

Falmouth Historical Society Annual Meeting

FHS Presents! — Falmouth's First Summer Colony *The Casco Terrace & Amerescoggin Neighborhoods*

Online via Zoom—January 18, 2023

The accompanying slides are posted on the Society website at:

[https://thefhs.org/resources/Documents/FHS Presents-An Early Falmouth Family Slides.pdf](https://thefhs.org/resources/Documents/FHS%20Presents-An%20Early%20Falmouth%20Family%20Slides.pdf).

David Farnham shared what the Society uncovered while researching three homes on Falmouth Foreside in response to a query from the community.

We received a routine request to research the history of two homes on the Foreside. We added the requestor's home to make it three.

Our methodology is simple.

1. We follow the trail of deeds to build the skeleton of homeowners.
2. We point our genealogy radar gun at each of those families to gather their stories. This put flesh onto the skeleton.
3. We add local history which puts more flesh on those dry old bones.

This is how we bring the story of a home back to life.

We did this for the three homes.

All were relatively new by Falmouth standards. Digging back into the 19th century, it was farmland.

Our first reaction was... they are going to be disappointed. This is, well, boring.

We had missed the point. The story was all about the fact the homes were relatively new. They were just the tip of the iceberg. The story was in the land beneath those homes. The land told the story of how that part of Falmouth evolved from an agricultural community to a summer resort. These two neighborhoods were at the heart of the story.

We are looking at 16 acres on the Foreside between Foreside Road and Casco Bay, and between the homes on the south side of Casco Terrace to those on the north side of Amerescoggin Road.

Each of those two roads has its distinct neighborhood, homeowner's association, and history. There are no lanes connecting those roads, but they are connected in their role in the transformation of the Foreside.

Looking back 165 years at the land now occupied by those two neighborhoods, we find them spread across three farms—all of which belonged to sea captains. When these seafarers died, the farms stayed in the families except for the Davis Farm which was sold to the Stackpoles, a family of mariners from Thomaston.

If you follow the trail back into the 18th century, the lots along the Foreside were 30 acres, the minimum size for farming. Over the years many were divided in half. Back then, nearly everyone in Falmouth was a farmer regardless of their primary occupation. Those 15 acres would support a subsistence farm that put food on the table. Some of those lots were split again. They were popular among sea captains and craftsmen such as blacksmiths.

The Gilded Age saw the emergence of Maine as a destination for “summer people.” You can blame Hudson River School artists such as Frederic Church whose paintings were visual advertisements for the Maine coast.

At first it was the super-rich who came on their yachts. Expansion of passenger rail service in Maine opened the door to the “merely” wealthy who built grand summer residences, and then the middle class who built seasonal cottages.

Landowners with seaside property began thinking of how they could turn a hardscrabble farm into hard cash.

In Falmouth, the first summer colony was established on the Stackpole (formerly Davis) Farm which ended up in the hands of Frederick Stackpole, another sea captain.

Frederick had moved to Kansas—which makes us wonder about his time at sea—and become a banker.

He immediately subdivided the 7½ acres into 85 postage-stamp sized lots (averaging about a twelfth of an acre). The lane running along the southern side was named “Casco Terrace.”

The waterfront lots would have cheek-to-jowl cottages facing Casco Bay across a common.

On the southern side of Casco Terrace was the Nelson Farm, now owned by the Nelson’s daughter. She didn’t create a subdivision plan but, as opportunities arose, she sold lots along Casco Terrace.

Here enters a retired general contractor who lived in Auburn named Joseph Chamberlin.

He built cottages on lots around that common purchased from both Stackpole and Wells. This was the beginning of the “Auburn Colony,” the first such seasonal community in Falmouth.

If you Google “Auburn Colony,” you will learn about an earlier, larger, and much better known summer community on Harpswell. We aren’t aware of any connection between the two. Both were established by people of Auburn, Maine, who found the sea breezes of Casco Bay preferable to the heat and bustle of a mill town on the Androscoggin.

The summer colony grew so quickly, it appeared on a map only a few years later. Casco Terrace is just steep enough that cottages built up the slope towards Foreside Road had water views and the ability to catch those cooling sea breezes.

One family with ties to Auburn that had been summering at Casco Terrace built the Terrace Inn which remains as the largest building in the neighborhood.

If Rusticators lit the flame, trolleys poured on the gasoline.

Electrification came in 1889 at the Smelt Hill Dam on the Presumpscot River in Falmouth, the first hydroelectric dam in Maine. Electricity allowed the replacement of the old horsecars with trolleys and led to the expansion of trolley service to the communities in the hinterlands such as Falmouth.

Trolley service from Portland, through Falmouth, to Yarmouth opened in 1898. Suddenly, the middle and working classes had convenient, inexpensive access to the Foreside.

To build ridership, the Portland Railroad Company built elaborate recreational parks at three spots by the water: one was Underwood Spring Park which opened in 1899.

The park featured a casino (a place for fine dining and entertainment), an open-air theater, a Japanese pavilion, a spectacular electric fountain, and scenic walkways.

The 34½-acre park was built on the former Underwood Farm.

During its heyday, the park was a major attraction—what today we would call a “venue.”

Then disaster struck in 1907. Fire destroyed the casino and fire. The owners decided not to rebuild.

The land, the spring, and the few remaining buildings were sold to George Edwards. He promptly published a subdivision plan. The strip of land on the southern side of the property was separated from the rest of the park by the spring (which was still producing bottled water). Through the middle of this strip ran Amerescoggin Road with lots on both sides.

George Edwards was a wheeler-and-dealer. He was involved in the establishment of Underwood Spring Park. Decline in demand for bottled water shut down the bottling operation around 1920.

Appealing to the more rustic group of rusticators, Edwards opened a motor camp on the site of the former casino. The camp made use of the former park’s remaining recreational facilities.

The motor camp was purchased by Mildred Prentice White after Edward’s death. (Side note: She was a very interesting woman whose life would make a fascinating research topic.)

Year after year, as lots were sold, the motor camp eventually became a residential community. The Amerescoggin Neighborhood is part of that community, but it also has a lot in common with the neighboring Casco Terrace.

We have focused on those two neighborhoods because they were the first summer colony. Other neighborhoods followed at amazing speed.

In addition to cottages for the middle-class and even working-class, grander summer Residences for the wealthy popped up along the shore. The Portland Yacht and Country Clubs moved to Falmouth.

A quick scan of town records in 1919 revealed more than 150 cottages and at least 20 summer residences. For every “Cottage,” there were several “Cottage Lots.”

The Foreside had become a resort community.

The Foreside weathered the Great Depression and WWII, but the postwar building boom transformed farmland and cottage communities into year-round residential neighborhoods.

The new homes didn’t obliterate the cottages. Among the new neighborhoods, hallmarks from the past remain. There are the Yacht and Country Clubs. Many of the grand summer residences remain as do the cottages.

Quite a few old farmhouses remain as well. The four buildings on the corner of Falmouth and Town Landing Roads date to the 19th century. Next to Town Landing Market is a farmhouse built in the 18th century. This is Falmouth where we are surrounded by history if we only take the time to notice.

As for the request, we responded with the history of the neighborhoods along with details about the families who built those three homes. We’re your town historical society. That’s what we do.