



# Spritsail

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**Racing Thistles at Woods Hole Yacht Club**

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**On the Front Cover:** Harry Clarke (2895), Tom Browne (2690) and Pat Tweedy (2478) sail back to the Woods Hole Yacht Club after an afternoon racing on Buzzards Bay in 1974. (Photo: Richard S. Taylor)

### **On the Back Cover:**

The crew of the *Malabar IV*, 1938. (Photo: Gerard Swope Jr.)

A formal portrait of M. Sylvia Donaldson who served in the House of Representatives from 1923-1930. (Courtesy of Falmouth Historical Society)

Emperor Hirohito at the entrance to MBL's Lillie Building. (Photo: Dorothy I. Crossley)

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The spritsail is a small boat rig of respectable antiquity used around the world. Its name comes from the sprit, a spar comparable to a gaff, but attached much lower on the mast.

The sprit crosses diagonally to the uppermost corner of the sail, which it extends and elevates. The Woods Hole Spritsail Boat was originally used for fishing and later became popular among local and summer residents for racing and sailing. —Mary Lou Smith

## From the Editors

Our glorious summer season is upon us, and the cover story of this issue of *Spritsail* highlights the excitement and joy of being on the water. Richard S. Taylor writes about his memories of sailing and racing Thistles at Woods Hole Yacht Club. The lightweight, easy-to-plane 17-foot boat only had a brief sojourn in Woods Hole, but its sailors fondly share their recollections with Dick for this article.

Kevin Swope shares the story and photos of a cruise on the schooner, *Malabar IV*, that his grandfather Gerard Swope Jr. sailed with a fascinating crew in 1938. The photos accompanying the story are from the book that Kevin recently published, *1938: Photographs by Gerard Swope Jr.*

Falmouth native M. Sylvia Donaldson was elected in 1922 to the Massachusetts House of Representatives from the 10th Plymouth District of Brockton, one of the first two women to be elected to that governing board. Her accomplishments are not well known, and we are fortunate that Leonard Miele did much research and wrote this interesting article.

Sara Piccini writes about the visit that Japanese Emperor Hirohito and Empress Nagako made in 1975 to Falmouth, a brief stop on their goodwill tour of the U.S. This summer, the museum, WHOI and Highfield Hall & Gardens will have exhibits on the connections between Japan and Falmouth/Woods Hole.

Mary Fran Buckley has retired from the *Spritsail* editorial board, and we thank her for her editing expertise and guidance. We are pleased to have Richard Taylor and Kevin Swope join us on the board, and are grateful for the outstanding editorial board members we have worked with over the years.

Enjoy this issue of *Spritsail*!

# Racing Thistles at Woods Hole Yacht Club

By Richard S. Taylor

The Thistle is a lightweight, high-performance sailboat that ghosts along quietly in light air and flat water, and planes easily at 8 to 10 knots. In heavier air, it can become something of a beast, providing singular thrills but also becoming a challenging boat to sail well and one that can capsize easily, sometimes seemingly at the slightest wrong twitch of the tiller.<sup>1</sup> Initially designed as a simply-rigged boat for families to race together, the Thistle has evolved over time into the exciting and more complex boat raced today in fleets across the United States. The first hulls were made of molded plywood. Later boats, starting in the early 1960s, were made of fiberglass.

We raced Thistles at Woods Hole Yacht Club (WHYC) only briefly, from about 1967 or '68 until 1980 when a variety of factors led to the fleet's demise. There is much in the WHYC archives about Cape Cod Knockabout and Mirror dinghy sailing and racing, but nothing about the Thistles. This article, part history, part memoir, is an attempt to remedy that.

It was prepared from information in my personal sailing logs, by reviewing online issues of the *Bagpipe*, the Thistle Class Association



The author (3237) and William (Bill) Poole (1817) racing on Buzzards Bay. (Photo: Dorothy I. Crossley)

magazine; and the personal recollections of myself, Jobie Chase and Lincoln A. Baxter, WHYC Thistle sailors all. Additional comments were provided by Lynne Browne, who crewed regularly for her husband Tom on

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<sup>1</sup> The dual nature of the boat and challenges it presents was sometimes reflected in the names skippers chose for their boats. Among the more unusual names on the Thistle New England District perpetual trophy are Bill Barlow's *Thistle Killya* (1128), Bill Poole's *Panic* (1975) and, maybe best of all, Dan Coughlin's *Little Yacht of Horrors* (1990).

his Thistle, and Kit Olmsted, a former Thistle sailor and longtime skipper of the Club's committee boat, the *Cigana*.

Jobie remembers, "Jon Leiby and Lincoln Baxter II, Lincoln A's father, were the first guys with Thistles in Woods Hole. Jon Leiby persuaded my dad [Joe Chase] to get one so that they could race." (Three boats were required for a race under the WHYC rule).



*Sarah*, Jon Leiby's steam Thistle, at Tabor Academy in Marion, Mass., at the time of the 1979 Thistle National Championship Regatta. The engine was coal-fired, I recall, and in the one ride I had on it, the boat moved through Great Harbor smoothly and quietly at about 5 knots, reminding me just a bit of an old, Victorian-era naphtha launch. (Photo: Richard S. Taylor)

That would have been in 1967 or '68. He continues, "My brother Tom and I added two more boats soon thereafter." Lincoln A. ("Lincoln" below) adds, "All the boats were moored off the Club, like the Knockabouts were [and still are]. At this point we started racing (I in 1584), Joe [Chase], Tom and Jobie in their boat, and Dick Edwards (originally sailing Leiby's boat)." As an aside, Lincoln also remembered that "Leiby ... took an old wooden hull on a WHOI cruise, and by the end of the cruise had built a steam engine into it."

Another boat, one owned by Richard Payne, also sailed with the WHYC fleet then, according to Kit.

None of these was actually the first Thistle at the Club, though. That distinction goes to Kit Olmsted's father's boat number 659, *Duggan's Dew*. In the early 1960s, well before Lincoln Baxter II, Joe Chase and Jon Leiby had thought about creating a racing fleet, Kit raced his father's boat in the Woods Hole Chowder Race and in handicapped events against Flying Dutchman and Jolly Boats. The boat had been assembled from a kit and raced by his father, Frederick, in Cleveland, Ohio, and raced by Kit in other Ohio regattas before the boat settled in Woods Hole.

With more than the necessary three boats available, the Thistles began Club racing on Sundays, starting five minutes before the Cape Cod Knockabouts. The fleet was officially sanctioned as Fleet 159 by the Thistle Class Association (TCA) in August 1972.



