

Postcards from Falmouth Oral History Transcript

Recorded: March 3, 2020

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Interviewer: Barbara Kanellopoulos

Topic: Old Stone Dock

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

The Book of Falmouth is available from Falmouth Public Library under REF LocHist 974.492 BOO, as well as at other CLAMS locations.

00:00	[Music]	
00:45	it's always fun to talk about the Old	#oldstonedock Gunning_Village_Har_0173 through 0188 Hunt_Village_Bch_0089 through 0095
00:46	Stone Dock	
00:47	it's uh it's a relic	
00:50	of of what commerce was in Falmouth	
00:53	during the 19th century	
00:55	and you don't get to see things like	
00:57	that along the shoreline much anymore at	
00:59	all	
01:00	in fact if you were to go down to the	
01:02	shore today	
01:04	there's a sign that says it's the kiddie	
01:06	pool and for all the world nobody has	
01:09	ever asked why you would build a kiddie	
01:10	pool out of granite blocks	

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01:13	but nevertheless it's uh it's all been	
01:15	silted in	
01:17	but in its day and its day was 200 years	
01:19	ago	
01:21	it was built in 1817	#1817
01:24	following a hurricane of 1815	#1815 #hurricane
01:28	of course they weren't called hurricanes	
01:30	then it was the great gale	#gale
01:31	of September 1815.	
01:36	there are three hurricanes that have	
01:38	really ravaged through the	
01:40	New England area has lots of hurricanes	
01:43	but the first one was in 1635 when	
01:46	Boston and the and the Pilgrims and and	
01:48	the colonies were just getting started	
01:50	the second one	
01:52	the same power and magnitude was the	
01:54	Storm of 1815	
01:56	and then the third one was a hurricane	
01:59	of 1938 which	#1938
02:01	which people are far more familiar with	
02:03	and they see pictures of the destruction	
02:05	and so forth	
02:06	but meteorologists will tell you that	
02:08	those three hurricanes were very similar	
02:10	in their track and their speed they came	

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02:13	up the coast with a speed of 100 miles	
02:14	an hour they were blowing 100 mile per	
02:16	hour winds	
02:17	and they just destroyed everything in	
02:19	their path	
02:20	prior to 1817 then this Old Stone Dock	
02:25	there was a a dock that was made out of	
02:28	wood	
02:29	uh and we think it was built in 1805 and	#1805
02:31	it would have been built out of palmetto	
02:33	logs	
02:34	which is basically a palm tree uh	
02:37	obviously no palm trees growing around	
02:39	Falmouth so	
02:40	once again a surmise is that probably uh	
02:44	Captain Swift brought them up in his	#swift #elijahswift
02:47	as part of his live oak adventures going	
02:50	at getting wood	
02:51	down out of the Carolinas and into	
02:53	Florida	
02:54	and so he probably brought these very	
02:56	resilient palmetto logs	
02:58	up to up to Falmouth there's not much	
03:02	that	
03:03	will verify that there was a dock prior	
03:06	to this but it seems logical that that	

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03:10	was	
03:10	the landing place of some sort it was	
03:14	the scene	
03:14	of the British invasion or	
03:18	attempted invasion in January of 1779	#1779
03:21	during the American Revolution	#americanrevolution
03:23	they were repulsed they never landed	
03:26	they did shoot musket balls at us and	
03:28	they weren't too happy with us but they	
03:29	didn't they weren't able to land	
03:31	and the second time was in 1814 during	#1814
03:34	the	
03:35	towards the end of the War of 1812 where	#warof1812
03:37	once again	
03:39	the British came and tried to come	
03:41	ashore they were repulsed again by	
03:43	by our cannons so it would seem that	
03:47	that's	
03:47	probably there was probably some kind of	
03:48	a landing area in that site prior to the	
03:51	Old Stone Dock itself	
03:55	the other reason why you'd think that	
03:57	that was probably true is because that's	
03:59	where	
03:59	Falmouth was settled when the uh	
04:03	the proprietors as they're called here	

