

Postcards from Falmouth Oral History Transcript

Recorded: September 22, 2021

Oral Historian: Reverend Nell Fields

Interviewer: Anna Lee

Topic: Waquoit Congregational Church

Note: The right column references postcards by identifiers searchable in the Digital Commonwealth online collection.

00:00	[Music]	
00:45	so the church obviously it's this really	
00:47	striking building and it's had a lot of	
00:50	time to become embedded in the fabric of	
00:52	the community	
00:53	so if you could just do a rundown of the	
00:55	history for me tell me a little bit	
00:57	about how that started	
00:59	uh absolutely and first of all thank you	
01:01	for inviting me here uh Waquoit	#waquoitcongregationalchurch Hunt_Waquoit-Bldg_364
01:05	Congregational Church	
01:07	was built in 1848	#1848
01:12	so it's not	
01:13	that old	
01:15	and the reason why uh the folks in the	
01:18	village decide to build the church is	
01:19	they got tired of walking to the East	
01:23	Falmouth church which is in Hatchville	#hatchville
01:26	and if if if that weren't far enough	

Falmouth Public Library – Postcards from Falmouth

01:29	some of the folks were going to the	
01:30	downtown church and they said you know	#firstcongregationalchurch
01:32	let's save some time let's let's build a	
01:35	church so they built	
01:37	uh the	
01:38	the building for	
01:41	1350	
01:42	dollars	
01:43	and back in the day	
01:45	we didn't have they didn't have enough	
01:47	money	
01:49	to really do the inside with that fancy	
01:51	plaster that you have so they used	
01:55	poor man's plaster which is tin	
01:58	so we're	
01:59	one of the few churches I know of on the	
02:02	Cape that have	
02:04	that has tin on the ceilings and tin on	
02:07	the walls	
02:09	and it's not	
02:10	just one	
02:12	type of panels there's 18 different	
02:15	tin	
02:17	panels in there	
02:18	I said to somebody now how do you know	
02:20	they're 18. and they said oh I counted	
02:23	them I said I hope you didn't do that	

Falmouth Public Library – Postcards from Falmouth

02:24	during my sermon	
02:26	so nowadays it's it's it's really lovely	
02:29	and it's very very expensive now to have	
02:33	tin panels but back in the day and it	
02:35	started off as a summer church	
02:38	and it became really a year-round church	
02:41	in the 1950s	
02:43	and when it was built it was	
02:46	the the color scheme of the day was	
02:50	white with dark green corner boards and	
02:54	dark green	
02:56	shutters I wore my dark green clergy	
02:59	shirt to to show the listeners the	
03:02	viewers	
03:03	the the color that it was but when I	
03:06	arrived there 11 years ago it was all	
03:09	white	
03:10	with black shutters	
03:12	and the white wasn't even painted it was	
03:15	vinyl siding	
03:18	and we noticed when the the vitals vinyl	
03:21	siding was starting to crack we noticed	
03:23	that there was some rot there	
03:25	and we were very fortunate to get a CPC	#cpc (Community Preservation Committee)
03:27	grant	
03:28	to	
03:29	renovate	

Falmouth Public Library – Postcards from Falmouth

03:30	the church	
03:32	and so we peeled off the the vinyl	
03:35	siding and it revealed these dark corner	
03:39	boards	
03:41	underneath	
03:43	white that had been painted over them	
03:46	and	
03:48	we wanted to go back to what the church	
03:51	was originally but it originally looked	
03:53	like and we took a sample of that and it	
03:55	wasn't black it was this very	
03:58	specific	
03:59	dark	
04:00	green and so we painted it	
04:04	so it could look like it did in 1848	
04:08	that's really fascinating so there was a	
04:10	um a strong historical restoration	
04:13	component to that renovation then right	
04:15	oh my gosh that I'm getting absolutely	
04:18	so we restored it to the original color	
04:21	and just as an aside	
04:24	just to give you an idea of how iconic	
04:27	that church is because many people if	
04:29	you're going to downtown Falmouth you	
04:31	pass that church when we repainted it	
04:34	and restored it	
04:38	instead of using a white primer on those	