The Thistle Fleet returning to the Woods Hole Yacht Club in light air after an afternoon racing on Buzzards Bay in 1974. (Photo: Richard S. Taylor)

Fleet 159 sponsored its first Open Regatta on August 12, 1973. Sixteen boats from nearby New England and Connecticut fleets participated. They raced modified gold cup courses in a choppy Buzzards Bay and a 15-20 knot southwester, according to the regatta report in the *Bagpipe*. Tom Browne (2690), of the author's home fleet at the time, Boston Harbor Fleet 22, won the series. Tom was later instrumental in bringing the author's and other boats to Woods Hole as activity in Fleet 22 declined.

The fleet sponsored another Open Regatta on August 17, 1974 and hosted the New England District Championship Regatta for the first time on July 19, 1975. Sunday fleet racing continued throughout these years.

Elmer Richards, a very competitive sailor at the national level and member of the Lake

Hopatcong Yacht Club in Mount Arlington, N.J., took an interest in what was being done in the fleet at about that time. "I don't recall when he joined WHYC, but it was certainly in the early '70s at the latest," Lincoln said. "Elmer's wife had a family summer place on



Racing to weather in light air during the 1975 New England District Championship Regatta at WHYC. (Photo: Dorothy I. Crossley)





Beating to weather during a WHYC Open Regatta in the mid-1970s. (Photo by Dorothy I. Crossley)

Juniper Point. Elmer was a very active sailor in the class going back almost to the beginning. He was very active nationally, and several times TCA class president."

Jobie adds: "[He] visited family in Woods Hole once or twice a summer, and would sail with Jon Leiby. Elmer would give us tips, but I don't remember that he ever brought his own boat or raced with us."

It soon became clear that using bottom paint on a Thistle and storing it on a mooring as done in Woods Hole would not allow the

boats to be truly competitive. Lincoln writes: "When [Tom Browne] joined us for a race, he always did a 'horizon job' on the rest of us. ... His competitive experience, and competitive boat, showed us several things: 1) We really didn't know how to make the boat go; and 2) dry sailing the boat was the only way to have a competitive boat. ... [Minimum] boat weight and a clean bottom (much cleaner than anti-fouling paint ... can produce) is crucial to sailing the boat competitively. The boats at WHYC were all heavy, much heavier than class minimum (515 pounds)—most early fiberglass boats were heavy, too, and none are truly competitive today. ... Tom would bring his Thistle down, and launch it at the town ramp every time he sailed with us. Tom really tried to get the fleet to be competitive."

When Boston Harbor Fleet 22 activity wound down in 1974 and 1975, Tom Browne suggested to me and others in the fleet that we should start sailing in Woods Hole. Besides Tom (2690) and myself (2311, 3237), who became regulars in the Sunday races at the WHYC, Harry Clarke (2895), Jack Valle (980) and Pat Tweedy (2478) also from Fleet 22, started sailing with us, at least for some events.

Breck Owens (3252) and Charlie Cook (3504) joined the Woods Hole fleet around 1977, and were regulars in Club racing and the regattas. Bill Barlow (1128) and Bill Poole (1817) from the Bristol Yacht Club fleet (Fleet 169) often sailed in Woods Hole regattas, too, through all the years the fleet was active.

Dry sailing the boats became the standard in





Close competition during a WHYC Open Regatta in the mid-1970s. (Photo: Dorothy I. Crossley)

Woods Hole with these new arrivals, "... the pros from Beantown," according to Kit Olmsted.

For every race it meant trailering the boat to the launching ramp on Albatross Street, next to the Woods Hole Science Aquarium, rigging the boat on the ramp (sometimes to the great consternation of the Falmouth Harbormaster who felt we were never rigging the boats fast enough), paddling it over to the Club for final rigging, sailing the race, reversing the process after the race, and driving the boat home. For a few members of the fleet, it meant trailering the boat nearly 100 miles each way for every race.

While the fleet was active, Woods Hole Thistlers took part in regional and national

events, too, with members attending the 1973 Mid-Winter Championships in St. Petersburg, Fla.; the 1977 Westport Invitational at Cedar Point Yacht Club in Westport, Conn.; and the 1979 National Championships at Tabor Academy in Marion, Mass.

The first Cape Cod Open Regatta in August 1973 boasted 16 entrants, with boats from the fleets at Bristol Yacht Club in Bristol, R.I.; Cedar Point Yacht Club in Westport, Conn.; and Cottage Park Yacht Club in Winthrop, Mass. WHYC hosted the New England District Championships in 1975, 1977 and 1980 and East Coast Fall Series Regattas in 1976, 1977 and 1979. By 1980, though, fleet participation was down significantly in both

the Sunday races and the regattas. The 1980 New England District Championships at Woods Hole had only eight participants.

At least part of the downturn was due to the sailing conditions in Woods Hole. Racing in Buzzards Bay and Vineyard Sound often involved sailing in heavy air and high seas. It could be hard physical labor to make the boat go in those conditions. The rails on a Thistle are narrow and hiking out on a long weather leg when it blew could be brutal on the thighs. Worse, it could be brutal on the boats. I'll never forget the comment one visiting Connecticut sailor made to me after one of our Fall Series

regattas became essentially a demolition derby, with many boats suffering broken masts or other damage. "I'll never be back," he said quietly, as he turned and walked away.

Maybe the biggest issue, though, was one of logistics. Quoting Lincoln again: "I believe the biggest problem for competitive Thistle sailing at WHYC was the lack of dry boat storage and launching facilities. Every place in the country where Thistles are sailed, and I've sailed many of them, including many Nationals, has dry boat storage. Boats are stored covered on trailers, and with the exception of inland fresh water venues in the Southeast and the West,



Bill Barlow (1128) capsized during a WHYC Open Regatta in the mid-1970s. All Thistles had positive flotation per class rules. Not all were self-rescuing, though. (Photo: Dorothy I. Crossley)

boats are launched off a pier or bulkhead using a hoist and bridle, which every boat owner has."

He continued, "Folks do not like putting their trailers in salt water for obvious reasons, and when they do, they wash the boats and trailers with fresh water on haul out. Without being able to conveniently store and sail a competitive boat in Woods Hole, and the fact that the Club already sailed a three-man boat [the Cape Cod Knockabout], the Thistle was just not going to take off. WHYC would have had to give up the parking lot for boat storage, and put a hoist on the dock ... [for] competitive Thistle sailing to succeed. This was just NOT going to happen." (There was barely enough space for members' cars in the lot, actually.)

By 1980 participation in the Sunday races was way down. The following year, it was over. The fleet charter was revoked in 1982.

Everyone who ever sailed a Thistle has a memory or two of a particularly clever race maneuver, a stupendous capsize or a spectacular ride—or maybe a day when the boat was just going well in moderate air, the seas were gentle and the boat was in perfect balance. All was right with the world ... a proper Zen moment.

Lincoln remembers: "One race at [a New England District Championship] on Buzzards Bay, when [the tide was foul and] the wind—as it typically does on a sunny day—started as a light northerly and died, but before it had filled in from the southwest, Joe Chase ...



