

Postcards from Falmouth Oral History Transcript

Recorded: May 20, 2022

Oral Historian: Valerie Harding

Interviewer: Troy Clarkson

Topic: Falmouth Heights

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

0:00	[Music]	
0:45	I am Troy Clarkson it is Friday May 20th	
0:48	2022 and	
0:50	this visit is with Valerie Harding	
0:55	so welcome Valerie today we're going to	
0:56	talk about some of the history of	
0:59	Falmouth Heights and just before the	#falmouthheights
1:01	camera came on you and I were	
1:03	well you were sharing stories	
1:05	about that rich history so let's let's	
1:08	actually start	
1:09	with that there are so many roads within	
1:12	Falmouth Heights	
1:13	that are familiar to people	
1:15	but you know the history behind some of	
1:18	those names so for instance	
1:20	when I was first married my wife and I	
1:23	lived	
1:24	in a rented apartment on Jericho Path	#jerichopath
1:28	where there are condos now before that	
1:30	they were apartments before that they	
1:32	were tennis courts oh yes just before	
1:34	what we used to call the "wee bump" where	
1:36	that hill went over and you could if you	
1:37	drove fast enough you could get your car	
1:39	airborne uh I so I've heard well	
1:43	you'd always ask your parents	
1:45	especially your father to drive really	
1:46	fast right so tell us though in that	
1:49	immediate area I mean Falmouth Heights	
1:52	has a history as the first planned uh	
1:55	summer resort community but it's so much	
1:57	more than that well long before it was	

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1:59	developed as a summer resort in 1880 by	
2:02	a man from Worcester	
2:04	actually a consortium of men from	#falmouthheightslandandwharfcompany
2:05	Worcester	
2:06	before that in back in the 1700s and the	
2:10	late 1700s	
2:12	it was considered a very remote part of	
2:14	Falmouth	
2:16	and Jericho Path the name always	
2:18	interested me because I grew up on	
2:20	Johnson Road and you know	
2:23	why was it called Jericho Path well	
2:25	after doing research to come to find out the	
2:30	inhabitants of Falmouth from the late	
2:32	1600s to the 1700s when they had large	
2:36	dead animals they couldn't bury them off	
2:38	Main Street	
2:39	so they would take them up to what they	
2:40	called Jericho which was the hill on the	
2:43	Heights and they would car- I guess drag	
2:46	them up there and leave them there so	
2:49	that was	
2:50	it was called Jericho on the Heights	
2:52	hill and it became Jericho Path	
2:55	and I since have heard from	
2:58	actually someone whose father was an	
2:59	excavator in Falmouth that sometimes	
3:02	when he would dig foundations he would	
3:04	find bones of large animals up there	
3:06	they the kids thought they were dinosaur	
3:08	bones but they were probably	
3:10	horse and cow	
3:12	but the other thing is in that same	
3:14	vicinity is Lake Leaman Road	#lakeleaman
3:16	when they developed	
3:20	Worcester Court	#worcestercourt
3:21	and Grand Avenue	#grandavenue Hunt_Heights_Sts_320 through 322 Hunt_Heights_Sts_324 and 325 Gunning_Heights_Sts_1064 through 1074
3:24	they also	
3:25	laid out other roads Worcester Court was	
3:28	where I ended up in high school	

