

Falmouth Public Library – Postcards from Falmouth

Postcards from Falmouth Oral History Transcript

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Interviewer: Troy Clarkson

Topic: Woods Hole Public Library, Woods Hole Historical Museum

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

00:00	[Music]	
00:45	so Rob welcome thank you for	
00:47	participating in	
00:48	this important project and	
00:50	today we will be discussing a postcard	
00:53	that's been given to you and this one is	
00:56	of the Woods Hole Library which has a	#woodshole #woodsholepubliclibrary Gunning_WoodsHole_Bldg_0587 through 0590
00:57	rich history here in Falmouth so thank	
01:00	you for being willing to chat about it	
01:01	and just tell us about the postcard and	
01:04	your connection to it so uh the Woods	
01:06	Hole Library is a	
01:08	very important connection to me I think	
01:10	probably the first time I was ever there	
01:11	I was maybe two or two and a half years	
01:13	old	
01:14	I didn't grow up in Woods Hole I grew up	

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01:17	in Connecticut but my parents	
01:18	grandparents both grew up here and	
01:21	certainly the time you know every time I	
01:23	would come down when the library would	
01:24	be open it was a wonderful place to go	
01:26	to grab books a very very comfortable	
01:28	area and then in the years to come I	
01:30	wouldn't didn't realize how involved I	
01:32	would be in the library right now I'm	
01:34	currently the the Vice President of the	
01:36	uh of the Board of the library itself	
01:39	and heavily involved with many of the	
01:40	activities	
01:42	today what I'd like to do if I could is	
01:45	go through some of the history of the	
01:46	library itself uh it's certainly one of	
01:48	the key meeting places anywhere in Woods	
01:50	Hole and certainly it's considered to be	
01:52	one of the friendliest places in Woods	
01:54	Hole in fact a writer from the Reader's	
01:56	Digest in 1961 on the way to the	
01:57	Vineyard found that he had missed the	
01:59	book the boat with his family and family	
02:01	he had himself his wife and three three	
02:03	children and wandered around and ended	
02:06	up going the library and spent over two	
02:08	hours there and he	

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02:09	had the comment afterwards this is by	
02:11	far and away the friendliest place in	
02:12	this little town I think it's still like	
02:14	that today	
02:17	so what a great story indicative of the	
02:19	the value I always say that the public	
02:22	library or any library	
02:25	is	
02:26	the heart and soul of a community and so	
02:29	the Woods Hole Library is part of the	
02:30	heart and soul of that village which is	
02:32	critical to the character of our our	
02:35	community you mentioned before we went	
02:36	on camera that it's been actually um	
02:39	since it was founded in February of 1873	#1873
02:42	been in four different locations so talk	
02:44	to us about the journey of the library	
02:46	and how it it wound up where it is today	
02:49	great I so yes the library started in	
02:51	February of 1873 initially was called	
02:54	the Woods Hole Social Library not the	
02:56	Woods Hole Public Library but rather the	
02:58	Woods Hole Social Library and it started up	
03:01	really a gathering of the Woods Hole	
03:02	residents	
03:03	one of the real key founders was this of	
03:06	this was a man named Asa Shiverick and he	#asashiverick #shiverick

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03:08	was the superintendent of the Pacific	#pacificguanocompany Gunning_WoodsHole_Bldg_0564
03:10	Guano Factory a lot of people I don't	
03:12	think are aware that there's a large	
03:14	guano factory in Penzance Point and he	#penzancepoint
03:16	was the founder and initially was	
03:19	involved with	
03:21	involving the community they ended up	
03:23	issuing 89 shares for the original	
03:26	Woods Hole Social Library at two dollars apiece	
03:28	and what did they do with that oh	
03:31	they end up buying books with their	
03:32	funds they donated a lot of their own	
03:34	books as well and the first library	
03:36	actually met in the base of Asa	
03:38	Shiverick's house which is right in the	
03:40	corner of Water Street and School Street	#waterstreet #schoolstreet Gunning_WoodsHole_Sts_0801 through 811 & Hunt_WoodsHole_Sts_598 through 603
03:43	and back then was called Main Street	
03:44	hadn't been changed to Water Street at	
03:46	that point uh he was Mr. Shiverick was	
03:49	was very nice about it he donated some	
03:51	of the oil lamps there and the heat that	
03:54	lasted there and members were expected	