Charlie Cook close reaching during a WHYC Open Regatta in the mid-1970s. (Photo: Dorothy I. Crossley)

surreptitiously anchored, and it took a while for folks to figure out why he was passing everyone." He also remembers: "In the late '60s as I became the primary sailor of 1584, Jim Bunker (a year younger than me in school) and I used to take the boat out to Buzzards Bay or Vineyard Sound during windy sou'westers after school, just to go surfing the waves."

One of my own special memories is the gloriously sunny day on Buzzards Bay when racing was called off just before the start due to high, and likely to build, winds. It was blowing

at least 20 knots out of the southwest, another classic "smokey sou'wester." There was just myself and one other on board that day, Mike Horn, a fellow Thistle sailor.

We looked at one another and instantly agreed, "Let's have some fun." We were down by the Weepeckets. Just the main and jib were up. I brought the boat around onto a broad reach, Mike pumped the jib three times and we were off. The boat leapt onto a plane. I trimmed the main to balance the boat and suddenly felt we were airborne. The bow wave flew off both sides of the boat from about midships and well over our heads and I felt we were balanced on the top of a giant ball with only the centerboard and rudder in the water. I feared the slightest misstep in sail trim or rudder movement would have had us over. Seemingly 30 seconds later, we were off Quissett Harbor laughing uncontrollably. It actually was about 15 minutes of deliriously thrilling sailing.

Thistles are still enthusiastically raced, with large fleets nationwide, but just one fleet in New England at Narragansett Bay. Participation is still high. The Thistle Atlantic Coast Championships drew 35 boats in July 2024, down only slightly from the 40 boats that took part in that regatta at Cottage Park Yacht Club in Winthrop, Mass., in 1971.

It is a glorious boat to sail, just not one fully suited to racing in Woods Hole, sad to say.

*About the Author: Richard S. Taylor managed scientific instrumentation projects for NASA flight missions at M.I.T. and the Harvard/Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics. He has been a member of the Woods Hole Yacht Club for nearly 50 years and served on the WHYC's Board of Governors for 13 years. He raced Thistles and Cape Cod Knockabouts, crewed regularly on a Cal 40 in off-shore races, and has cruised the East Coast from the Chesapeake Bay to Maine.*

*All photographs courtesy of the Woods Hole Historical Museum.*



# The Crew of the *Malabar IV*

By Kevin A. Swope

My grandfather, Gerard Swope Jr., had become a summer resident of Woods Hole in 1932 when he married Marjorie L. Park in the rose garden of her parents' Mediterranean style home at 129 Penzance Road. After World War II, the Swopes moved to the "Airplane House" on Juniper Point for a decade before returning to the old Park servants' cottages on Penzance Point. In the meantime, my grandfather had become involved with the Marine Biological Laboratory, serving as its president from 1953 to 1964, chairman from 1964 to 1971, and chairman emeritus until his death in 1979. The Swope Center is named in honor of his long service to the institution. (Incidentally, he also was a founder of the Associates program at the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution.)

In August 1938, my grandfather and five friends set off on a two-week cruise from Cape Cod to Maine aboard a chartered schooner, the *Malabar IV*. Designed by John G. Alden in 1923, she had won the Bermuda race that same year. On the return trip, some of them were joined by their wives for the final leg back from Gloucester. (Although not my grandmother, Marjorie Park Swope, who remained behind with their three young children at her parents' home in Woods Hole.) The photos accompanying this article are taken from the book, *1938: Photographs by Gerard Swope Jr.* (Damianos Publishing, 2024).

Gerard Swope Jr.  
(1905-1979)

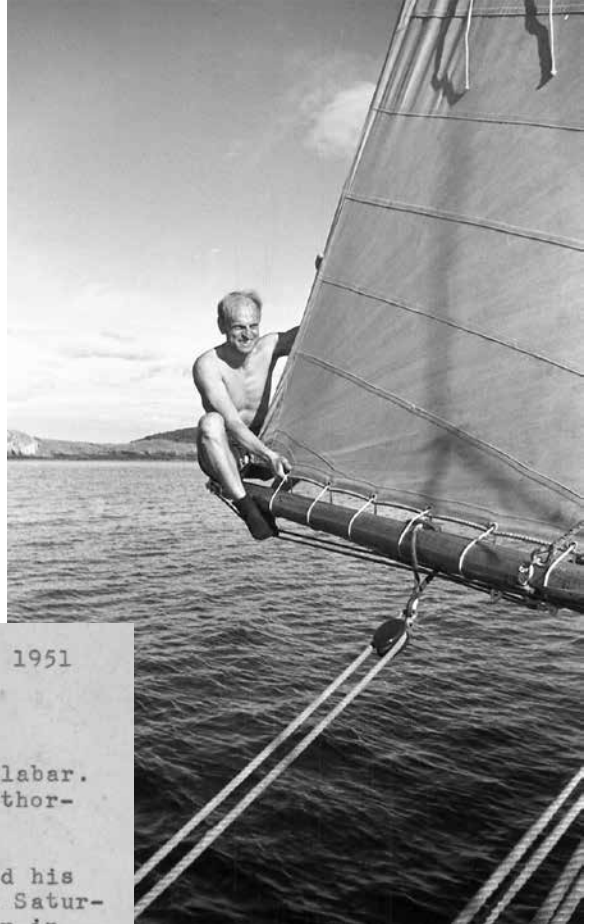


The Crew of the *Malabar IV*  
(Photo by Gerard Swope Jr.)

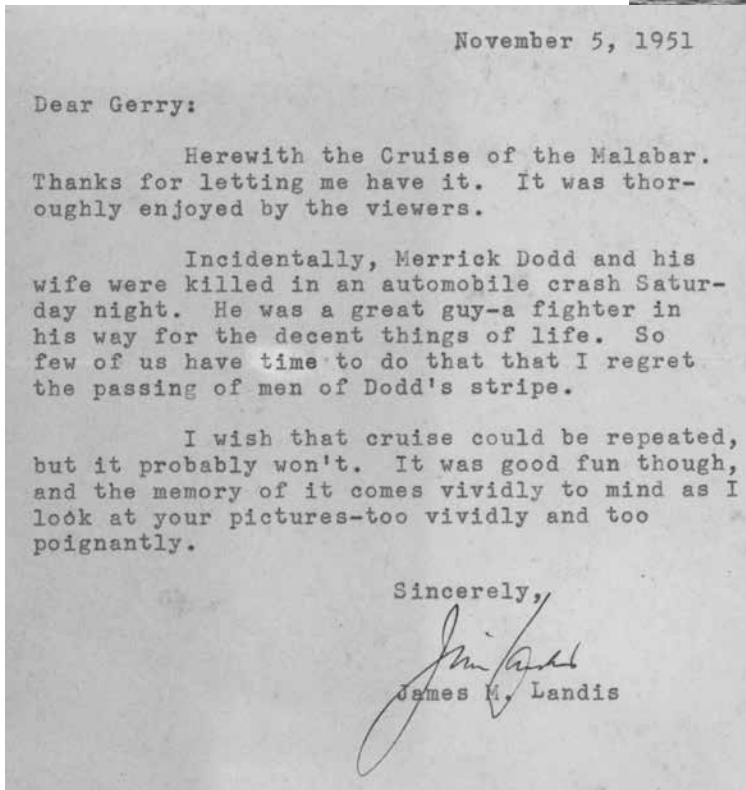
It was only after it was published that I discovered the identities of some of the other crew members.