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3:30	and that was in 1959 and there were	
3:33	still dirt roads down there	
3:35	and Worcester Court	
3:36	intersects with Lake Leaman Road well	
3:39	where was Lake Leaman they decided to	Gunning_Heights_Pnd_1318 & 1319 Hunt_Heights_Pnd_315 & 316
3:41	change the name of Little Pond to Lake	#littlepond
3:43	Leaman	
3:44	and it remained so for probably about 20	
3:47	years until the local townspeople	
3:48	decided to change the name	
3:50	back to Little Pond which is where you	
3:53	which is where the tennis courts were	
3:55	right yes and uh	
3:57	and so I've got lots of connections in	
3:59	that part of town we moved here to	
4:01	Falmouth when I was four	
4:04	but before that my grandparents had a	
4:06	had a home it was a summer home and then	
4:09	they moved here full time on Hudson	#hudsonstreet
4:10	Street okay right in that area all right	
4:13	there was nothing there it was all woods	
4:14	we kids used to play in there lots of	
4:17	skinny little dirt roads and in fact	
4:19	Worcester Court	
4:22	where Lake Leaman and Worcester Court	
4:24	intersect	
4:26	and Worcester Court is now well we	
4:28	called it Worcester Court Extension	
4:30	which goes down behind the plaza that	
4:32	was all dirt roads right down to the	
4:34	cranberry bog which is the Falmouth Mall	#falmouthmall
4:37	so they were just little dirt roads even	
4:41	back in the early 60s	
4:43	so let's talk about that a little bit	
4:45	then because I uh	
4:48	as we sit here in May of 2022 that	
4:51	former cranberry bog Falmouth Mall	
4:53	property just sold	
4:55	to a developer I read in the paper for	
4:58	59 million dollars so tell us share with	
5:01	us your memories of that tract of land	
5:03	and how it unfolded okay so if you go	

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5:06	down Teaticket Highway	
5:10	right where the bank is across the	
5:12	street from CVS	
5:14	that was Hazelton's junkyard	#hazeltons
5:17	and the Hazeltons later moved their	
5:19	junkyard to Gifford Street which is	
5:21	where the storage units are	
5:23	just beyond the Little League field and	
5:25	all but that was a junkyard and it was	
5:27	downhill down to the Walmart area was	
5:30	all junk cars and everything else	
5:33	as kids we used to ride our bikes	
5:36	down the dirt road which was - became	
5:38	Worcester Court	
5:40	when the bog froze and	#cranberrybog
5:44	we used to put our skates on and run	
5:46	across the dirt and jump over the ditch	
5:48	and skate on the bog our parents weren't	
5:50	too worried because it was a bog and how	
5:52	far can you fall in a frozen bog	
5:56	Little Pond we also skated on that used	
5:58	to freeze over and there were a lot of	
6:00	bonfires and there weren't many there	
6:02	weren't any houses down on Miami Ave. one or two	
6:07	actually my father bought a lot of	
6:09	land down there but my mother wouldn't	
6:11	build a house down there because it was	
6:12	too deep into the woods	
6:15	imagine that too deep into the woods	
6:18	right in Falmouth Heights yeah	
6:21	now a beautiful	
6:23	year-round residential area and imagine	
6:26	being on the water on Miami Ave you know	
6:28	right on Little Pond there right near	
6:30	the beaches and yeah	
6:33	so um and	
6:36	from Jericho Path	
6:38	down to Falmouth Heights Beach	
6:40	in the winters it was	
6:43	it was like a ghost town there was no	
6:45	light no lights on in houses or anything	
6:47	like that there were no lights on	
6:50	all the homes were dark	

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6:52	because they were all summer homes they	
6:54	were not insulated they were	
6:56	pretty much just large cottages	
7:00	in the winter we used to go down and	
7:02	sled on Heights Hill but	
7:06	when we would sled on Heights Hill we	
7:08	would sled down Grand Avenue	
7:11	because no cars traveled there and	
7:15	sometimes they plowed it sometimes they	
7:17	didn't	
7:18	and then we would sled across the street	
7:20	right through	
7:22	the casino	Gunning_Heights_Bldg_1151 through 1157 Hunt_Heights_Bldg_195 Hunt_Heights_Bldg_208 through 218
7:23	and out onto the beach	
7:26	now uh I've had the chance to do	
7:28	several of these interviews over the	
7:30	last couple of years and	
7:33	and then through the work that I do with	
7:35	my column	
7:36	uh talk a lot about the history of that	
7:38	area so	
7:39	my uncle Henry	
7:41	who was a pediatrician in Brockton had a	
7:44	summer home right there in fact	
7:47	on the corner	
7:49	on the ball field that was that was his home	#falmouthheightsballpark Gunning_Heights_Ball_1251 through 1265 Hunt_Heights_Bldg_267 through 269 Hunt_Heights_Bldg_194 Hunt_Heights_Bch_274
7:52	he then ironically sold it to the Stone	
7:55	family and of course	
7:57	decades later Phil Stone became my	
7:58	stepdad right so okay yes I remember	
8:02	Dickie Stone and his brother living	
8:03	there but the predecessor to the Cape	#baseball
8:05	Cod Baseball League used to play games	
8:09	at that Heights field do you have any	
8:10	recollections of that no I grew up in a	
8:13	family of three girls and we really	