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04:05	they're called different	
04:06	different by different names but they're	
04:08	the folks who basically	
04:10	uh bought the land from the tribes the	
04:13	the	
04:14	indigenous tribes Wampanoags uh and uh	#wampanoag
04:17	Nauset Indians	#nauset
04:18	which was a sub-tribe of the Wampanoags	
04:22	and the proprietors here started in	
04:25	Barnstable	#barnstable
04:26	and came down we don't know whether they	
04:28	came down by boat or by	
04:29	by walking but if you look down in the	
04:32	uh	
04:33	down at the beach area today you'll see	
04:36	what	
04:36	what Jim Lloyd of the Historical	
04:38	Department [Falmouth Historical Society?] likes to call	
04:40	Falmouth Rock he said Plymouth has their	#plymouth
04:42	Plymouth Rock we have our Falmouth Rock	#plymouthrock
04:44	we have a rock that says these are the	
04:47	proprietors they landed here in 18	
04:49	uh in 1660 and so forth and	
04:53	and founded the town well the	
04:56	the tribe had been here first obviously	

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04:58	they came down and we	
04:59	uh we followed a lot of the Indian	
05:01	trails to be here	
05:03	uh and it makes sense because that area	
05:06	of Surf Drive Beach opens onto a	#surfdrivebeach
05:10	Vineyard Sound and then it has Siders	#vineyardsound #siderspond Gunning_Village_Pnd_0148 and 0149 Hunt_Village_Pnd_136
05:12	Pond which is freshwater pond after	
05:15	named after Consider Hatch one of the	#considerhatch
05:16	original proprietors	
05:18	is on the one side and on the other side	
05:20	is Salt Pond	#saltpond Gunning_Village_Sts_0010 through 0016
05:22	which is salt water and oysters are	
05:25	plenty and that sort of thing	
05:27	so there they were between fresh water	
05:28	and salt water and the Sound so it was a	
05:31	perfect	
05:31	location for commerce and just	
05:34	for survival you had the fish lots of	
05:37	alewives the	
05:38	herring run is right there which	
05:40	is brackish water coming in	
05:43	from the sound and going up towards	

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05:45	Siders Pond	
05:46	so it's a perfect area to to	
05:50	start the start the town	
05:53	a lot of people you know are used to	
05:56	seeing towns that have started from the	
05:58	center and they move	
05:59	outward because that's how the the	
06:00	railroads did it	
06:02	when when railroads were built and	
06:04	they'd go along every 100 miles or	
06:06	whatever the distance would be	
06:08	did make the town grow right from the	
06:10	depot and go	
06:12	outward concentric circles for us it was	
06:15	different and it was different for	
06:16	for almost 100 years the commerce was	
06:19	coming off of the off of the Surf Drive	
06:21	Beach area	
06:23	and the main area to to move was right	
06:26	up Mill Road where the current Mill Road	#millroad Gunning_Village_Sts_0001 through 0016 Hunt_Village_Sts_075 through 178
06:28	goes between the salt pond and the uh	
06:32	fresh water pond uh and and on	
06:36	up so the green was actually founded in	#falmouthvillagegreen

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		Gunning_Village_Sts_0053 through 0078
06:39	1749.	#1749
06:40	so here we are at 1660 and then 1749	
06:43	about 80	
06:43	90 years later before they got up to the	
06:46	green	
06:47	so the center of commerce then	
06:50	was right there on the on the beach so	
06:53	this hurricane comes along and destroys	
06:55	everything that was wooden and	
06:57	through natural erosion you can imagine	
06:59	the other wooden piers probably gave way	
07:02	as the ships became larger or the	
07:05	elements took took their toll on a	
07:08	wooden pier	
07:09	so along about 1817 then they say hey	
07:13	what we really need to do is build this	
07:16	thing to last	
07:17	uh and I should probably just say at	
07:20	that point	
07:22	as I talked about the progression of the	
07:23	town it goes up so it took 80 years to	
07:25	get to the green and then it started	
07:27	heading to the east it started heading	
07:29	back down	