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03:56	to pay a dollar per year to check out	
03:59	books and non-members five cents so a	
04:01	little bit different than there is today	
04:03	so that was the first location um they	
04:05	were there for about five years and they	
04:07	moved down to what was then called	
04:09	Liberty Hall which is now known as	
04:10	Community Hall right beyond the	#woodsholecommunityhall
04:12	drawbridge itself it was built because	
04:15	things were really getting you know the	
04:16	library was starting to grow	
04:18	and they were there for about 17 years	
04:20	they shared the basement with other	
04:22	things such as a barber shop and a	
04:23	tailor	
04:24	they weren't open every every day though	
04:26	primarily they were open Wednesdays and	
04:28	Saturdays and became so popular that	
04:31	people would wait in line outside just	
04:32	to come in they're open for really two	
04:34	to three hours every day at that point	
04:36	um	
04:37	third location actually moved again	
04:40	right across the drawbridge uh this	
04:42	would have been diagonally across from	
04:44	where the bridge tenders are right now	
04:46	it was a	

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04:47	house called the Swift House and what	#swifthouse #swift
04:49	they did there they were there sort of a	
04:51	short period of time	
04:52	because the rent was a hundred dollars a	
04:54	year which they felt was too expensive	
04:56	for those you're not familiar this would	
04:58	be right next to where the Redfield	
04:59	Building is now and	
05:00	later on this building became a	
05:02	drugstore called Daley's Drugstore which	#daleysdrugstore
05:04	I remember as a young boy the old soda	
05:06	fountain that was there was absolutely	
05:08	great you could have a milkshake or an	
05:10	ice cream and you could watch the boats	
05:11	go right through the open channel	
05:14	so after a very short time there they	
05:16	then moved up to what's now Little	#littleharborroad
05:18	Harbor Road but back then was called	
05:20	Government Street	Hunt_WoodsHole_Har_583 & Gunning_WoodsHole_Har_0866 through 872
05:22	it was Fish's Grocery Store and they	#fishsgrocerystore
05:24	lived they were there rent-free had	
05:26	about 2000 books at that point and they	
05:29	stayed there until 1910. by the time	#1910
05:31	1910 came around the Fish building was	
05:34	sold and the decision was made that you	

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05:36	know there's enough people in Woods Hole	
05:38	between the year-round residents and the	
05:40	summer residents	
05:42	let's buy a lot and the lot where the	
05:44	library is currently located was bought	
05:46	at that point but the problem was all	
05:48	the money they supplied for the lot they	
05:50	really couldn't put anything other than	
05:52	buying the land itself so they waited	
05:55	about three years	
05:56	they were able to raise money	
05:58	they ended up having the books and a	
06:00	room that was vacant in what was then	
06:02	the Woods Hole School on School Street	#woodsholeschool
06:04	and by 1913 they'd raised enough money	#1913
06:07	pop year-round population was about 500	
06:11	summer population's about 1500 and enough	
06:13	people agreed to donate money and funds	
06:17	to build the library itself so by then	
06:20	five thousand dollars was raised they	
06:22	built the building uh opened in 1913	
06:26	and the fieldstone that's on the outer	
06:28	part of the library itself is fieldstone	
06:30	that came from Woods Hole and Quisset	
06:32	so the library itself as we know it	
06:34	today really goes back to 1913 but we	
06:37	had the land as of 1910.	

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06:40	and and so over a hundred years	
06:42	the Woods Hole Library in that current	
06:44	location has been	
06:46	as people enter the village one of the	
06:49	uh architectural features and uh	
06:52	really one of the highlights of the	
06:54	entry into the village but it's so much	
06:56	more than that more than an	
06:58	architectural feature of the village as	
07:00	I mentioned a few minutes ago it's	
07:01	really part of the heart and soul of the	
07:03	village and to this day welcomes	
07:06	residents and visitors	
07:07	community groups	
07:09	and despite how technology has changed	
07:12	our lives	
07:13	libraries are still a very important	
07:15	part of the community so talk to us a	
07:17	little bit about what	
07:19	the Woods Hole Library means to the	
07:20	village and the town today	
07:22	so you know I think as you look at the	
07:24	village it's a very good point I think	
07:26	as you look at the library itself	
07:29	we have a wonderful staff there who	
07:30	obviously is coordinating the you know	
07:33	the magazines the books the circular but	