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8:15	weren't into those ball games or	
8:17	anything	
8:20	what I really have strong recollections	
8:22	about are the large hotels	
8:26	they were still the old wooden hotels	
8:28	with the turrets	
8:29	and you know on the corner of Worcester	
8:31	Court was the Park Beach Hotel of course	#parkbeachhotel Hunt_Heights_Bldg_227 and 228 Gunning_Heights_Bldg_1166 through 1168
8:33	the Terrace Gables	#terracegables Gunning_Heights_Bldg_1169 through 1206 Hunt_Heights_Bldg_229 through 243
8:36	the Tower Hotel was still there	#towerhousehotel Hunt_Heights_Bldg_244 through 251 Gunning_Heights_Bldg_1207 through 1223
8:39	it was really	
8:41	the type of resort area that families	
8:44	came to from the city	
8:46	and on the train and then they would	
8:48	stay for a week or two	
8:50	in those hotels	
8:52	well in the winter when those hotels	
8:54	were closed up	
8:56	as kids you'd run across the veranda	
9:00	and it looked	
9:01	very ghostly inside with the table still	
9:04	set up	
9:05	you know with salt and pepper still on	
9:06	the table and	
9:08	it was kind of creepy	
9:10	because there you also got home before	
9:12	dark because there was as I say there	
9:15	was not a light on in any house down	
9:17	there and	
9:19	that was from	
9:20	Jericho Path up and also	
9:25	we had a little tiny post office for	Gunning_Heights_Bldg_1092 through 1094

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		Hunt_Heights_Bldg_270 and 271
9:27	Falmouth Heights that was only open in	
9:28	the summer and where was that	
9:31	that was	
9:36	I can't think of the name of the motel	
9:38	but it is still there I think it's	
9:40	called the Heights Motel actually	#heightsmotel
9:42	and it's just before you hit Grand	
9:45	Avenue coming up Heights Road right oh	
9:47	sure yeah yeah and on the other side of	
9:49	it there was a little donut shop that's	
9:51	where I had my first job	
9:54	but that building also you know these	
9:56	these buildings even these um big summer	
9:59	homes they didn't have any	
10:01	sheetrock or anything they just had the	
10:04	studding	
10:05	and the wooden walls	
10:08	and you the wires ran up the wooden	
10:11	walls the electricity it was	
10:14	pretty unsafe but they were all built	
10:16	that way right you know even if you went	
10:18	to visit someone you knew who was living	
10:20	I knew a couple of people who lived	
10:22	right on the right on the height of	
10:24	Heights Hill	
10:26	right on the facing the ocean with the	
10:28	ocean view	
10:30	and those cottages were	
10:33	pretty rustic so um	
10:37	they were built	
10:38	pretty rustic that way and of course	
10:40	they um	
10:43	were from	
10:44	in the beginning they the men who	
10:47	were the business group they sold mostly	
10:50	to families from Worcester	
10:52	as in Menauhant the man who developed that	#menauhant
10:54	sold mostly to families from Attleboro	
10:58	really yeah I didn't know that isn't	
10:59	that interesting yes so	
11:01	um	
11:02	and in in Menauhant they had a Menauhant Hotel	#menauhanthotel