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07:30	towards uh towards Barnstable down down	
07:32	Main Street	#mainstreet Gunning_Village_Sts_0017 through 0041
07:34	and after a certain point they realized	
07:36	that so far the only road to get to the	
07:39	dock	
07:39	was down Mill Road so here they are now	
07:42	they're up at Locust they're going down	#locuststreet
07:44	Main Street	
07:46	and they're getting further and further	
07:47	away so in 1800	
07:50	just a few years before the Stone Dock	
07:52	was built but in 1800	
07:54	the townsfolk got together and said what	
07:56	we really need to do is go	
07:58	from this point which was right where	
08:00	Barbo's Furniture is right now	
08:02	and go straight down to the pier and	
08:04	that's why if you look at Shore Street	#shorestreet Gunning_Village_Sts_0080 through 0083 Hunt_Village_Sts_171 and 172
08:06	it's eight tenths of a mile long	
08:08	it's straight as an arrow and it's its	
08:10	objective was to get	
08:12	people from Main Street to the dock	

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08:15	uh that's what it was all about so	
08:18	uh after this great gale of September	
08:21	uh goes blowing through	
08:24	the townsfolk got together and uh and	
08:28	built this	
08:29	granite block now the way that's built	
08:32	is they import it and there's some	
08:33	question as to exactly what those	
08:35	granite blocks are	
08:37	I like to think that the Falmouth	#falmouthgranite
08:38	granite	
08:40	underneath it all but of course after a	
08:41	couple hundred years they're	
08:43	they're all black and covered with	
08:46	seaweed and so forth so it's really kind	
08:48	of hard to distinguish	
08:49	the origin of all those granite blocks	
08:52	but the point of it was	
08:54	they would build a a a	
08:57	line which which you see right now	
09:00	actually uh	
09:01	of of granite blocks and then they built	
09:04	the	
09:05	the dock the actual docking area right	
09:08	over it	
09:09	so it's the same palmetto logs it's the	

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09:11	same planks it's the same everything	
09:13	that you	
09:13	used to seeing when you think of a pier	
09:16	but this time they put the blocks in	
09:18	there	
09:19	so that it would be uh it would sort of	
09:22	lend some extra support	
09:24	to the the pier uh the piers themselves	
09:27	and in	
09:28	the uh the the structure of the of the	
09:31	pier of the wharf so	
09:34	that's what it is over time	
09:38	all that all that wooden part you know	
09:40	washed away again	
09:41	but the granite blocks remain so why	
09:44	wasn't it maintained	
09:46	it wasn't maintained because as time	
09:49	went on so that was built in 1815.	
09:53	uh the gale was 1815 the the dock was	
09:56	built in 1817	
09:57	and things were going along fine but it	
09:59	was about that time as	
10:00	uh the railroad came to town and	
10:04	the railroad starts coming down from	
10:05	Boston and so forth	
10:07	the Old Stone Dock is at least a mile	

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10:10	away	
10:11	from the railroad station and	
10:14	it just didn't work you couldn't send	
10:16	freight down	
10:19	on a train and get it to the pier in any	
10:22	efficient manner the train dead	
10:25	ended	
10:26	in Woods Hole and of course that's where	#woodshole
10:29	the ferry terminal is today that's what	
10:30	the Steamship	#steamshipauthority
10:31	Authority is and that's where the	
10:33	trains met	
10:34	the boats so commerce went there	
10:38	it also it's a much deeper uh harbor	
10:41	in Woods Hole than it is off of Surf	
10:44	Drive Beach	
10:46	so the the question then became so what	
10:49	happens now	
10:51	it was a stone dock it was made for	
10:52	commerce there were whalers	
10:54	whaling ships that went there his	#whaling
10:56	primary function was packet ships	
10:58	and and by packets those would be ships	
11:01	that would sail when you had the cargo	
11:02	they didn't necessarily go on a schedule	
11:05	you'd bring down your goods to to be	