Falmouth Public Library – Postcards from Falmouth

04:41	corner boards you want to use a little	
04:43	bit darker color and so our painter	
04:47	used a	
04:49	oh like a turquoise a Key West green	
04:53	just as the primer well people had no	
04:56	idea was the primer they thought that's	
04:58	what we were painting the church	
05:00	I got more phone calls	
05:03	and some not very pleasant phone calls	
05:05	like I can't believe that you're	
05:07	painting that you know Key West green	
05:10	the Chamber got calls the town got calls	
05:12	and finally I I told our painter I said	
05:14	can you just	
05:16	you know get a piece of plywood and	
05:18	write the word primer on it and so he he	
05:22	wrote "it's primer"	
05:24	so we had that leaning up against the	
05:26	church while we were renovating that	
05:28	uh kind of interestingly	
05:31	when we were we had to replace some of	
05:33	the siding and as we peeled back the	
05:35	siding	
05:36	we saw what our	
05:39	what the the folks used for	
05:42	insulation	
05:43	it was a newspaper	

Falmouth Public Library – Postcards from Falmouth

05:45	back from the 1800s	
05:48	so there's nothing there's really	
05:50	nothing between the siding in that tin	
05:52	but old newspaper and I was able to save	
05:55	some of it it's all in like six point	
05:57	type and one of the stories talked about	
06:00	a neighborhood lad who got lost in the	
06:03	woods but he was found	
06:05	you know that was that was exciting news	
06:07	back then	
06:08	that idea of um being able to peel back	
06:11	the surface to see history underneath	
06:13	that is um really interesting I think	
06:15	one of the things we're trying to get at	
06:16	with this project so I'm glad you	
06:18	brought that up and it does sound like	
06:21	um people are very invested in the idea	
06:24	of the church as a local icon	
06:27	and they they really want to weigh in on	
06:29	what they see and how they how they	
06:30	perceive it as part of the community	
06:32	yes and especially for	
06:34	in our situation Waquoit is the smallest	#waquoit
06:37	village in	
06:38	in Falmouth and	
06:40	the the church over the years really has	
06:43	become	

Falmouth Public Library – Postcards from Falmouth

06:44	the heart	
06:46	of the village	
06:47	when these	
06:50	buildings were erected	
06:53	initially they were not only a church	
06:55	they were a meeting house they were the	
06:57	center for activity in the village and	
07:00	if there was something of important that	
07:03	people needed to discuss everybody would	
07:05	gather in there and they would you know	
07:07	talk about it and and now we've really	
07:10	become the focus of the community not	
07:13	only because of the building but all the	
07:16	things that we do	
07:18	to reach out to the community and invite	
07:20	the community in together	
07:23	but the outside of the building	
07:25	doesn't tell the full story	
07:27	because as iconic as it is on the	
07:30	outside	
07:31	it's equally iconic	
07:33	inside	
07:34	because	
07:38	the folks who belong to that church	
07:41	actually	
07:42	paid for the church	
07:44	by buying a pew	

Falmouth Public Library – Postcards from Falmouth

07:47	and so our pews are still numbered and	
07:49	if maybe the Fields family had 16 or the	
07:52	Bourne family had	#bourne
07:54	20 and they	
07:56	literally paid for the pew they built	
07:59	their own	
08:00	book rack you can go into that church	
08:02	and there's	
08:04	oh five or six different designs on the	
08:06	book rack	
08:08	of course the Fields family had	
08:09	something very plain but the Bournes had a	
08:11	very scrolled book rack they made their	
08:14	own elbow rest	
08:16	it's just like a curve thing it's not	
08:18	very	
08:19	comfortable	
08:20	the person who was in pew 27 liked to	
08:24	chew tobacco and um	
08:27	there's still a spittoon on the floor so	
08:30	you and you pick up	
08:31	the cover of it and it's all copper	
08:34	inside	
08:36	we use that during the summer	
08:39	to put a dehumidifier hose in	
08:43	the other thing that's sort of iconic is	
08:45	is	

