

Falmouth Public Library – Postcards from Falmouth

**Postcards from Falmouth Oral History Transcript**

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Interviewer: Anna Lee

Topic: Falmouth Public Library

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

00:00	[Music]	
00:44	yeah so the um the library obviously the	
00:47	Main Library is a real anchor of Main	#falmouthpubliclibrary Gunning_Village_Bldg_0258 through 0288 & Hunt_Village_Bldg_009 through 012
00:49	Street and the branches have been around	
00:51	long enough to be these recognizable	
00:53	community centers but it wasn't always	
00:56	that way so can you give me a walk	
00:58	through of the history of how that came	
01:00	to be	
01:01	happy to	
01:02	there was a librarian in 1958	
01:07	whose quote I use often she said library	
01:11	Falmouth is a library-minded town and it	
01:13	was true in 1958 it's true today	
01:17	and it was certainly true um when the	
01:19	library was being	
01:21	um	

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01:22	put together in the 1800s	
01:24	there was a subscription-based library	
01:27	and goes back to the 1700s	
01:31	but the main move to get a free public	
01:33	library was in the	
01:35	1800s the	
01:38	Falmouth Free Public Library was	
01:40	established at town meeting in	
01:43	1891 um with an appropriation of 50	#1891
01:46	dollars a year	
01:48	but the the real momentum behind it was	
01:52	Esther	#estherbeebe #beebe
01:53	Elizabeth Beebe who died in	
01:56	1889 and left us three thousand dollars	#1889
02:00	which was a substantial amount of money	
02:02	at that time	
02:04	to establish a library	
02:06	the um	
02:08	cost of the library was 35 000	
02:11	and there was an interesting letter to	
02:13	the editor	
02:14	by somebody who signed it um “Heavy	
02:17	Taxpayer” and he charged the the	
02:21	library trustees with building a Taj	
02:24	Mahal	
02:25	because they were concerned about it	
02:27	being a fireproof building so the	

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02:29	construction was	
02:31	iron and concrete	
02:33	and they had Vermont green slate for a	
02:37	roof which we still enjoy today	
02:39	and the base is local granite	
02:43	so the the	
02:45	the library was well built and the main	
02:48	part of the library we still enjoy	
02:50	the 1901 library was designed for	#1901
02:52	Falmouth of 1901 which had	
02:55	about 900 homes	
02:57	and the collection was about 5 000 books	
03:01	so it quickly	
03:02	it quickly got to be	
03:04	a bit small	
03:06	in the 1920s they considered building a	
03:09	mezzanine to hold more more books and if	
03:12	you go into the old part of the building	
03:14	look up and see you would have to be	
03:17	pretty short uh to make use of a	
03:20	mezzanine in that area so although the	
03:22	plans were drawn I'm I'm pretty	
03:23	grateful that that	
03:24	that they didn't follow through with	
03:26	that plan	
03:28	the main	
03:30	addition to the library the first	

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03:32	addition to the library happened in 1967	#1967
03:36	when they built wings on either side of	
03:38	the initial building and that added	
03:40	another seven thousand square feet to	
03:43	the building	
03:44	in 1978	
03:46	uh a	
03:48	addition was added to the right which is	
03:50	the current Adult Collections room and	
03:52	that	
03:53	uh added another 15 000 square feet	
03:57	and then the most recent addition in 2007	#2007
04:00	added the wing on the left side which is	
04:02	the Reference room and the meeting rooms	
04:05	to bring it to the current um 40 000	
04:08	square feet so when is the next addition	
04:11	not going to happen we are	
04:13	a steady state library for um	
04:16	zero-based growth for every book that	
04:18	comes in um	
04:20	we we get rid of one and	
04:24	that's not a bad thing uh it's a good	
04:26	thing to um	
04:29	to be good stewards of the collection	
04:31	and keep the collection fresh and	
04:33	current	
04:34	um	