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11:07	freighted up to Boston or down to New	#newyork
11:09	York and every port in between all	
11:12	down down across the Martha's Vineyard	#marthasvineyard
11:14	and over to New Bedford and Fall River	#newbedford #fallriver
11:17	and so forth all those	
11:18	uh all those ports between Boston and	
11:21	Falmouth	
11:22	and uh and New York were the frequent	
11:27	markets for our strawberries the eels	
11:30	the salt cranberries and so forth wood	
11:34	that was the main commerce uh forestry	
11:37	and so forth	
11:38	incoming timbers uh as well uh	
11:42	and since the Swifts were big in that	
11:44	type of a trade	
11:45	they would bring their goods up and	
11:47	bring them to Falmouth	
11:49	the Sarah Herrick is a uh is a whale	#sarahherrick
11:52	ship that was	
11:53	registered or said to be to be	
11:57	brought into the Falmouth dock so that's	
11:59	how we know that there were whaling	
12:01	ships there as well	
12:03	but after the commerce now ends up in	
12:06	Woods Hole	
12:09	the dock started to become more	

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12:12	available to people and if it didn't	
12:15	have the upkeep that it did	
12:16	boats used to be able to sail right	
12:18	inside of it uh	
12:20	now that won't happen the Book of	#bookoffalmouth From FPL: REF LocHist 974.492 BOO
12:22	Falmouth mentions a	
12:25	a black who had a mail	
12:28	route he would uh sail to the Old Stone	
12:31	Dock	
12:32	with mail for the new town is that	
12:35	accurate	
12:36	I can bet it is I I I don't know for	
12:40	sure but yeah that	
12:41	that would be the type of commerce that	
12:43	you would find	
12:44	coming out of the dock and the heavy	
12:47	stuff would end up going down towards	
12:48	Woods Hole	
12:49	but that type of mail run or milk run	
12:52	type of a	
12:53	run over to the Vineyard and out to	
12:56	Nantucket	#nantucket
12:57	and down to uh Cuttyhunk that would	#cuttyhunk
12:59	have been	

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13:00	the the daily commerce going from the	
13:03	Old Stone Dock	
13:06	when things when the the railroad came	
13:08	in then and went down there	
13:10	they said that well they needed	
13:12	someplace else for	
13:14	a dock for for a harbor and that's when	
13:17	the Inner Harbor was created	#falmouthharbor Hunt_Village_Har_103 through 120 Gunning_Heights_Har_1320 through 1334
13:19	and that's why you'll still see	
13:20	references on charts and	
13:22	when people talk sometimes they'll talk	
13:23	about the Inner Harbor	
13:25	well that would be sort of old-time talk	
13:28	because most people now talk about the	
13:29	harbor and they think of the Flying	#flyingbridge Gunning_Village_Bldg_0377 through 0383
13:31	Bridge Restaurant and	
13:32	the commerce that goes on but it was	
13:34	never heavy commerce if you look at it	
13:37	you say well this used to be the Old	
13:40	Stone Dock used to handle	
13:42	handle hogsheds of produce and	

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13:45	fresh cut vegetables and so forth there	
13:47	was never anything like that in	
13:49	in Falmouth Harbor all that had gone to	
13:51	Woods Hole	
13:53	so Falmouth Harbor really became they	
13:55	dredged out	
13:56	if you take a look and you wonder why	
13:58	why in the world Clinton Avenue is	#clintonavenue
14:01	so abruptly at the Clam Shack and then	
14:03	resumes over in front of the Falmouth	
14:05	Yacht Club	
14:06	that was a road it had been cut off it	
14:09	was it was a pond of its own it was	
14:11	Deacon's Pond	#deaconspond Gunning_Village_Har_0190
14:12	and when it was dredged out it created	
14:14	an inner harbor	
14:16	and over the years that had been	
14:17	improved and so forth	
14:19	but that was in 1908 that the Inner	#1908
14:22	Harbor	
14:23	opened up and for many years thereafter	
14:26	people would sail their sailboats up to	
14:29	up to the Old Stone Dock and they'd put	
14:30	in there and many of uh	
14:32	the Robert C. Hunt postcard collection	#robertchunt #postcardcollection