Falmouth Public Library – Postcards from Falmouth

08:46	looking at the changes over the years	
08:49	that our foreparents	
08:51	made	
08:53	when this was first built there was no	
08:55	altar area that came a little bit later	
08:58	there's a step and then the altar area	
09:01	uh about six seven years ago	
09:05	we had to replace that platform because	
09:07	it got a little squishy and and one of	
09:09	our folks replaced it and just left the	
09:12	wood out in the back	
09:14	and I thought oh I better haul that wood	
09:16	away and when I looked at the wood that	
09:19	that platform first was built	
09:22	it had stencil on it	
09:24	and it said	
09:25	to Waquoit Church	
09:27	from	
09:28	the New England Organ Company	
09:32	good old Yankees we built that first	
09:34	platform on with the crate	
09:38	that our first organ	
09:40	came in	
09:41	um I looked at that uh	
09:43	the New England Organ Company went out	
09:46	of business in the	
09:48	late 1800s so I I'm pretty sure that	

Falmouth Public Library – Postcards from Falmouth

09:51	that was	
09:52	the original platform at the time	
09:55	wow so there are a lot of really it	
09:57	sounds like interesting	
09:58	personal decorative details really	
10:00	worked into yeah	
10:02	I didn't even get to the the beautiful	
10:05	uh chandelier that's in the map in the	
10:07	middle it's Sandwich glass and it was	
10:09	originally uh filled with whale oil and	
10:12	you have to go up into the attic	
10:14	to	
10:15	crank that	
10:17	line down we now replaced it with with a	
10:19	chain in order to fill it	
10:22	with whale oil and we have Sandwich	
10:25	glass lanterns on the side that are now	
10:27	electric	
10:29	and and the other thing that we did over	
10:31	the years is that we did put seat	
10:33	cushions in	
10:34	new seat cushions because they didn't	
10:36	have them	
10:37	it was all wooden pews	
10:39	but we also	
10:41	extended the seat cushion for about	
10:44	two to three inches because	

Falmouth Public Library – Postcards from Falmouth

10:46	over the years	
10:47	you know people have gotten a little a	
10:49	little bit bigger than our foreparents	
10:52	yeah it's the little things it's the	
10:53	little things but got to keep people	
10:55	comfortable during those hour-long	
10:57	service	
10:58	hour-long sermons thinking about all	
11:01	that I can imagine that there must be a	
11:03	really strong sense of personal	
11:04	investment people have really left their	
11:06	mark and been allowed to	
11:08	see that they have left their mark	
11:09	themselves their families	
11:11	and	
11:12	that concept and the idea of	
11:15	faith communities working to build	
11:17	something that has a lasting impact in	
11:18	the community	
11:20	is a theme that's come up um over and	
11:22	over again in these interviews	
11:23	is there something along those lines	
11:25	that you want to	
11:26	reach something recent or ongoing that	
11:28	you want to spotlight in terms of that	
11:30	kind of project that reaches out to the	
11:32	community	

Falmouth Public Library – Postcards from Falmouth

11:33	um	
11:34	well I think for us it's sort of ongoing	
11:36	you know we're we're here for the	
11:38	community we respond to the community	
11:40	one thing I do want to highlight is	
11:42	um	
11:44	I've always seen	
11:46	our chapel I call it a chapel because	
11:48	it's it's tiny and it's so beautiful	
11:51	I've always seen our chapel as a place	
11:54	of light and and	
11:57	metaphorically of course and so I've	
12:00	always thought this is a place of light	
12:02	for people this is a a harbor a safety	
12:06	place	
12:07	a place where people can come no matter	
12:08	who they are and feel welcome there	
12:13	fast forward a couple of years I learned	
12:15	what the word Waquoit means it's a	
12:17	Wampanoag word and it means	#wampanoag
12:20	a place of light	
12:22	and and I think it just sort of	
12:25	the the the sanctuaries and everything	
12:28	it represents just sort of speaks for	
12:29	itself it is a place of light in a	
12:33	village	
12:34	that is a place of light	

Falmouth Public Library – Postcards from Falmouth

12:36	that's wonderful and I do think I know	
12:38	what you mean in the sense that um	
12:42	you know you're right there in Waquoit	
12:43	Village kind of out on the edge of	
12:44	everything right out to the sea	
12:47	and um	
12:48	that becomes people	
12:50	people build a strong sense of identity	
12:52	in a place like that and that becomes	
12:53	something that's entrenched	
12:55	oh	
12:56	I've had you're absolutely right I've	
12:57	had so many people uh tell me that	
13:01	it just makes them smile makes them	
13:02	happy when they drive by that church I	
13:06	can't I personally	
13:08	cannot ever imagine	
13:11	that church	
13:12	not being there	
13:14	because it is so	
13:15	um identified with Waquoit it's so	
13:18	identified with that community and and	
13:21	back in the day	
13:23	you could go up in the balcony and you	
13:25	could see Waquoit Bay that was our you	#waquoitbay Gunning_Waquoit_Har_0563
13:27	know the the first harbor that the town	