Much like the protagonists of "The Wizard of Oz," it turns out I had the answer all along. In my files I discovered a yellowed 1951 letter to my grandfather from his friend Jim Landis, thanking him for the loan of an album of photos from that voyage. The letter itself is tinged with nostalgia and becomes increasingly poignant the more one learns about its author.

James McCauley Landis was born September 25, 1899, in Tokyo, Japan, where his parents were Presbyterian missionaries. He graduated



James M. Landis (1899-1964)



from Princeton University in 1921 and Harvard Law School in 1924. A brilliant student, he clerked for Supreme Court Justice Felix Frankfurter and then joined the Harvard Law School faculty. (Here he would have first encountered my grandfather, who graduated with the Harvard Law



School class of 1932.) An expert on financial regulation, Landis was a member of President Franklin Roosevelt's "Brain Trust" and drafted the legislation that created the Securities and Exchange Commission in 1934. He went on to succeed Joseph Kennedy as the SEC's second chairman, serving from 1935 to 1937. My grandfather served as a staff attorney at the SEC from 1934 to 1937, so Landis would have been his boss. By 1938, Landis had returned to Harvard to serve as dean of the law school.

His career following the cruise of the *Malabar IV* was no less impressive. During World War II, he was tapped to become director of the Office of Civil Defense. He served President Truman as chair of the Civil Aeronautics board, then went into private practice in New York. In 1960, he became a special assistant to President-elect John F. Kennedy. His report recommending the reorganization of administrative agencies served as a blueprint for the Kennedy and Johnson administrations. At the same time, he was prone to personal demons. He was known as a drinker and had been dismissed as dean at Harvard Law School in 1946 for having had an affair with a secretary. Soon after Kennedy had taken office, it was revealed that Landis had failed to file income taxes for a period of five years in the 1950s. He was sentenced to 30 days in prison in 1963, and upon his release had his license to practice law in New York suspended. Less than a week later, he was found drowned in his pool in Harrison, N.Y., at the age of 64.<sup>1</sup>

Another crew member was Jim Landis's Harvard Law School colleague E. Merrick Dodd. Born in Providence, R.I., in 1888, Dodd graduated from Harvard University in 1910 and Harvard Law School in 1913. He taught at Washington & Lee, the University of Nebraska and the University of Chicago before joining the Harvard Law School faculty in 1928.<sup>2</sup> That same year he married Dr. Winifred Hyde, a professor of psychology and philosophy from 1911 to 1928 at the



E. Merrick Dodd (1888-1951)

University of Nebraska. She had been born February 9, 1879, in Milwaukee, Wisc. She graduated from the University of Nebraska in 1900 and received her doctorate at the University of Jena in Germany, the first woman to earn a PhD from that institution.<sup>3</sup> Merrick Dodd specialized in corporate law and is remembered for his famous debate with Adolf Berle in the *Harvard Law Review* in 1931-1932 over the responsibility of corporate directors.<sup>4</sup>



Jack Gibbon (1903-1973)  
and Maly Gibbon (1903-1986)

Like Jim Landis, the Dodds' lives ended tragically. On the evening of November 3, 1951, they were returning to their weekend home in New Castle, N.H., when their Oldsmobile convertible hit a patch of black ice on the Shapleigh Island Bridge, broke through the wooden guardrail, and plunged into the Piscataqua River.

The third known member of the *Malabar* crew is a bit of an outlier in that he never went to Harvard Law School. Nor did he eventually die from drowning. (Perhaps I should note that my grandfather also passed away on dry land.) John Heysham "Jack" Gibbon was born in Philadelphia on September 29, 1903. He graduated from Princeton University in 1923, two years behind Jim Landis, and this may be his connection to his crewmates. He earned his MD from the Jefferson Medical College of Pennsylvania in 1927. He had a surgical fellowship at Harvard University in 1930 and 1931, so he and all of his identified crewmates were all living in Cambridge at the same time.

In 1938 he was an assistant surgeon at Pennsylvania Hospital and on the faculty at the University of Pennsylvania. He was already doing research that eventually would result in his inventing the heart-lung machine. Employing his invention, Dr. Gibbon performed the first successful open-heart surgery in 1953.<sup>5</sup>

His collaborator was his wife, Mary "Maly" Hopkinson, who had been a technician for Dr. Edward Churchill's surgical research laboratory at Harvard. She was born September 25,

1903, the daughter of noted Boston painter Charles S. Hopkinson. Maly enrolled at Bryn Mawr College with the class of 1925 but left after two years to study piano in Paris. There she became interested in the practice of medicine, and upon her return to Boston in 1927 obtained her position with Dr. Churchill. Maly joined the *Malabar IV* for its return trip to Cape Cod. Jack Gibbon passed away in 1973 and Maly in 1986.<sup>6</sup>

I had originally chosen these photographs for their visual qualities, but now realize they have historic significance as well. And there are two other crew members I have yet to identify!

Additional photos from the cruise of the *Malabar IV* appear on page 28.

*About the Author:* Kevin A. Swope is a lifetime summer resident of Woods Hole. He is the author of *The Saxonville Mills: Three Centuries of Industry in Framingham*, co-author (with James L. Parr) of *Framingham Legends & Lore and Murder & Mayhem in MetroWest Boston*, and the editor of 1938: Photographs by Gerard Swope Jr. He is currently working on a history of Penzance Point.

<sup>1</sup> Justin O'Brien, *The Triumph, Tragedy and Lost Legacy of James M. Landis: A Life on Fire* (Oxford and Portland, Ore., 2014).

<sup>2</sup> Zechariah Chafee Jr., "Edwin Merrick Dodd," *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society* 70:282-289.

<sup>3</sup> Ludy T. Benjamin Jr, "Psychology at the University of Nebraska, 1889-1930," *Nebraska History* 56 (1975): 382.

