



*Number 4  
Little Harbor Road*

*Left: Woods Hole Social Library at the building at Number 4 Little Harbor, c. 1892*

*Right: Number 4 renovated to two stories after 1915 and the Messer boarding house behind it. Sarah Bryant Fay's painting studio and boat house is at right. Photo by Sarah Bryant Fay.*



**No. 5 Little Harbor Road** (the Hatch house) was built by Elijah Swift (entrepreneur, shipbuilder and developer of the Bar Neck Wharf) for his son Thomas L. Swift as a chandlery in 1840. The rear ell of the house is said to have been built in the 18<sup>th</sup> century prior to the Revolution; ballast stones were used in the construction of the foundation. The ell may have been built by a Captain Morgan in Falmouth and towed to Woods Hole by an ox cart in the 1840s. Thomas Swift's estate sold it to Captain Robinson Hatch (1790-1875) in 1861 and by 1880 it was owned by his son Charles E. Hatch (1822-1888), father of Ruth Anna Hatch. Hatch added the front porch and ran a wood and coal business on the dock behind the Methodist Church on Water Street (later known as Dyer's dock, also used for coal). In the 20<sup>th</sup> century the house was owned by John and Charlotte Christian (Mrs. Christian was a descendent of the Hatch family). The present owner has done a great deal of restoration work on the house as well as an addition which replaced the ell.



**No. 7 Little Harbor** (the Davis house) was built about 1846 and run as a boarding house by the widowed Delilah Eldridge Sanford Davis. Delilah had married Thomas Davis, Jr. as his second wife. It was later owned by Jabez Davis, Jr. By 1908 it was owned by Walter O. Luscombe whose residence was on Church Street (demolished in 1960, it was the site of the present Fisher House, parish hall for the Church of the Messiah). In 1945 or 1946 the Davis house was used as a tea room by George P. Woolard. Mr. Woolard owned it into the 1950s. The present owners are Wallace and Pamela Stark.

*In a photo by Baldwin Coolidge taken in the 1890s of the west side of Little Harbor shows a Spritsail boat tied in front of the Hatch house, right (Number 5). On the left is the Delilah Davis house hidden behind trees.*

## Twenty-Seven years at the Woods Hole Historical Museum

By Susan Fletcher Witzell, Archivist

Last month (September 2019), I announced to the Steering Committee that I planned to retire in a year. I've been at the Collection and Museum for 27 years, as both volunteer and employee. Getting towards 80 years of age, it's time to no longer work.

I've always been a frequent user of the Woods Hole Library and in 1992 when I was unemployed (after 17 years at WHOI), I asked Jennifer at the library if she needed a volunteer at the Historical Collection (as it was called then) next door. Oh yes!

The Collection had just received one of the largest family collections ever donated: the Fish-Morse Collection from Quissett. It is contained in 20 boxes plus boxes of clothing and shawls. I lived near Quissett Harbor where the collection came from and had long been fascinated by its history. The Fish family, the Eldreds, Careys and Yales, as well as their descendants the Morses, were the essential core of Quissett history.

It took months to catalog and archive the material – letters (an entire trunk of those), deeds, manuscripts, photos and clothing. I came in for a few hours one day a week. As a result I created an exhibit from the material, 200 Years of a Quissett Family, and under the same title wrote an article for *Spritsail*.

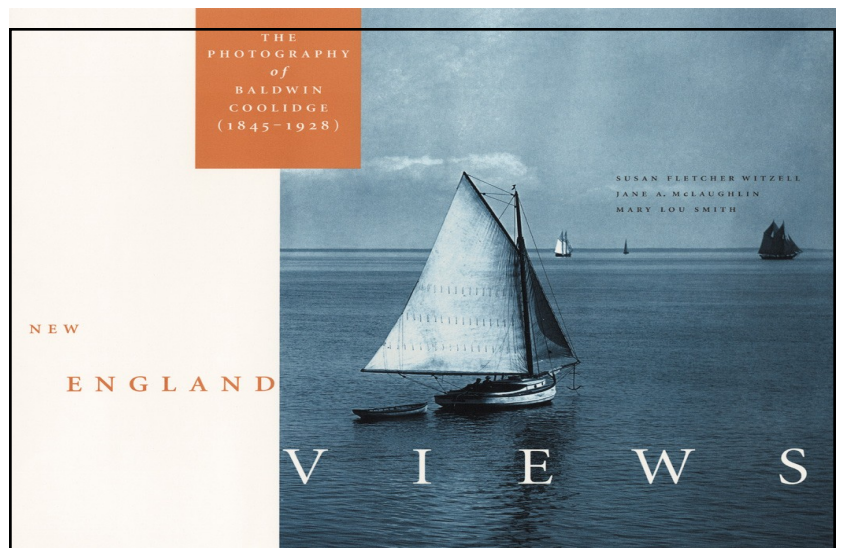
Along with Connie Chadwick, who worked on oral history, and Libby Dodge, the archives registrar, I became a regular volunteer helping Jennifer run the Collection and the summer exhibits and events.