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04:37	that's the history of the main library I	
04:38	should jump backwards and talk a little	
04:40	bit about the branches because the	
04:42	branches are interesting the North	#northfalmouthlibrary
04:44	Falmouth Branch	
04:45	is actually older than the main library	
04:49	that was established	
04:50	in	
04:51	1879 it was a room in the North Falmouth	#1879 #northfalmouthcongregationalchurch Gunning_North_Bldg_1363 through 1368 & Hunt_North_Bldg_368 & 369
04:54	Congregational Church	
04:56	and	
04:57	in 1955 and looking for more room they	#1955
05:00	moved across the street to the old fire	
05:03	station it's the little white building	
05:05	that currently is used by the North	#northfalmouthvillageassociation
05:07	Falmouth Village	
05:08	Association and	
05:11	they were there for	
05:12	10 years and then they moved to their	
05:14	current location in Nye Park	#nyepark
05:18	and that's an interesting story the	
05:20	building they're in	
05:21	was an old barracks building that came	
05:24	from the from um	

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05:27	from the base and it was moved across	
05:30	land	
05:31	it took five days to get it to Nye Park	
05:34	uh it they had some heavy rains it got	
05:37	stuck in the mud	
05:39	an axle broke	
05:41	they had to take a day off because it	
05:42	was Sunday and they needed a day of rest	
05:44	so	
05:45	after five days of of dragging this poor	
05:47	building across they set it up on blocks	
05:50	in the parking lot and there it sat	
05:52	waiting for um town meeting to vote for	
05:55	the money to um establish it as a	
05:58	community center not a library in Nye	
06:01	Park and	
06:03	one of the stipulations was that there	
06:06	would always be room in the in the	
06:08	basement for storage of Park Department	
06:11	uh tools	
06:12	and I haven't been in the basement in a	
06:14	long time but the last time I was there	
06:16	there was still tools belonging to the	
06:18	Parks Department in the basement	
06:21	so finally it was it was turned over to	
06:24	the library um	
06:26	I think it was in	

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06:27	1960 a pardon me for having my	
06:30	notes but when I get nervous I would	
06:32	need notes to tell you what my name is	
06:35	in 1964	#1964
06:37	the building was transferred to the	
06:39	Trustees of the public library and it	
06:41	became	
06:42	a public library and at that same	
06:45	location still is	
06:46	today the East Falmouth Library is not	#eastfalmouthlibrary
06:49	as old it was established in 1935 in a	#1935
06:52	classroom in the	
06:54	East Falmouth Elementary School	#eastfalmouthelementaryschool
06:57	and in 1943	#1943
07:01	they needed that space	
07:02	for kindergarten and so the library was	
07:05	closed and it remained closed until	
07:08	1958 when the school was able to give	#1958
07:11	them space again	
07:13	but it was clear that the East Falmouth	
07:15	Library needed more room and so in	
07:17	1971	#1971
07:19	the um town purchased the Vidal House	
07:22	across from or by Mill Pond next to	#millpond
07:25	Smitty's and	
07:27	that's where the library is today well	
07:30	that's really fascinating the the note	

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07:32	especially about North Falmouth Library	
07:34	that is not the origin I would have	
07:35	expected for that building	
07:38	and um what you said about	
07:40	building uh the idea of building a Taj	
07:42	Mahal is very interesting because	
07:44	libraries obviously become very heavily	
07:46	identified with the buildings they	
07:48	inhabit but at the same time they're an	
07:49	institution that's beyond a building	
07:51	that has to	
07:52	think about how to serve the public	
07:55	so if	
07:57	you could tell me a little bit about the	
07:59	library's intentions in the community	
08:01	especially things that you think other	
08:02	people may not necessarily be aware of	
08:04	if they're just casual patrons	
08:07	well it's it's interesting	
08:10	the services library services are	
08:11	changing	
08:12	and um	
08:14	again the need for space	
08:17	is	
08:17	the need for a library is is always	
08:20	going to be there	
08:22	it's just that the use of the existing	