<sup>4</sup> Berle maintained a director's primary duty was to shareholders; Dodd argued that there was also a duty to the larger society. Interestingly, Dodd noted the influence of the business commonwealth views of Owen D. Young and my great-grandfather, Gerard Swope Sr., both of the General Electric Company. See Charles R.T. O'Kelley, "Merrick Dodd and the Great Depression: A Few Historical Corrections," *Seattle University Law Review*, 42 (2019): 532.

<sup>5</sup> J. Donald Hill, MD, "John H. Gibbon Jr. Part I. The Development of the First Successful Heart-Lung Machine," *Annals of Thoracic Surgery*, 34(3):337-41.

<sup>6</sup> Alexandra Columbus, BA; Scott W. Cowan, MD; Charles J. Yeo, MD; and Stacey A. Milan, MD; "Mary H. Gibbon: teamwork of the heart." (2014). Thomas Jefferson University Department of Surgery Gibbon Society Historical Profiles. Paper 22.

# Japanese Emperor Visits Woods Hole: A 50-Year Retrospective

*By Sara Piccini*

In October 1975, Emperor Hirohito, posthumously named Emperor Shōwa, and Empress Nagako of Japan embarked on a goodwill tour to the United States that included visits with President Gerald Ford in Washington, D.C., and stops at major cities including New York, Chicago and Los Angeles. The visit came four years after the emperor's first foreign tour, as Europe, the U.S. and Japan sought to strengthen diplomatic ties during the Cold War.

During his trip, Hirohito made a brief but memorable stop in Woods Hole at the invitation of James Ebert, then president of the Marine Biological Laboratory (MBL). Although not formally trained, the emperor had long been a practicing marine biologist, publishing several papers on hydroids, his area of specialty.

As Ebert noted in an August 17 letter hand-delivered to the emperor, scientists from Woods Hole and Japan had been collaborating for nearly a century. "It is especially fitting that you have chosen our very special scientific community of Woods Hole as one of the few localities to be favored by your presence," Ebert wrote. "This Laboratory's first Director [1888-1907], Charles Otis Whitman, was for a brief but significant period a

Professor in Tokyo."

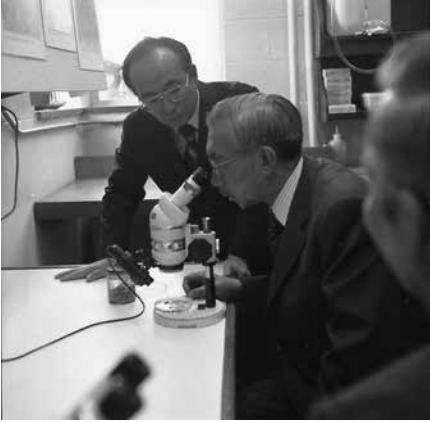
The preparations for the visit took many months, involving advance visits from Japanese dignitaries and consultations with the U.S. State Department and Secret Service. A detailed memo from the State Department's Office of the Chief of Protocol contained information ranging from proper forms of address to eating manners, including this tidbit: "Since Their Majesties do not peel off the skin of fruits themselves, fruits should be peeled and served ready to be eaten with a fork. (Accordingly, grapes should be avoided.)"

It was clear, however, that the emperor wanted to dispense with ceremonial activities during



Emperor Hirohito at the entrance to MBL's Lillie Building.  
(Photo: Dorothy I. Crossley)





The Emperor looks into a microscope.  
(Photo courtesy MBL Archives)

Crowd gathered outside WHOI's Redfield  
Building to see Emperor Hirohito.  
(Photo courtesy MBL Archives)

his short stay in Woods Hole. After meeting with a Japanese planning contingent in mid-June, George Woodwell, then director of MBL's Ecosystems Center, wrote in a memo to Ebert, "The Emperor wishes indeed to spend his time in Woods Hole on sciences and not on formalities."

Early in the afternoon on Saturday, October 4, the emperor and empress landed at Otis Air Force Base (now Joint Base Cape Cod). The emperor departed by limousine to Woods Hole, while the empress toured the Sandwich Glass Museum and Falmouth Artists Guild.

Hirohito's first stop was the Woods Hole



Oceanographic Institution's (WHOI) Redfield Laboratory. Already familiar with the work of WHOI senior scientist Howard Sanders, who had discovered a new phylum of primitive crustacean, the emperor visited Sanders's lab to discuss his research and examine specimens through a microscope.

The emperor and his entourage then made their way to MBL's Lillie Building, where special salt-water tanks had been set up in the library for viewing hydroids collected by MBL researcher Sears Crowell, a professor at Indiana University. Hirohito spoke with other MBL scientists as well, including Marie Abbott and Shinya Inoué.

By all accounts, the emperor's goodwill tour served not only to advance the friendship between the U.S. and Japan, but also to extend the productive collaboration among Japanese and American scientists.

Several weeks after the tour, the U.S. ambassador to Japan, James Hodgson, wrote in response to a letter from MBL scientist Harlyn Halvorson, "By now I'm sure you realize that the Emperor's trip to the United States was a conspicuous success that succeeded the wildest expectations. Certainly at no point was the Emperor made to feel more welcome or



State Police stand guard on the roof of MBL's Whitman (now Rowe) Building.  
(Photo: Dorothy I. Crossley)

provided with more personal attention than at Woods Hole."

*We thank Jennifer Walton, archivist at the Marine Biological Laboratory, for generously sharing materials in MBL's collection about the emperor's visit.*

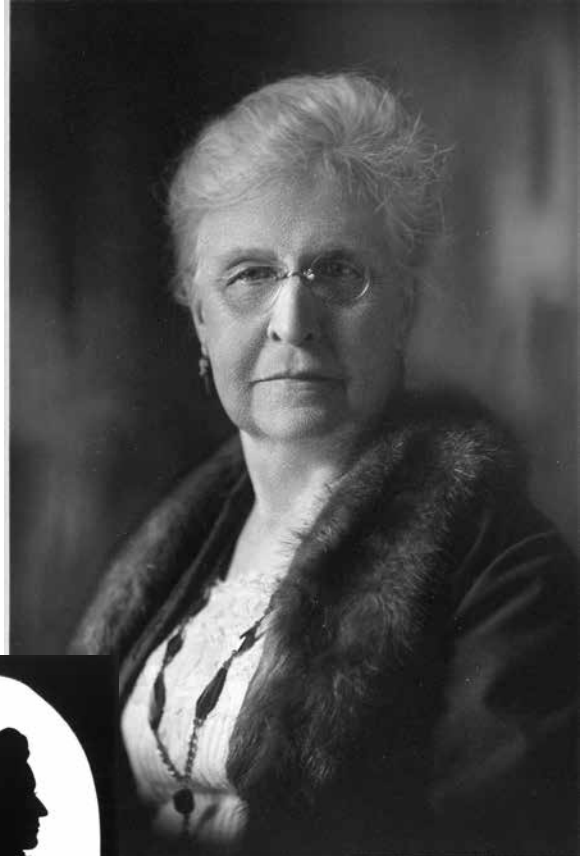


# M. Sylvia Donaldson and Her Falmouth Forebearers

*By Leonard Miele*

M. Sylvia Donaldson was a distinguished native-born resident of Falmouth, perhaps second only in fame to Katharine Lee Bates, the author of "America the Beautiful." She was a third-generation member of the Donaldson family that enriched the history of the Falmouth community with their contributions to science, education and politics. At the time of the American Revolution, Dr. Hugh George Donaldson was recognized for his innovative medical experiments to cure smallpox on Cape Cod, his son George Washington Donaldson was an esteemed town official and a state legislator for Barnstable County, and George's daughter Sylvia was a respected educator for four decades and made history as one of the first two women to be elected to the Massachusetts House of Representatives in 1922.