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		Hunt_Menauhant_Bldg_343 and 344 Gunning_Menauhant_Bldg_0492
11:05	and they sold the property	
11:08	you know surrounding the hotel	
11:09	eventually to people who came and stayed	
11:11	in the hotel and then decided to build	
11:13	their summer cottages which those	
11:15	cottages at the foot of	
11:17	Central Avenue are kind of similar you	
11:20	know Victorian looking	
11:22	but they were roughly	
11:24	the outside looked nice but inside it	
11:26	was very rough living but they liked	
11:28	that back then in the 1880s you were	
11:30	going to stay in your summer camp right	
11:32	right and some of those families both in	
11:35	the Heights	
11:36	and the Menauhant area are still	
11:38	there yes have been coming for	
11:40	generations yes yeah	
11:42	and of course up on the Heights hill	
11:44	they had a the small chapel	#falmouthheightschapel Hunt_Heights_Bldg_219 and 220 Hunt_Heights_Bldg_260 Gunning_Heights_Bldg_1087 and 1088 Gunning_Heights_Bldg_1162
11:46	and it eventually became an observatory	
11:49	and right around the circle	
11:53	that's why there's still Chapel Ave. up	
11:55	there there was a chapel there and	
12:00	that little area there which is so	
12:03	interesting to me because it's	
12:05	very much like Oak Bluffs	
12:07	the little cottages yes with the	
12:09	gingerbread houses that's funny you	
12:11	should say that let's talk about that	
12:12	for a second because a lot of people I	
12:14	know	
12:15	come here or live here for years and	
12:17	never	
12:18	get to that area because you know you go	
12:21	to the Heights and the beach in the	
12:23	restaurants there	
12:25	but the area we're talking about is	

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12:27	tucked away it is up high yes but you	
12:30	have to sort of know how to get there to	
12:32	get there even though it's right there	
12:34	right exactly and I think it's it was	
12:37	that style of building because they had	
12:39	Methodist camp meetings that's how Oak	
12:41	Bluffs started	
12:43	and that's how the that area	
12:46	started up in the Heights and also a	
12:50	tiny bit of Menauhant started the same way	
12:52	that's why they built Grace Chapel over	#gracechapel
12:54	there	
12:56	so um you know the architecture it's	
12:59	very interesting to look at it because	
13:01	it was popular at the time to build your	
13:03	little summer camp and have everybody	
13:05	come down to a revival	
13:08	you know Methodist meeting and	
13:11	I just find that so interesting you know and	
13:15	I don't know if you remember but Mr.	
13:17	Craig who was a teacher when I was in	
13:19	school he probably retired shortly after	
13:22	I left high school but his family owned	
13:25	the Craig House which was a big hotel	#craighouse Gunning_Heights_Bldg_1159 through 1162 Hunt_Heights_Bldg_219 through 221
13:27	which was up there	
13:29	was later bought by	
13:33	two guidance counselors in Falmouth I'm	
13:35	trying to think uh Mr. Wasseth and um	
13:39	who you probably remember sure Paul	#paulwasseth
13:41	Wasseth right	
13:43	I think he was an employee of Mr. Craig's	
13:45	and eventually he and his family	
13:48	bought the Craig Hotel which is gone now	
13:51	but I sometimes drive up that	
13:54	little hill there	
13:56	and around Chapel Ave. and wonder where	
13:58	they tucked a hotel up there	
14:00	but by the same token right	
14:03	not one tiny little block in front of it	
14:06	was the was the Terrace Gables	

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14:09	that hotel and then	
14:11	just down the hill was the Tower	
14:14	House Hotel	
14:15	and then you had the Park Beach Hotel	
14:18	you think about right there on basically	
14:21	Heights Hill and just down at the foot	
14:23	of it were so many hotels	
14:25	in that amazing and then	
14:27	adjacent	
14:29	to what was	
14:30	the Tower House Hotel people today	
14:33	would recognize is that expansive open	
14:36	space we call the kite field	
14:38	yes and that's an interesting story	
14:41	that um	
14:43	when the Tower House Hotel was sold	
14:46	well let me back up	
14:48	the kite field used to be tennis courts	
14:51	Mr. Tower of the Tower House he built the	
14:54	tennis courts there and uh	
14:57	eventually in the late 60s his family	
15:00	sold the hotel	
15:02	and it they were selling it to the	
15:03	timeshare people	
15:05	and the timeshare wanted to	
15:07	uh put a whole lot of buildings there	
15:09	you know little	
15:11	share buildings	
15:12	and a lot of people objected who lived	
15:15	in the area they objected the homeowners	
15:17	objected because their view was going to	
15:19	be displaced	
15:21	and they won out I think they took them	
15:23	to court and so the Tower family	
15:26	left it to the town as open space in	
15:29	perpetuity	
15:30	and that's how it became the kite field	
15:33	and today I think lots of folks	
15:35	don't even know that that's public	
15:37	property I think you're right and	
15:40	available for public enjoyment	
15:43	and passive	
15:44	recreation but you know what's funny as	
15:46	we talk about these things I	
15:48	have vivid memories of my own	