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14:36	has great pictures of tourist day	
14:39	sailors	
14:40	you know boats that you and I would have	
14:42	uh pulled up to the Old Stone Dock	
14:44	and it's featured right there you'll see	
14:47	some that have a uh some of the pictures	
14:49	will have the old time	
14:51	uh bath house still in that picture	#bathhouse
14:54	and you look at it and you get a much	
14:57	better picture	
14:58	in looking at those old postcards	
15:01	than you would ever get today when you	
15:03	look at at the	
15:04	Old Stone Dock but those postcards will	
15:07	give you some idea of the depth and the	
15:09	type of commerce that could pull up	
15:11	some of those postcards still have the	
15:14	pilings that were lining the the Old	
15:17	Stone Dock and if you look real close at	
15:19	some of them	
15:20	you'll see wooden side buoys there where	
15:23	you'd be pulling up	
15:25	so nobody wants to pull a ship up beside	
15:27	a granite block I mean that's not how	
15:29	you	
15:29	how you treat a boat but so	

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15:33	over time as I say it's become a	
15:35	favorite now for	
15:37	the uh for the kiddie pool	
15:40	if you talk to kids in Falmouth today	
15:42	they'll tell you that they learned how	
15:43	to	
15:44	how to swim in the Old Stone Dock and	
15:47	most of them don't even know that it was	
15:48	there	
15:50	a neighbor of ours Jim Crossen started	#jamescrossen
15:53	the Old Stone Dock Association up in the	#oldstonedockassociation
15:55	1970s	
15:56	and really brought a lot of history with	
15:58	it and brought a lot of	
16:00	attention to this relic it is	
16:03	really it's a monument to to Falmouth to	
16:06	have that here	
16:07	and there's very few towns who can point	
16:09	to something on the waterfront and say	
16:10	that was there 200 years ago	
16:12	so the Old Stone Dock Association has	
16:14	really worked to preserve that heritage	
16:16	and	
16:17	that type of history the other place	
16:19	where you'll find a reference	
16:21	to it is is on the there's a big	

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16:24	uh boulder with a	Hunt_Village_Sts_179
16:27	with a plaque on it and with an anchor	
16:29	atop it right at the end of Mill Road	
16:31	right where Mill Road turns on to Locust	
16:34	and if you take a look at that you'll	
16:35	see that that was a monument dedicated	
16:37	to the seafarers	
16:39	uh of in 1908 and it was really	
16:44	the end of the Old Stone Dock that was	
16:46	their farewell	
16:47	uh to what had been such an active	
16:49	center of commerce and the seafarers who	
16:52	who made it such uh but in 1908	
16:55	the the uh the harbor had been	
16:59	dredged the Inner Harbor was now taking	
17:01	over	
17:02	and over time people started bringing	
17:04	their boats into the Inner Harbor	
17:06	and the Old Stone Dock became the Old	
17:09	Stone Dock	
17:12	and was there a window	
17:15	a windmill and an attempt	
17:19	to manufacture was it	
17:23	a product glass no well yeah	
17:26	a couple of things going on right down	
17:28	there on the beach the windmill was up	

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17:30	on Mill Road and if you were to drive go	
17:32	up Mill Road from the beach uh	
17:36	just as the road bends and it bends	
17:38	right at the end of the salt pond	
17:40	that's where the windmill was located	
17:42	that windmill was actually	
17:45	made to to grind uh corn	
17:49	it wasn't it wasn't part of the glass	
17:51	tree but i'll bring that up in a sec	
17:54	that was that was that was a grinding	
17:56	mill and I know that because Bill Swift	#williamswift
17:59	told me and if anybody knows anything	
18:00	about the town of Falmouth it's Bill	
18:02	Swift	
18:03	and he used to live right down there so	
18:05	that's where that's where the windmill	
18:06	was	
18:07	now there were many windmills along the	Gunning_Village_Bldg_0439 through 0450
18:10	shoreline uh of	
18:14	Surf Drive Beach the point of	
18:17	them was to to bring in salt water they	
18:20	would go out into the	
18:21	into the Sound and suck up the water	
18:23	bring it up and put into great big vats	
18:26	typically about 10 feet by 10 feet and	

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18:28	it put water in it probably about 18	
18:30	inches deep	
18:32	and it would they would leave it out in	
18:34	the sun	
18:35	to evaporate and what you'd end up with	
18:38	after	
18:38	after all that water had been brought up	
18:40	and left in these vats for	
18:42	for some period of time it would	
18:44	evaporate and you'd have salt	
18:46	up until the Civil War salt was a	#americancivilwar
18:48	prime	
18:49	a premium product in fact many	
18:53	Civil War battles were fought	
18:56	at the shoreline to destroy what was	
18:58	called the salt works	
19:00	and the salt works was the windmill and	
19:02	the vats that dried the water	
19:05	and they would just they would try to	
19:06	destroy that because	
19:08	salt was used to preserve meats and	
19:11	anything that was perishable would be	
19:13	encased in salt uh prior to the period	
19:16	of refrigeration	
19:19	the glass company uh was because of the	
19:22	sand	