The storied events of the Donaldson family began in 1776 when Hugh George Donaldson left his family and home in London, England, at the age of 19 and immigrated to Cape Cod. Because his father, Thomas Clement, wanted him to pursue a military career, Hugh left "the mother country" hoping to study medicine in the Province of Massachusetts Bay. It has been suggested that



A formal portrait of M. Sylvia Donaldson who served in the House of Representatives from 1923-1930. (Courtesy of Falmouth Historical Society)



This silhouette is the only visual representation of Dr. Hugh George Donaldson. (Courtesy of Falmouth Historical Society)

he changed his surname before he left home, perhaps asserting his independence from his father's authority. Upon his arrival in Falmouth at the height of the colonial war with Great Britain, many citizens suspected him of being a British spy. According to his granddaughter Sylvia, "He came to America a loyal subject of George III, but soon became interested in the case of the colonists, renounced his allegiance to Great Britain and enlisted in the American army." In 1780, he served as a sergeant in Captain Matthias Tobey's company as part of Lieutenant Colonel Enoch Hallett's regiment of troops deployed to the neighboring colony of Rhode Island.

Hugh George Donaldson became a pupil and colleague of Dr. Francis Wicks, a prominent physician in Falmouth. Together, they became pioneers in smallpox research, opening smallpox isolation hospitals on Great Hill (Falmouth Heights) and at Nobska Point in Woods Hole. Legend has it that Hugh Donaldson was such an admirer of Dr. Edward Jenner, the London scientist who championed the idea of vaccines, that he contacted him, requested an amount of vaccine virus to be sent to him, and introduced it for the first time in Falmouth. Since there was early opposition to smallpox vaccinations, Donaldson tried to allay the fears of the community by inoculating his own sons and placing them in his isolation hospital with smallpox patients. Both sons remained free of the disease.

In 1783, at the age 26, Hugh George Donaldson, a proud "American" doctor, married Chloe Dimmick. They had six children, including

George Washington Donaldson, who was born eight months before Chloe Donaldson died at the age of 36 in 1797. Hugh married his second wife, Susanna Snow, in 1800. They had three children before she died at 32 in 1805. He married his third wife, Hannah D. Hatch, in 1807. They had two children and were married for five years until he died of a malignant fever in 1812 at the age of 55.

Hugh George Donaldson was known as "a man of golden character." He reflected the youthful spirit of the new American nation, serving the Falmouth community and his country with inimitable enthusiasm. As the father of 11 children, it was advantageous for him to be a member of the Falmouth school committee for eight years from 1802 to 1810. Using his skills as a caring physician, he serviced the Falmouth Poor House for nine years. He provided medical care for those homeless citizens who could not afford to pay for their housing or medical expenses. He was a charter member of the Marine Lodge A.F. & A.M. where he served as the first senior warden and secretary pro tem, and as a proactive convert to Methodism, he donated the land for the first Methodist meeting house and cemetery that was built in 1811 adjacent to his home on Main Street in Falmouth.

George Washington Donaldson was born on February 22, 1797, the youngest child of Hugh and Chloe Donaldson. Like his father, George was an adventurous, independent young man and led a life devoted to public service. Beginning at the age of 10, he was

attracted to the lure of the sea and worked on coasting vessels every summer until he was 17. When there were continued war skirmishes with Britain in 1813, he was aboard a vessel in Providence, R.I., that was immobilized by a British blockade. Undeterred by the distance to reach his home, George left the vessel and walked the 70 miles from Providence to Falmouth. George eventually became a true tradesman and proved himself to be a tireless worker as described in an early edition of *The Falmouth Enterprise*. "When he was 17 he set out to learn the trade of tanner, currier and shoemaker. He went to Beaufort, S.C., returned to Falmouth, and went into farming and salt manufacture."

In 1823, George married Lucy Gifford and they had eight children. When she died at the age of 40 in 1836, he married Harriet Hatch in 1837. She died in 1841 when she was 41 years old, bearing only one child. In 1847, he married Ann Stone who had two children. She was 40 years old when she had her second child, Mersylvia Lawrence Donaldson, who is better known as M. Sylvia Donaldson to the Falmouth community. Interestingly, Ann Donaldson's mother was named Mersylvia Bishop. By coincidence, George Washington Donaldson was 26 when he first got married, as was his father Dr. Donaldson. They were both married three times and they each had 11 children.

George Washington Donaldson, though basically a farmer and cultivator of salt, worked with the Barnstable County courts to protect



This post-mortem photograph of George Washington Donaldson was taken in December 1868.  
(Courtesy Falmouth Historical Society)



the public's safety and to ensure law and order in the community. He served as a deputy sheriff, justice of the peace, and executor of wills and documents. A story that appeared in Cape Cod's *The Register* in 1860 is an amusing, yet serious telling of one workday in the life of George Washington Donaldson.

"Aug. 26, Sabbath evening, as the packet *Bride* was about to leave the campground wharf, at the Vineyard landing, with ladies and gentlemen, a drunken man intruded himself on board and incensed the feelings of the passengers by his vulgarities while crossing the Sound. Upon arrival at this place he commenced an assault upon Mr. G. W. Donaldson, justice of the peace and constable, who arrested the refractory fellow, and finally succeeded in carrying him a prisoner to his own house. Soon after this—the same evening—a party of six young men, whose names we forebear, went to Mr. Donaldson's and forcibly seized the prisoner, and despite the protests and exertions of Mr. D., carried him off in triumph. Mr. D., backed by the most respectable citizens of this place, procured warrants and had them arrested."

In 1860, the year that Abraham Lincoln was elected president, George Donaldson was nominated and elected a Republican Representative to the Massachusetts General Court. This position of trust and respect is the same honor his daughter Sylvia would receive as she made political history with the passage

of the 19th Amendment.