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15:51	childhood in that area	
15:52	and I think	
15:54	instinctively it's	
15:56	20 years ago but it it's 50 years ago	
15:59	and so the ability for us to have these	
16:01	conversations and preserve that history	
16:04	so that future generations can	
16:06	understand and learn	
16:08	what those landmarks are and what	
16:11	they meant and how they developed is	
16:12	really important I think it is too	
16:15	Worcester Court with the open space that	
16:17	runs down the length of Worcester Court	
16:20	was drawn out that way by the by those	
16:22	developers from Worcester	
16:25	which to me is so interesting that they	
16:27	had the foresight to you know lay out	
16:30	just that little strip of grass but it	
16:32	runs all the way down what three or four	
16:35	blocks yes and um you know it kind of	
16:38	opens up everything in that area	
16:41	it really does and it and because it's	
16:43	now public property it always will and	
16:45	so it would be some green space	
16:47	in the middle of what's pretty densely	
16:49	residential property yes and actually	
16:52	when the Heights was developed	
16:54	and not down by the water I mean the back	
16:58	what I call the back end of that area	
17:00	which was Johnson Road Holland Road	
17:02	Hudson Street Raymond Street	
17:05	that was after World War II when so many	#worldwar2 #veterans
17:07	soldiers were coming back to Falmouth	
17:09	and there was no housing	
17:11	and the soldiers when they came back to	
17:12	Falmouth they at first lived in the	
17:15	World War I	#worldwar1
17:17	soldier housing which was over where the	
17:20	Windfall Market is now	
17:22	just beyond the Windfall Market and um	#windfallmarket
17:26	it was pretty decrepit but that's where	
17:28	they lived you know it was built for	
17:31	World War I returning veterans	
17:34	and um so	
17:38	of course there was a building boom to	

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17:39	build for all these young soldiers and	
17:41	their families	
17:43	and along Heights Road also were the	
17:46	first houses that were built and because	
17:49	that really was	
17:51	not developed yet and um	
17:55	you know around the Robbins Road area	
17:58	you know in the corner of Jericho Path	
18:00	that if you go up a little bit they were	
18:01	all modest Cape homes that were built	
18:04	along that area	
18:06	and we're just beginning to see some of	
18:07	those homes being turned over into	
18:10	larger homes	
18:12	you know um and uh but right after World	
18:15	War I into the early	
18:18	60s they were just little Cape homes	
18:20	which is what they built I remember my	
18:22	parents bought their house on uh	
18:25	Johnson Road and paid seven hundred and	
18:27	fifty dollars I'm sorry seven thousand	
18:30	five hundred imagine that yeah	
18:33	ten uh not even ten a hundred times that	
18:35	today oh it's amazing yeah and then we	
18:38	moved we built another house on	
18:40	Worcester Court but	
18:42	again that was all woods beyond there	
18:45	Raymond Street Hudson Street and all of	
18:47	those	
18:48	so it's so interesting that that area	
18:52	was considered so far out of town	
18:55	you know and	
18:58	Falmouth kind of ended	
19:01	you know right there at Heights Corner	
19:03	right you know	
19:05	it seemed out of town you you'd uh tell	
19:08	someone where you lived and they'd be	
19:09	like really	
19:12	so that uh	
19:13	we're nearing the end of our time	
19:15	together but that when you mentioned	
19:16	the Heights Corner at the beginning and	
19:18	now towards the end uh	
19:21	I remember that building on the corner	
19:24	uh as a Howard Johnson it was when I was	#howardjohnson