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08:24	space will change	
08:26	or be reconfigured to meet the changing	
08:28	needs of the community and as as we're	
08:31	all aware	
08:32	a lot of the collections are becoming	
08:34	digitized our current collection of DVDs	
08:38	will slowly uh be phased out as as	
08:42	we receive more of our um DVD watching	
08:45	via video streaming we're buying a lot	
08:47	of ebooks people are reading books	
08:49	electronically the e-audiobooks it's a	
08:52	big space grab in the library but new	
08:56	cars are not even being equipped with CD	
08:58	players so people are getting their	
09:01	audio books through streaming and and	
09:03	downloading them to their phones	
09:05	I don't want to scare people we will	
09:07	always have books we will always meet	
09:08	the needs of the community and it's	
09:10	interesting because we're a tourist	
09:13	community and sometimes	
09:16	our summer homes are not kept up	
09:17	technology wise as	
09:19	as as much as our main home so it's	
09:23	important that we	
09:24	we have it we still have a collection of	
09:27	VHS tapes	

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09:29	they have got to be phased out there are	
09:30	just a few people who are still using	
09:32	VHS but	
09:34	we'll hang in there as long as as there	
09:36	is a need for it	
09:39	the note about the rental homes is very	
09:41	interesting because I can imagine people	
09:43	um	
09:44	there's a divide definitely between	
09:45	people who interact with the libraries	
09:47	locals and people who come back every	
09:48	year as vacationers	
09:51	and I would imagine they come back	
09:52	expecting what they have seen for the	
09:55	past five ten years maybe even their	
09:57	whole childhoods	
09:59	do you think that there's a difference	
10:01	in the way the library serves	
10:02	vacationers as opposed to locals in	
10:04	terms of programming materials anything	
10:06	like that well we certainly direct our	
10:09	programming um which is	
10:12	financed by	
10:13	well the programs are financed by the	
10:15	Friends of the Library and the Trustees	
10:19	but we certainly	
10:20	our main constituents are our tax-paying	

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10:24	residents of Falmouth but we we have a	
10:26	real commitment to the tourists and we	
10:28	do	
10:29	allow borrowing and welcome them to the	
10:32	library so	
10:33	so	
10:35	and and go out of our way to provide the	
10:37	services that they need I was	
10:39	talking with Jill Erickson and she was	#jillerickson
10:42	telling she was showing me a letter from	
10:44	some visitors from England who had	
10:46	uh marveled over the the quilt that	
10:48	hangs in the Reference Room and the	
10:51	reference librarians gave them all kinds	
10:53	of information about the quilt and even	
10:55	found a poster an old poster of the	
10:58	quilt which they took home and framed	
11:00	and sent a photo back to us of of our	
11:02	Falmouth quilts hanging on the wall in	
11:04	their home in England so um	
11:07	we always we meet the needs of the of	
11:10	the public and	
11:11	many times go above and beyond those	
11:13	needs	
11:15	the um speaking of the quilt that's very	
11:17	interesting because	
11:20	perhaps for some people it might fade	

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11:21	into the background but the library	
11:23	isn't just a home for	
11:25	the materials that you would expect	
11:26	there's also there's art there's other	
11:29	things that are	
11:30	in the collections that help to	
11:33	preserve a picture of Falmouth as a	
11:35	community not just	
11:37	not just those informational materials	
11:40	it's it's interesting because um	
11:44	I found a quote from one of the original	
11:46	Trustees of the library Reverend Henry	#henryherbertsmythe
11:49	Smythe and he I'm going to have to read	
11:50	this because I don't want to mix it up	
11:53	he um said that the library should	
11:55	gather and store materials related to	
11:57	the history of the town and he talked	
12:00	about old letters logbooks stories and	
12:02	traditions	
12:03	and he said specifically things that	
12:05	have never been written down but which	
12:08	are most important material for	
12:09	understanding the town's life this is by	
12:12	far the most valuable work a library can	
12:14	do for a town	
12:15	so yes our mission is beyond	
12:19	current reading of fiction and that it	

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12:20	is to preserve the history of the town	
12:23	and this project they will that we're	
12:25	working on Postcards from Falmouth	#postcardsfromfalmouth
12:27	certainly meets um the desires of the	
12:31	initial trustee who who would	
12:34	greatly approve of what we're doing I'm	
12:36	sure I would think so even though in the	
12:39	way that um the idea of what the library	
12:42	should be has changed there are some	
12:44	things that um	
12:45	that definitely haven't they still hold	
12:47	strong	
12:48	and	
12:51	in terms of that obviously we've gone	
12:52	through a period of a lot of upheaval in	
12:55	the last couple of years or so so if you	
12:57	could tell me a little bit about the	
12:58	adaptations the library has had to make	
13:00	to	
13:01	things that might have otherwise been	
13:03	considered iron-clad in order to deal	
13:05	with the pandemic	#pandemic
13:06	oh during the pandemic	
13:08	that that was a very interesting time	
13:11	for us we had to rethink how we provided	
13:15	library services	
13:17	without people coming in the building	