M. Sylvia Donaldson was born on July 12, 1849, the same year abolitionist Harriet Tubman escaped slavery and slave owner Zachary Taylor became president of the United States. She graduated from Falmouth's Lawrence Academy in 1865, attended Boston University, and graduated from the Boston Normal School in 1868 where she trained to be a teacher. It appears that her first teaching job was in Falmouth when she was just a teenager and that one of her first students was Katharine Lee Bates, who mentions Sylvia in one of her early diaries. When Sylvia completed her studies in Boston, she traveled to Europe for



An old postcard of the Goddard School where M. Sylvia Donaldson was principal for 38 years.  
(Brockton Historical Group web photo)

a year before teaching in the Brookline school system for the next three years.

In 1873, Sylvia was hired to teach in Brockton (North Bridgewater until 1874) at the Sprague, Whitman and Goddard elementary schools, becoming the principal of the Goddard School in 1881. As the principal of the school,

she took a personal interest in the lives of all her students, keeping a record of their graduation status and their accomplishments in later life. She was an effective organizer and administrator, successfully encouraging her students to think beyond themselves to help others in need. Setting an example, she was known to spend her own money to purchase graduation dresses for students who could not afford them. With her guidance, the students of Brockton adopted 34 French war orphans in Europe and raised money to support them for a year. *The Brockton Enterprise* noted that she was "a woman of high ideals, of strict probity and unvarying courtesy. ... Her stately bearing and dignity of character make her a distinguished figure on every occasion. She is ever ready to help in a great cause or a lesser work, and no one ever appeals to her in vain." When she retired in 1919, she ended an exceptional 46-year teaching career, with nearly 800 people gathering at Brockton High School to pay tribute to her.

Sylvia was a tireless educator and civic leader, serving as president of the Brockton Teachers Association, the first female president of the Plymouth County Teachers Association, president of the Woman's Education Union, trustee of the Teachers' Annuity Guild, a member of the Audubon Society, the Deborah Sampson Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution and the League of Women Voters, a charter member of the Junior Red Cross and the Women's Republican Club of Brockton, and trustee of the Brockton Hospital and the Brockton Public Library.



Democrat Susan Walker Fitzgerald of Jamaica Plain (center) and Republican M. Sylvia Donaldson being sworn in as the first female Representatives in the Mass. House of Representatives in January, 1923. (Courtesy of David Vieira, State Representative)

With the passage of the 19th Amendment, Sylvia was emboldened to begin her political career by running for the Brockton School Committee. On December 2, 1919, at the age of 70, she was the first woman to be elected to the school committee. She was nominated by both the Democratic and Republican parties and received a record-setting 8,114 votes.

The 1922 state elections in Massachusetts were a notable victory for the state Republican Party. John Cox won his second term as the mayor of Boston, defeating Democrat John F. "Honey Fitz" Fitzgerald, the grandfather of President John Fitzgerald Kennedy; incumbent Republican Henry Cabot Lodge won his U.S. Senate seat for a fifth term, serving from 1893 until his death in 1924; and M. Sylvia Donaldson, from the Tenth Plymouth District





Left: Seat 45 in the House of Representatives was assigned to George Washington Donaldson and to his daughter M. Sylvia Donaldson six decades later. (Photo taken by David Vieira, State Representative)



Right: This is a file photo of M. Sylvia Donaldson from the House of Representatives.

of Brockton, was one of the first two women to be elected to the Massachusetts House of Representatives, an historic first for the nearly 300-year-old body. She was assigned seat 45 in the House, the same seat given to her father six decades earlier. Reflecting on her victory and her political goals, she noted that "there are two paths, one of self and one of service. I do not expect to do anything startling in politics, relegate men to the nursery and kitchen while I overturn the political world. I hope that women will take their responsibility in citizenship and play their part well. ... I came to the State House unpledged and unhampered, with the ideal of service—service to the greater number. I did not expect to please everybody."

As a representative, Sylvia Donaldson voted in favor of a variety of social issues. She

advocated legislation protecting women's rights in housing, health and employment; as a member of the Public Health Committee, she championed child nutrition and opposed abusive child labor; and as a former educator, she supported her fellow teachers and their efforts to improve the curricula for Massachusetts schools. Sylvia, however, was not in favor of making Armistice Day a public holiday, and she voted against old age pensions believing "they should be contributory." She also voted against the repeal of the Volstead Act, stating "I could not favor the return of the saloon in the Bay State."

The most memorable day of M. Sylvia Donaldson's political career was on February 18, 1926. In the morning, she appeared before the Joint Judiciary Committee at the State House to speak against two bills endorsing compulsory jury service for women. Although she was an early advocate of women's suffrage, she opposed these bills sponsored by the League of Women Voters because mothers would be forced to leave their children alone and disrupt their lives at home. She felt "that the League of Women Voters had no right to presume to speak for the women of the state." The Hearing Room galleries were filled with nearly 200 ardent, hostile supporters of the legislation who openly voiced their disapproval of Sylvia Donaldson's arguments. There was, however, a feeling among legislators that it was "unladylike" for women to be jurors and that they would be exposed to unsavory defendants and distasteful testimony. It would not be until 1951 that women would be seated as jurors in



Massachusetts.

Two hours after Sylvia's testimony before the Judiciary Committee, she became the first woman in Massachusetts history to preside over the House of Representatives. The House galleries were crowded with friends and colleagues from Plymouth County, countless members of state women's clubs, and many of the same women who had derided her at the jury hearing. As the House session began, John C. Hall, the Speaker of the House, handed the gavel to the 76-year-old, second-term legislator and offered the following testimonial:

"You demonstrate the fact that to-day neither the ballot, nor public office, nor the highest gift within the power of this House, is denied to any citizen 'on account of sex'... we to-day welcome you ... to the honored privilege of presiding over 'the greatest deliberative body in the world.' ... Madame Speaker, we who are about to subject ourselves to your guidance do so with full confidence in your integrity, ability and efficiency. Madame Speaker, we salute you!"

M. Sylvia Donaldson was a tall, dignified, self-assured woman who was often rigid in her views but benevolent in her actions. Although she never married, she embraced her students and her constituents as her lifelong family. Sadly, she fell and fractured her hip on January 3, 1937, dying two weeks later on January 15 at the age of 87. The city of Brockton celebrated her life nine months later by dedicating the

M. Sylvia Donaldson playground on October 24, with hundreds of city officials, colleagues, and former students attending the event. As reported in *The Brockton Enterprise*, "Educational leaders, preachers of the gospel, lawyers, financiers, doctors, shoemakers, builders, and persons from all walks of life not only filled the grounds but crowded the sidewalks surrounding the park to pay a sincere and loving respect to the woman whose character was of the highest and whose reputation for aiding all within her power will long be imprinted on the memories of men and women who were fortunate enough to have contacted her personality." Although Brockton was her home for 56 years, she was buried in her birthplace of Falmouth at the Oak Grove cemetery near her former student Katharine Lee Bates.