Falmouth Public Library – Postcards from Falmouth

13:30	ever had was in Waquoit Bay	
13:32	and	
13:33	sailors actually used our steeple	
13:36	to find their way home	
13:38	sail toward the steeple and now that	
13:41	steeple is used	
13:43	for the Falmouth Airpark they always	
13:45	know that they're home because they're	
13:46	flying toward the steeple so it's a it's	
13:49	a place of light and it's a it's a	
13:51	beacon that it it almost calls to you as	
13:54	you're rounding the bend as you're	
13:55	coming	
13:56	from Mashpee toward Falmouth you you just	
13:59	you know that you're home because you	
14:00	see that steeple	
14:02	that is really wonderful and I think	
14:04	maybe living in Falmouth some people	
14:06	might become	
14:08	not used to but we have	
14:09	so many historical um	
14:12	interesting historical buildings so many	
14:14	hallmarks of the you know the history we	
14:16	share around us that maybe	
14:18	we might be tempted to take for granted	
14:20	the idea that	
14:22	we still have existing around us all	

Falmouth Public Library – Postcards from Falmouth

14:24	these	
14:25	markers of you know the common identity	
14:27	that we've built the ways we delineate	
14:28	you know this is our place this is our	
14:30	community	
14:31	so it's it's great to be reminded of	
14:32	that and know that something like that	
14:34	is still out there and still	
14:37	being you know	
14:38	seen for the same purpose interpreted	
14:40	for the same purpose	
14:41	yeah now I think what what is unique	
14:43	about um the Waquoit church is that it's	
14:46	just right out there in the open	
14:48	by itself I mean we have some historical	
14:50	houses around it but there's there's	
14:52	there's no crowding there's there's	
14:54	there's nothing else around it so it's	
14:56	it's just out	
14:59	there and it doesn't get lost	
15:03	in other buildings or with other	
15:04	buildings	
15:06	you said that you don't think you could	
15:09	imagine Waquoit without the church and	
15:11	I think for exactly the reason you just	
15:13	described I think that's true for a lot	
15:14	of people	

Falmouth Public Library – Postcards from Falmouth

15:15	it stands out	
15:17	but um to pivot a little bit maybe to	
15:20	speak about getting lost in a	
15:21	metaphorical sense um	
15:24	and especially	
15:25	when we're talking about community	
15:26	initiatives um is there anything in	
15:29	terms of challenges that you faced in	
15:31	the past year or so during the pandemic	#pandemic
15:33	that you think stand out in the history	
15:35	of the church	
15:37	um	
15:41	the the pandemic was	
15:44	an incredible time of growth for us	
15:48	and you use my the word du jour pivot I	
15:51	mean it was like	
15:52	boom we had to pivot immediately so	
15:56	we uh we never missed a Sunday	
15:59	we had uh	
16:00	technology our first thing of technology	
16:02	was an iPhone and an iPad and we were we	
16:06	went to Zoom and Facebook and now we	
16:07	have cameras and and lights and and	
16:10	everything else and uh the pandemic	
16:13	taught us the value	
16:15	of community and that	
16:18	I think we were people were more willing	

Falmouth Public Library – Postcards from Falmouth

16:20	to be vulnerable with each other and	
16:23	that hunger to connect and to be part of	
16:26	something	
16:27	greater than yourself really	
16:30	really came through and we're we're a	
16:32	different church we're a better church	
16:35	a more responsive church than we were	
16:37	before and oh my gosh we were very	
16:40	involved	
16:41	with	
16:42	with the community and responding to	
16:44	community	
16:45	needs but during the pandemic it it	
16:47	really it got real we started a food	
16:50	program	
16:52	we were delivering meals to	
16:54	people in need on a weekly basis and my	
16:57	idea was of need is not only a monetary	
17:00	need but	
17:02	parents who were just done with cooking	
17:04	for the week um you know they would they	
17:07	would call me up or somebody would	
17:09	nominate them and we delivered them a	
17:11	full meal for Christmas	
17:13	we	
17:14	uh partnered with our our good friends	
17:16	The Buffalo Jump who they live in Waquoit	#thebuffalojump