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19:27	a kid	
19:28	I don't and then of course	
19:31	it was Jack in the Beanstalk	#jackinthebeanstalk
19:33	that	
19:34	was the first Jack in the Beanstalk I	
19:36	think and it's moved around	
19:39	to several spots since and been a bank	
19:41	for many years but do you remember	
19:43	anything there before Howard Johnson I	
19:45	don't but across the street where the	
19:47	Driftwood Plaza is	#driftwoodplaza
19:49	was nothing but marshland and they	
19:51	filled it in a little bit that's why	
19:53	that corner always floods it's very low	
19:55	marshy area from Morse Pond it flows	
19:58	over there and there's a culvert	
20:00	underneath	
20:01	but that was where Mr. Limberakis had	#limberakis [Leo Limberakis]
20:03	his first Clam Shack after the war and	#clamshack
20:06	he you didn't eat inside he just had a	
20:08	couple of picnic tables and he was only	
20:10	open in the summer and you went to a	
20:12	window	
20:13	and you ordered there and then of course	
20:16	Davis Straits was just two farms on	#davisstraits
20:18	either side of the Davis family	
20:20	and across the street where Staples is now	
20:24	was just a farmhouse and	
20:27	big fields and a couple of times the	
20:30	circus came to town and put up tents there	
20:35	yeah it's crazy really that that when I	
20:38	say Falmouth ended there it did	
20:41	Falmouth center right then of course we	
20:43	had Teaticket which was a separate	#teaticket
20:45	village	
20:46	you know and they were their own little	
20:47	village with a village market and	
20:50	uh you know	
20:52	post office they had their post office	
20:53	their village market and there was a farm	
20:56	actually there was a farm right where	#agriculture
20:58	Burger King is a very large farm and	
21:01	farmhouse and that farm went way down to	
21:05	the cranberry bog in the mall where the	
21:07	mall is today	

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21:09	so it was very rural	
21:12	yes and agricultural as well and so	
21:15	that's wonderful well thank you for	
21:16	painting that wonderful	
21:18	picture for us I uh as I leave here	
21:21	today and drive down there I'll	
21:23	have a wonderful	
21:25	landscaping I have one other tidbit	
21:28	to give you because I do like the	
21:30	little hidden secrets	
21:33	the Heights hill was used by Dr.	#hughgeorgedonaldson
21:35	Donaldson	
21:36	back in the late 1700s for a smallpox	#smallpox #vaccination
21:40	hospital as was	
21:42	Nobska because both places were so far	
21:45	out of town	
21:47	and he was he had studied in England and	
21:50	he had brought back smallpox vaccine and	
21:52	he was vaccinating people and they did not	
21:55	believe in it the local townspeople so	
21:57	he vaccinated his own children and took	
22:00	them out there	
22:01	so that he could prove that it was safe	
22:05	isn't that fascinating	
22:07	Dr. Donaldson lived in the house where	
22:10	Harriet Dugan has her real estate office	
22:12	that was his farm at the foot of Nye Road	#nyeroad
22:16	but you think the Heights is so	
22:18	such a	
22:19	smart little area now but it was once	
22:22	considered	
22:23	so offbeat we had a contagious hospital	
22:25	out there	
22:27	wow remote in those days and really part	
22:29	of the heart of the community today	
22:31	absolutely	
22:33	well speaking of that being the heart of	
22:35	the community I think that's a good way	
22:37	to conclude thank you for sharing all of	
22:39	those wonderful stories and those happy	
22:42	memories that are in your heart and	
22:43	sharing them with us so that future	
22:45	generations can paint those same lovely	
22:48	pictures	
22:49	Valerie thank you so much	

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22:50	thank you very much for having me here	
22:52	it's been a delight	
22:56	[Music]	