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13:19	we did a lot of home delivery we did	
13:22	outside delivery of materials	
13:25	people asked for they missed the	
13:28	browsing so we loaded up book trucks and	
13:30	brought books outside for people to	
13:32	browse we	
13:34	listened to the community to see what	
13:36	they needed and what we could do to meet	
13:39	those needs	
13:40	one thing people missed was the	
13:41	computers	
13:43	and and	
13:45	internet connectivity so we bought hotspots	
13:48	that people could borrow we bought	
13:50	Chromebooks that they could take home	
13:52	um	
13:54	we had to	
13:55	be on our feet thinking fast and and	
13:59	staying in touch with other CLAMS	
14:00	libraries across the Cape	
14:02	to get good ideas libraries are great	
14:05	about sharing	
14:07	and meeting the needs of everyone in	
14:09	that way	
14:10	we were lucky that	
14:13	that we had already started down the	
14:15	digitization path so we had a lot of	

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14:17	ebooks available for people	
14:22	research that people would normally do	
14:24	at the library is a lot more online and	
14:26	I'm not talking about	
14:28	Google	
14:29	we had a wonderful digitization project	
14:32	in 2012 using CPC funds	#cpc (Community Preservation Committee)
14:36	and we digitized the Falmouth Enterprise	#falmouthenterprise
14:38	from January	
14:40	of 1896 through	
14:43	December of 1962 we	
14:46	had to stop in 62 because there was a	
14:49	requirement that um only historic	
14:52	records could be	
14:54	digitized so it had to be from 2012 when	
14:57	we did the project back 50 years	
15:00	we're looking we're working with the	
15:01	Boston Public Library to complete that	#bostonpubliclibrary
15:03	digitization project	
15:05	and the the Falmouth Enterprise is such	
15:08	a wealth of information about the town	
15:11	this is one of the the best things we	
15:13	did it really is it's um	
15:16	there's so much research so much you can	
15:18	learn about that one thing I learned in	
15:20	looking at the Falmouth Enterprise was	
15:22	that there was a a crime that took place	

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15:25	in the library in December of 1943	
15:29	the librarians came in to find that the	
15:31	library had been broken into	
15:33	and a set of historic stamps had been	
15:36	stolen	
15:37	and he'd come in through the basement	
15:40	window and taken the displays off the	
15:42	wall	
15:44	and one of the librarians had remembered	
15:46	a gentleman in army fatigue studying the	
15:49	stamps the week before	
15:51	and so she was able to give a	
15:53	description of him to the police	
15:55	and the police went to the base and	
15:58	talked to the librarian there and she	
16:00	said oh yes	
16:01	a	
16:02	gentleman had borrowed	
16:04	the six books they had on the value of	
16:06	stamps	
16:08	prior to our break-in so they	
16:11	they went and uh	
16:13	arrested him	
16:14	and he had	
16:16	packaged the stamps up in a box and	
16:18	buried them in his mother's garden in	
16:20	Framingham	

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16:22	and they were retrieved	
16:24	unharmed but the beautiful frames they	
16:27	were in um	
16:28	apparently he thought this would	
16:30	identify the stamps with Falmouth so he	
16:32	stopped on the Bourne Bridge and threw	
16:34	them in the Canal	
16:35	so those were not recovered but it's	
16:38	stories like these that um that you	
16:40	wouldn't know from uh	
16:42	it would be too hard to go back through	
16:44	microfilm and and learn about it I've	
16:47	looked uh	
16:48	that's not the end of the stamp story	
16:50	I'm trying to figure out what happened	
16:52	to the stamps and I've talked to the	
16:53	Historical Society and	#falmouthhistoricalsociety
16:55	talked to people in the library but that	
16:58	timeframe 1943 is just far enough back	
17:01	that there isn't	
17:02	uh memory of the event so I'm I haven't	
17:06	given up though I'm still going to keep	
17:07	looking to try and find the end of that	
17:09	story	
17:10	that is a really interesting little saga	
17:13	maybe a sign or a I hate to say a	
17:15	symptom but when you	