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19:23	and they would use the furnaces to heat	
19:25	that sand up and get the silicone	
19:27	and yes that was that would have been	
19:29	located at the corner of Shore Street	
19:32	so it's right kind of where the parking	
19:34	lot is now	
19:36	where Shore Street comes down and Surf	
19:38	Drive goes across	
19:40	it was on that corner uh and that's	
19:42	where the Beach Breeze Inn is	
19:44	right now and that's sort of an area	
19:47	there was a bank down there there was a	
19:50	tavern	
19:51	and there was this glass manufacturing	
19:54	and when you think about it of course	
19:56	with the uh it was a perfect place for a	
19:58	tavern and	
19:59	and the bank because these packet ships	
20:03	are coming back from their run	
20:04	and now they want to deposit the money	
20:06	or they need the money for some purpose	
20:09	and and having a tavern and a little	
20:12	little spot for the sailors to pull into	
20:13	when they get there	
20:14	is was kind of refreshing	
20:18	yes it's interesting that you talk about	

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20:21	the center of town as being right on the	
20:23	shore there which is makes a lot of	
20:25	sense	
20:25	we we don't think of uh the center of	
20:28	town as being	
20:30	out there no you wouldn't and and as you	
20:33	look	
20:34	there's actually the first two meeting	
20:36	houses if you take the time to	
20:38	to go along Surf Drive and then up Mill	
20:40	Road to the very end right up to where	
20:42	that boulder is that I talked about the	
20:44	head the plaque and the anchor	
20:46	there's a cemetery off to the one side	#oldburyingground
20:49	in that cemetery of course the reason it	
20:51	was the cemeteries	
20:52	when they used to bury their dead	
20:54	outside the church outside the meeting	
20:56	house	
20:57	and that was the site of two meeting	
20:59	houses the first two meeting houses that	
21:01	were built in Falmouth	
21:03	were built in that in that cemetery area	
21:06	the third meeting house is it has a	
21:08	stone marker	
21:09	as you turn onto Locust Street before	

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21:12	you even get up to the green	
21:14	there's a marker on the side of the road	
21:16	that says this is the site of the third	
21:18	meeting house uh and it's not until you	
21:21	get to the green	
21:23	1749 that you will find the fourth	
21:26	meeting house	
21:27	so yes it was it was the center of life	
21:30	the houses that are extinct is still on	
21:33	Elm Road there's the Hatch	#elmroad #hatch
21:35	foundation I guess the house is	
21:38	questionable	
21:39	there's a sons houses across the street	
21:41	but there's a	
21:42	heavy granite foundation on the left	
21:45	side if you're going	
21:46	up from away from the water which was	
21:49	the foundation of the Hatch house and	
21:50	Hatch was one of the original	
21:52	proprietors	
21:52	of Falmouth I have heard that at the	
21:56	at that triangle with that rock and	
21:58	anchor	
21:59	underneath is a time capsule with	
22:02	the names of 100 more than 100 sea	
22:06	captains	

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22:07	but what you say is interesting because	
22:09	I've never thought of that before as a	
22:11	kind of	
22:12	putting a period to period two seafarers	
22:16	I think it was I think it was their	
22:17	goodbye uh	
22:19	and uh whether there's a time capsule	
22:22	under there	
22:22	or not I don't think we'll ever know and	
22:24	I don't think the	
22:26	DPW will let us dig it up anymore so	
22:30	uh I don't know I don't know I've heard	
22:33	the same thing whether it be under that	
22:35	boulder or	
22:36	in front of the boulder we've certainly	
22:37	done lots of plantings around the	
22:39	boulder	
22:40	no evidence of it has ever come up so	
22:44	perhaps it's there I don't know	
23:07	[Music]	