*About the Author: Leonard Miele was an English teacher for 30 years at Brockton High School. He is the author of Voice of the Tide: The Cape Cod Years of Katharine Lee Bates.*

#### Resources:

*The Falmouth Enterprise*, digital archives  
 Falmouth Historical Society Archives  
 The Falmouth Town Records  
 History of Barnstable County  
*Legendary Locals of Falmouth*  
*The New York Times*, digital archives  
*The Register*, digital archives  
 State Library of Massachusetts: Journal of the House of Representatives  
*Suckannesset: A History of Falmouth, Massachusetts*  
*The Wicked Local* (James Kenneally)



## Woods Hole Historical Museum

579 Woods Hole Road, Woods Hole, MA 02543

(508)548-7270

whhmdirector@gmail.com / woodsholemuseum.org

Woods Hole Historical Museum open  
June 14 to September 27, 2025, 11 AM to 3 PM,  
Tuesday through Saturday.

Archives open year-round,  
Tuesday & Thursday, 9 AM to 1 PM.  
Admission: Free, donations welcome.

Guided Walking Tours of Historic Woods Hole,  
Tuesdays 10 AM (July-August) by appointment  
only.

### Upcoming Events

**June 13, Members Opening Party**  
Museum Courtyard, 5 to 7 PM

**July 19, Concert by Tibia Recorder Duo**  
Church of the Messiah, 4 PM, followed by  
reception in Museum Courtyard, 5 PM to 7 PM

**August 7, Annual Meeting with talk by artist  
Salley Mavor**, Church of the Messiah Parish and  
Community Hall, 5 to 7 PM

**August 21, Oyster Talk and Tasting**  
Museum Courtyard, 5 to 7 PM

### 2025 Exhibits

"History of Woods Hole" — Gallery One

"Women Artists of Woods Hole: Selections from  
the Permanent Collection" — Gallery Two

"A Fruitful Collaboration: The Woods Hole -  
Japan Science Connection and the Emperor's  
1975 Visit"—Front Hallway

Visit [woodsholemuseum.org](http://woodsholemuseum.org) for a full list of  
programs and events

### Campus

*Bradley House*, built in the early 1800s, features  
galleries with changing exhibits, a permanent  
scale model of Woods Hole circa 1895, the  
Museum gift shop, the Museum archives, and  
staff offices.

*Swift Barn Small Boat Museum* houses an 1890s  
Woods Hole Spritsail Boat, a Herreshoff 12  
½, a Cape Cod Knockabout, a Woods Hole  
Chamberlain Dory, a 1922 Old Town canoe,  
a Mirror dinghy, and many boat models and  
maritime artifacts.

*Yale Workshop*, 1890s workshop of Dr. Leroy  
Milton Yale, Jr. who summered in Quissett. The  
Workshop includes original and representative  
tools, fishing gear, maps, books, etchings and  
artifacts appropriate to Dr. Yale's varied interests.

*Penguin Shed*, where children are welcome to climb  
aboard Cape Cod Knockabout Penguin, practice  
tying nautical knots, and pulling block and tackle  
rigs.

*Walsh Rambler Rose Garden* features a few of the  
hybridized Walsh Ramblers that are in full bloom  
June and July.



## **Falmouth Museums on the Green**

Home of the Falmouth Historical Society  
55-65 Palmer Avenue, Falmouth, MA 02541  
(508)548-4857 / [museumsongreen.org](http://museumsongreen.org)

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### **Museums are open June 6 to October 17**

10 AM to 2 PM, Monday, Tuesday and Friday

10 AM to 4 PM, Saturday

### **Walking Tours**

Early June to mid-October — Tours depart from the Hallett Barn on Mondays, Tuesdays, Fridays, and Saturdays at 10:30 AM. Check website for updates.

## **Events**

### **Slavery and Abolitionism on Cape Cod**

June 11, 4 to 5:30 PM

### **26th Annual Katharine Lee Bates Poetry Fest**

June 12, 4 to 5 PM

### **Tour the Gardens at the Museums on the Green this Summer**

June 17 & 28, July 12 & 22

August 9 & 26

September 13 & 23

October 7 & 11.

Tuesday tours are at 11:45 AM.

Saturday tours are at 1 PM.

### **25th Annual Heritage Award Celebration at Museums on the Green**

June 26, 4 to 6 PM

### **"Cape Dreams – A Season with the Brewster Whitecaps " — Author talk**

July 7, 4 to 5 PM

### **America 250 Symposium Cape & Islands in the Revolution**

July 26, 1 to 5 PM

### **Falmouth's Whaling Heritage**

October 2, 4 to 5:30 PM

### **Wicked at Wicks: A Children's Halloween Celebration**

October 24, 4 to 5:30 PM

### **The Remarkable History of Penikese Island**

November 13, 4 to 5:30 PM



Images of the *Malabar IV* from the book, 1938: Photographs by Gerard Swope Jr. (See article on page 11.)

## AWARD WINNER!



### ***Woods Hole Cooks Something Up for the 21st Century: More Recipes from a Cape Cod Village***

Thanks to all of our wonderful recipe contributors and financial supporters, the new museum cookbook is a Readable Feast double award winner:

**2024 New England Book of the Year  
2024 Best Community Cookbook**

We hope you'll share the deliciousness by purchasing a copy for yourself, family members and friends. The cookbook makes a perfect gift for all home chefs!

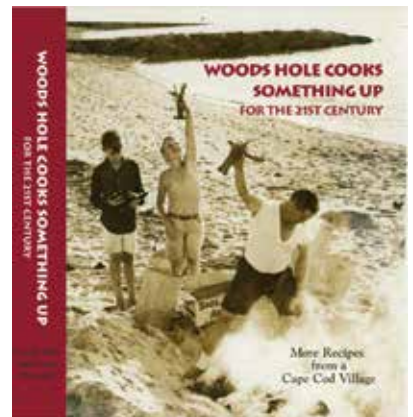
- 300 tantalizing recipes incorporating local, regional and international flavors
- Historic photos and remembrances of Woods Hole village
- Beautiful illustrations by local artists

For in-person shopping, stop by the museum gift shop Tuesday through Saturday, 11 AM to 3 PM, or visit Eight Cousins Books at 199 Main Street in Falmouth.

To order online, use the QR code or go to our website at [woodsholemuseum.org](http://woodsholemuseum.org).

***All proceeds from cookbook sales support the Museum.***

Thank you for your purchase!



We are honored to have Eight Cousins Books  
in Falmouth as a corporate sponsor.





The Crew of the *Malabar IV*



M. Sylvia Donaldson and  
Her Falmouth Forebearers



Japanese Emperor Visits Woods  
Hole: A 50-Year Retrospective