Falmouth Public Library – Postcards from Falmouth

17:18	and we gave away drive through 800	
17:23	fully cooked turkey dinners	
17:27	we wouldn't even	
17:28	we didn't even think about that pre	
17:30	pandemic and the fact that we have this	
17:33	small church with this like big heart	
17:35	just delights me some and I think that's	
17:37	what people	
17:38	see and feel	
17:40	and and and think about when they drive	
17:42	by that chapel oh that's the church that	
17:45	does this that's the church that feeds	
17:48	people that's the church that has great	
17:50	music that's the church that does these	
17:52	wonderful yard sales that the church	
17:54	that	
17:55	you know reaches out to inviting Afghan	
17:58	families to come to development	
18:00	that's another interesting and really	
18:02	topical question that I'd like to ask	
18:04	you about if you could elaborate on that	
18:06	a little bit	
18:07	we are working with four other	
18:09	individuals	
18:11	we	
18:12	started a group called Neighborhood	#neighborhoodsupportteam
18:15	um Support Team	

Falmouth Public Library – Postcards from Falmouth

18:17	and we've identified three families who	
18:20	are opening up their homes they had an	
18:22	apartment maybe in their house or their	
18:24	their summer folk	
18:26	that we're going to we've asked to	
18:28	resettle	
18:29	uh three families from Afghanistan here	
18:32	to Falmouth so we're currently working	
18:34	with a an agency	
18:36	they're waiting for those families to	
18:38	come in from the military bases	
18:40	and once they do they're going to show	
18:43	families	
18:44	our profile that we put together just	
18:47	the greatness of a Falmouth you know our	
18:49	scientific community and in Woods Hole	
18:52	and	
18:53	we're ready we've got all our teams put	
18:55	together we've raised	
18:57	we've raised money so we're ready to	
18:59	welcome them	
19:01	I think	
19:02	looping back to the topic of the	
19:03	pandemic it's really a watershed moment	
19:05	for a lot of institutions and I would	
19:07	hope that the thing that gets hammered	
19:09	home for people is that it is about	

Falmouth Public Library – Postcards from Falmouth

19:12	standing up and making sure people don't	
19:13	get left behind that's right which is I	
19:16	see as the common theme of what you're	
19:18	telling me	
19:19	yes yes it's um	
19:23	I think we saw that during the pandemic	
19:26	and it's something that we've always	
19:27	known	
19:28	is that what	
19:30	I think what makes Waquoit unique and	
19:32	Falmouth unique is that	
19:35	we do have a strong community and and	
19:37	and because we're willing to reach out	
19:39	and connect	
19:41	with others and to make sure that people	
19:43	aren't	
19:44	left behind and it's so easy to be left	
19:47	behind in so many in so many different	
19:50	ways	
19:51	and the pandemic taught us that	
19:54	um you know we do have to reach out	
19:57	and welcome people welcome all people	
20:00	and that's the other thing that delights	
20:02	me about uh Waquoit	
20:05	and and not you know when you walk	
20:07	inside	
20:08	that chapel you feel the sense of of	

Falmouth Public Library – Postcards from Falmouth

20:11	welcome that yes you're kind of stepping	
20:13	back in time but you're also stepping in	
20:16	to a new future a new reality and when	
20:20	you leave	
20:22	you're changed	
20:24	and isn't that what's supposed to happen	
20:25	anyway	
20:26	I think so and I think the the extent to	
20:29	which	
20:30	you believe that is really obvious and	
20:32	I'm really happy to see it and um just	
20:34	just to wrap up is there anything else	
20:36	that you want people to know about the	
20:37	church if they're looking for	
20:38	information	
20:40	no matter who you are no matter what	
20:42	you've done no matter what you believe	
20:44	in you are	
20:45	welcomed	
20:46	at our church and you don't even have to	
20:49	believe in anything	
20:51	then and anytime you just want a tour	
20:53	you know	
20:54	stop by or give us a call and we're very	
20:56	happy to do so oh that's wonderful	
20:59	well	
21:00	and thank you so much for coming it was	

Falmouth Public Library – Postcards from Falmouth

21:02	great to have you as part of this	
21:03	project it was wonderful thank you so	
21:04	much	