The next highlight was the idea of making a book from our extensive collection of Baldwin Coolidge photos. By then I was cataloging all of our originals and copy prints. What a marvelous photographer! I broached the idea to Jennifer, Mary Lou Smith and Jane McLaughlin, who had written about Coolidge in the first-ever issue of *Spritsail*. They and the publications committee received the idea with enthusiasm. I spent the good part of a year going many times to the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities (now Historic New England) in Boston to research Coolidge's other photos – they own the master collection of his plate glass negatives, acquired in the 1920s after his death. *New England Views* would contain more than Woods Hole photos since he'd worked all over New England.

The book was designed by Diane Jaroch who had designed *Spritsail*, *Woods Hole Reflections*, *The Book of Falmouth*. 2000 copies were printed and supported by the collected donations of subscribers and some grants. Diane's design for *New England Views* was submitted to the American Association of Museums annual design competition in 1999 and won first prize for museums whose budgets fell under \$100,000.

By the time *New England Views* came out I was the Assistant Curator working twice a week for 8 hours (later 10 hours). I also worked at the library.

One of the delights of the 27 years has been working with Jennifer on exhibits. Together we created some of the most beloved ones, and I also helped her with exhibits which were entirely her project. Our favorite was "The Lawrence Ladies Clothing Collection" shown beginning in 1999, continuing in 2000. The Woods Hole Library had held its first auction and someone had donated trunks of clothing to it. Realizing their special contents, Jennifer had captured 2 out of 3 trunks. They were filled with the most exquisite collection of women's clothing from the 1840s to the 1920s, accessories, children's garments and lots of undergarments. The entire collection fills 20 large garment boxes. Antique and vintage clothing has been a special focus for me since the 1970s and I had read extensively about Victorian clothing. It was a great pleasure to archive the clothes, create the exhibit and display these garments. The exhibit was very popular.







*A peach silk dress from the 1870s which was trimmed in navy blue velvet and blonde lace. On the wall behind the dress is a matching bonnet also trimmed in navy blue velvet ribbon, part of another peach dress trimmed in black lace and a leather purse trimmed in purple ribbon, stamped with lavender flowers, embroidered with purple silk violets and olive green leaves. Lawrence Ladies Collection.*

*Photo by Susan F. Witzell*

My next exhibit project (and an article which occupied an entire issue of *Spritsail*) was “Gardeners, Caretakers and Boatmen of Woods Hole.” I interviewed many people with the emphasis being not on the landowners and estate owners but their hard-working gardeners, caretakers and boatmen. Jennifer did the boatmen part; I researched the rest. This exhibit also stayed up for 2 years.

Working with Jennifer on the William H. Littlefield painting exhibit was also a joy, with its triple venue of our museum, the Cape Cod Museum of Art and the Provincetown Art Association Museum.

In 2007 and 2008 I designed an exhibit which featured “Then and Now” photographs of Woods Hole, doing the now photos during the winter when I could safely stand in the streets to position myself in the same locations as were photographed 100 or more years ago.

2011 featured an exhibit for the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Civil War. My husband Nick and I had been involved in Civil War reenactments from the 1980s-1990s. He loaned his uniform, drum and other equipment, photos were downloaded from the National Archives, and one of the Lawrence Ladies Collection dresses reappeared.

My other favorite has been the “Businesses of Old Woods Hole.” A lot of research went into the stories of now-forgotten businesses of the village. Artifacts as well as photos were featured; the second year added a special exhibit of items related to the Pacific Guano Company.

The last exhibit I was involved with was “Science Connection: Woods Hole and Japan.” This was Jennifer’s exhibit but I aided her as much as possible in a subject that was a great pleasure to work with.

Jennifer had started as the museum archivist but in fact, running the Collection (and later, the Museum) as Curator was so time-consuming that she no longer worked on the archives. Eventually I took this over and it has become my main job, as well as helping the Director (formerly the Curator) run the museum and working on various publications and publicity designs.

It’s been a pleasure to help Debbie transition into the job as Director. Debbie is very positive and is great at putting the Museum and its programs into the eyes of the public from many years of public relations and writing. I especially appreciate her fine editing skills whenever I ask her to review the things I write. We have worked well together on *Mainsheet* and *Spritsail* and creating material and posters for events.

It’s been very interesting and satisfying to have done something I have greatly enjoyed for so many years. When one graduates from college with a degree in art and art history, one never knows what a career might bring. When I was in grad school at NYU’s Institute of Fine Arts, studying Medieval Art and Architecture, I was aware that the Institute offered courses in Museum Studies... and this sounded utterly boring. Little did I know....

In closing, I would like to mention the following: as far back as 1992, upon the acquisition of the Fish-Morse Collection, the archives ran out of any extra space to store new items. Eventually a storage locker was rented to store infrequently accessed collections. I am hopeful now that the issue has been brought up again, after so many years of discussion and planning, that this we will see and celebrate a new archives space built for our tiny museum.