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17:17	have a an institution that's really	
17:19	supposed to be a clearinghouse and a	
17:21	place for as many people from the public	
17:23	to come and be served and to gather	
17:25	strange things happen yes for sure	
17:28	and um	
17:30	thinking of the the steps that the	
17:32	library has taken to adapt to the	
17:33	pandemic	
17:34	do you	
17:35	see any of those things carrying forward	
17:38	has the patron response been to to hang	
17:41	on to these things or they want to go	
17:42	back to the way things were	
17:44	absolutely library services are forever	
17:47	morphing um we would never step	
17:49	backwards and um library home delivery	
17:53	is really uh important we have a a	
17:56	homebound librarian who	
18:00	people can register with and she will	
18:02	deliver books to them and	
18:04	she develops a real personal	
18:05	relationship with the people that she	
18:07	serves and she knows what books they	
18:08	like she makes recommendations and	
18:12	that's something that's certainly	
18:14	ongoing it happened before the pandemic	

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18:16	but during the pandemic we expanded it a	
18:19	bit I would	
18:22	on several occasions I would stop at	
18:24	people's homes with the instruction to	
18:26	put the books underneath the back cover	
18:28	of the pickup truck in the driveway or	
18:31	or put the the bag of books in the	
18:33	mailbox after the mail delivery that	
18:35	came at four o'clock so it was kind of	
18:37	uh kind of fun making sure that people	
18:39	still had the reading material that they	
18:42	desired	
18:43	uh at that time of course we've always	
18:46	done a phone-in reference service um ask	
18:49	a librarian so a lot of the services	
18:52	were there we just needed to ramp them	
18:54	up a little bit	
18:57	I would imagine that that kind of thing	
18:59	really puts you up close and personal	
19:00	with the the texture of people's lives	
19:02	because people bring strange questions	
19:04	to the library	
19:06	they do	
19:07	they do	
19:09	that that would be a better question for	
19:11	a reference librarian I know Jill has	
19:13	her favorite questions	

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19:15	and um	
19:18	they're not interesting stories are not	
19:20	coming to my mind right now	
19:23	I would like to talk about the um the	
19:25	Postcards though the	
19:27	Postcards from Falmouth is a	
19:31	a grant funded project	
19:33	and	
19:34	why postcards and Falmouth and this is	
19:37	an interesting story	
19:41	some years ago	
19:42	my husband and I were having	
19:44	dinner at the Quarterdeck and a woman	#quarterdeck
19:47	that we knew	
19:49	from the Falmouth Road Race and the	#falmouthroadrace
19:51	Falmouth Mile enough to say hello to	
19:52	Doris Beatty was seated next to us so we	
19:55	said hello she was	
19:56	dining with a a friend	
19:59	and the next night	
20:00	we were at the Flying Bridge for dinner	#flyingbridge Gunning_Village_Bldg_0377 through 0383
20:03	while we were having dinner two nights	
20:04	in a row I don't know that's enough	
20:06	that's a whole other story but seated	
20:09	next to us was Doris Beatty and her friend	
20:11	and so we teased them that they	

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20:14	were following us and we got talking	
20:16	with them and um her friend Mr. Hunt	
20:19	Robert Hunt	#robertchunt
20:20	told me that he had been stationed here	
20:23	during the war and had started a	
20:25	collection of postcards about Falmouth	
20:28	and would we be interested in having	
20:29	them and I said absolutely so he came	
20:32	with 600 postcards and we scanned them	
20:35	and put them up on our our website and	
20:38	they were we're really lucky in Falmouth	
20:40	because um as a tourist town there are a	
20:43	lot of postcards about Falmouth if	
20:45	you're not a tourist community you might	
20:47	have a handful of postcards but Falmouth	
20:50	has lots as we found out	
20:53	Mr. Gunning came in the library after	
20:55	seeing the	
20:57	Hunt collection and said that his mother	
20:59	Anita Gunning had collected postcards	#anitagunning
21:01	for years and would we be interested in	
21:03	hers he brought in 1800 postcards	
21:07	from about Falmouth so with volunteers	
21:10	and staff we scanned the front and back	
21:13	of those	
21:14	postcards and then most recently a	
21:17	gentleman in Falmouth Gareth Jennings	#garethjennings