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07:36	it's a lot of the events that take place	
07:38	as well	
07:39	we have many annual events that occur	
07:41	the the plant sale is very popular we	
07:44	have the accessories sale which is	
07:45	actually is coming up in early August	
07:49	one of the interesting things is Super	
07:51	Bowl Sunday for a lot of people means	
07:52	football and recently the Patriots well	
07:55	if you're in Woods Hole	
07:57	it means the fabric sale the fabric sale	
07:59	is a very popular event that's occurred	
08:02	so those are things that are sort of	
08:03	recurring events but in addition	
08:05	we have lectures	
08:07	we have a lot of musical performances	
08:09	that take place there there are book	
08:11	groups that have met there	
08:13	many children's groups come in there's	
08:16	currently a camp the Children's School	#childrensschoolofscience
08:18	of Science is in they they tend to stop	
08:20	by	
08:22	MBL has a camp that comes in	Marine Biological Laboratories #mbl Gunning_WoodsHole_Bldg_0644 through 0695& Hunt_WoodsHole_Bldg_550 through 555

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08:24	children have been a huge part of of the	
08:26	Woods Hole Library as I mentioned you	
08:28	know my first time was probably when I	
08:30	was two two and a half	
08:32	and one of the later additions that they	
08:35	made back in the 1950s uh had a whole	
08:38	children's wing put in there as well and	
08:41	I think it's because of the welcoming	
08:42	nature of the staff	
08:44	the great volunteers	
08:46	last year was was a very difficult year	
08:48	with a pandemic and yet the library	#pandemic
08:51	itself was only closed for about two	
08:53	months the decision was made to have	
08:55	people place orders	
08:56	they opened up the courtyard itself so	
08:59	anyone that wanted a book or magazine or	
09:01	periodical could go in and they could	
09:03	check things out at that point	
09:06	gradually as things improved a little	
09:08	bit we allowed limited access in	
09:10	and people needed books they needed the	
09:13	magazines and the staff worked extremely	
09:16	hard last year Margaret McCormick was	#margaretmccormick
09:17	the director and her staff were	
09:19	wonderful very creative in allowing this	
09:22	and I think	

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09:23	with so many things being closed in the	
09:24	town of Falmouth in the village Woods	
09:26	Hole last year	
09:27	other than about a two-month period the	
09:29	library remained open and was a very	
09:31	very important part of the community and	
09:34	provided a lot of necessary things that	
09:36	needed to take place	
09:38	excellent so	
09:40	it continued as it has	
09:43	since 1873 to be an important part of of	
09:46	the community right what else would you	
09:48	like to share about either the history	
09:50	or the	
09:51	the uh the ongoing presence of the Woods	
09:54	Hole Library in the community so I	
09:55	what's what's interesting of course too	
09:57	is you know we have the library and the	
09:59	next door neighbor is the Woods Hole	#woodsholehistoricalmuseum
10:01	historic collection which goes back to	
10:02	1974.	#1974
10:04	in the Bradley House itself and there is	#bradleyhouse
10:07	a very strong partnership the Woods	
10:08	Hole Library is actually the in	
10:11	effect the parent corporation of the	
10:13	Woods Hole historic collection of the	
10:14	Woods Hole Museum and I think that the	

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10:16	two groups together work very well um	
10:20	Franklin Gifford one of the great	#franklingifford
10:22	painters one of the great artists of	
10:23	Woods Hole	
10:24	tremendous collection that he has in the	
10:26	Ratcliffe Room which is the most recent	
10:28	edition in the downstairs portion of the	
10:30	library itself and many of the original	
10:32	paintings are also in the Woods Hole	
10:35	museum the Woods Hole Historic Museum	
10:37	you know right next door	
10:39	these the historic Swift boat barn Dr.	
10:42	Yale's workshop is there	#leroymiltonyale
10:44	and for those people that really haven't	
10:46	gotten Woods Hole too much uh every	
10:48	year we we change the second exhibit we	
10:51	have one primary exhibit which talks	
10:53	about the history of Woods Hole	
10:55	I've been very fortunate I've been doing	
10:56	the historic walking tours of Woods Hole	
10:58	for four years and we get 100 150 or	
11:01	more people every year coming to Woods	
11:02	Hole	
11:03	they see the library they enjoy the	
11:05	library aspect they go in they're very	
11:06	comfortable there	
11:08	they participate in the book sale which	