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21:20	brought in his collection and so we	
21:22	scanned them so we have	
21:25	well over 3000 postcards of Falmouth	
21:28	scanned and you you might think there'd	
21:29	be a lot of duplication yes there is	
21:31	some	
21:32	but um there are different time frames	
21:34	the different collections of different	
21:36	time frames so we're constantly finding	
21:38	new postcards	
21:40	and postcards you know what what do we	
21:41	do with them well it's been really	
21:43	interesting we had a creative writing	
21:45	program where people chose a postcard	
21:48	and wrote a story about it	
21:50	um	
21:51	this project Postcards from Falmouth to	
21:54	to look at postcard locations across the	
21:57	town and	
21:58	film people's memory of that location	
22:02	I had an interesting question from a	
22:04	patron he was looking through our	
22:06	postcards and came across one	
22:09	where someone had written on the front	
22:11	of the card "why so quiet," signed Marie	Hunt_Village_Bch_093
22:15	and this this was the first batch that	
22:17	we had scanned and we hadn't done the	

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22:19	front and back just the front and he	
22:21	wondered if there was any more to this	
22:22	question on the back of the card	
22:25	so I looked and on the back of the card	
22:26	was just the address and the postcard	
22:29	had been sent to	
22:31	a Julia Quiring in Boston so I looked	#juliaquiring
22:34	her up to see what I could find out and	
22:36	she was a most interesting woman	
22:37	fascinating she was a Boston Brahmin a	
22:40	hat designer	
22:42	her brother was an artist who did	
22:44	frescoes in the theaters in in Boston	
22:48	and she lived to be 108 which so	
22:51	impressed me	
22:52	I did find two other postcards addressed	
22:55	not to her but to her sister Anna so	
22:58	every time we get a new collection I go	
22:59	through to see if there are any more	
23:01	postcards written to this family but I	
23:03	think	
23:03	I think that's probably all we've heard	
23:05	from the Quirings	
23:07	I think that's a really a great example	
23:09	of the idea of what we're trying to do	
23:11	with the project being to use these	
23:13	ephemera to capture moments	

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23:16	in history and in people's memories	
23:18	because that's where the really	
23:19	interesting particulars are and it's	
23:22	also a great visual history of the town	
23:25	I was so impressed with the postcards of	
23:28	the train stations in North Falmouth	Hunt_North_Bldg_403 & 404
23:31	when when the main uh	
23:33	means of transport to Falmouth was	
23:35	trains and there it was a huge huge uh	
23:38	depot in North Falmouth you wouldn't	
23:40	think there'd be room for it but I think	
23:42	it was mostly in the area where the	
23:44	parking is for the uh for the ferries	
23:46	now but quite fascinating	
23:49	and nowadays it's kind of an element of	
23:50	the landscape that's either been	
23:52	effaced totally or really pushed into the	
23:54	background yeah so having that record is	
23:57	it's valuable but also like you said it	
23:59	really provokes people's curiosity and	
24:01	leads them down interesting paths yeah	
24:04	and to that point as we wrap up is there	
24:06	anything that you want to	
24:08	say to people about the library	
24:10	yes I always am happy to talk about the	
24:12	library	
24:14	the library appropriation is only 1.5	

Falmouth Public Library – Postcards from Falmouth

24:18	percent of the town budget and it is um	
24:22	a real deal for the for the residents of	
24:25	Falmouth the um	
24:28	there is so much to offer at the main	
24:30	library the East Branch the North Branch	
24:33	but also the West Falmouth Library and	
24:35	the Woods Hole Library all open to the	
24:38	public all offering different programs	
24:40	and services there's truly	
24:42	something for everyone at the Falmouth	
24:45	Public Library	
24:47	and our our our two private libraries	
24:49	that are still open to the public	
24:52	well that's wonderful thank you for	
24:53	coming thank you for having me	
24:55	[Music]	