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11:09	is both an outdoor and indoor book sale	
11:11	but they also enjoy the museum itself	
11:13	and you know gallery 2 this year we just	
11:16	have a new exhibit for the indigenous	
11:17	people of Woods Hole and and Cape Cod	
11:20	for that matter a lot in the Wampanoag	
11:22	but a lot of the glacial formations etc	
11:25	and similar to what the library does	
11:28	the Woods Hole museum produces the Woods	#woodsholeweeklydispatch
11:31	Hole Weekly Dispatch Debbie Scanlon	#deborahscanlon
11:33	Colleen Hurter do a wonderful job with	#colleenhurter
11:35	that mainsheet is distributed as well so	
11:38	between both organizations are their	
11:40	next door neighbors to each other they	
11:42	share the same land	
11:44	it's it's a great opportunity for people	
11:46	to come to Woods Hole they get their	
11:47	books their periodicals from the library	
11:50	they get to participate in a lot of the	
11:51	events there and then they go next door	
11:53	to the museum the museum you know has a	
11:55	semi-annual auction that takes place	
11:57	there and they also have a lot of events	
12:00	as well including the Woods Hole	
12:02	Conversations and lectures that take	
12:03	place and much of the	
12:06	many of the lectures and other meetings	

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12:08	that take place there's a few larger	
12:10	facilities within the library itself and	
12:11	the lower level so they're able to do	
12:13	that so um you know Woods Hole again	
12:15	village of less than 800 people there's	
12:16	a lot of things going on there and we	
12:18	draw so many people not just from the	
12:20	town of Falmouth but from the Cape as	
12:22	well as you know domestically and	
12:24	internationally as well	
12:26	so you raise a good point about uh	
12:29	Woods Hole's identity as a village like	
12:31	many of the villages in Falmouth	
12:33	although it's part of the larger	
12:35	Falmouth community it has	
12:37	a very strong identity and its own	
12:40	history and so you said you you lead	
12:42	walking tours uh so take us from the	
12:44	library uh briefly on just some of the	
12:47	highlights of some of those other	
12:49	historic sites in the village so it is	
12:52	interesting is I start the tours inside	
12:54	in Gallery One and there's a timeline	
12:56	there and we have photos of the historic	
12:59	you know the famous people of Woods Hole	
13:00	but then as you work your way around I	
13:02	mean Little Harbor had the original	#littleharbor

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13:03	settlements going back to 1679 there	#1679
13:06	were	
13:06	12 families half from Sandwich half from	
13:09	Falmouth several of them were Quakers	
13:11	that started so Little Harbor was the	Gunning_WoodsHole_Har_0855 through 0903 & Hunt_WoodsHole_Har_582 through 590
13:13	initial part of Woods Hole so we start	
13:16	there we make our way down Water Street	
13:18	you know I'll talk about uh you know not	
13:20	so much what's now the Steamship area	#ferry
13:22	but rather what was the railroad area it	#railroad Hunt_WoodsHole_Tran_607
13:24	was a very important part my grandfather	
13:26	was the general agent uh for New Haven	
13:28	Railroad back then and at one point	
13:30	there were nine railroad tracks that	
13:32	came into Woods Hole the two tracks that	
13:33	came in and nine that that uh were there	
13:36	you know obviously the the boats not	
13:38	just to the Martha's Vineyard as we	
13:39	currently have but also to Nantucket New	
13:42	Bedford and Fall River it's a very very	
13:44	popular line and that brought a lot of	
13:46	the people in so as we go down as we	
13:48	make our way down Water Street out if I	
13:50	don't lose anyone at Pie In the Sky	

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13:51	which does happen occasionally though	
13:53	sneak in to get something to eat you	
13:54	know I'll talk about the post office	Gunning_WoodsHole_Bldg_0584 through 586
13:57	uh what is now Under the Sun was the	
13:58	former Congregational church	
14:00	what's what's now the Woods Hole Inn has	
14:02	always been a hotel back 150 years or so	
14:05	Hotel Avery Hotel Nobska was there	
14:07	continue down past Dyer's Dock	
14:10	stopping at the Eel Pond Bridge	#eelpond #eelpondbridge Gunning_WoodsHole_Pnd_0904
14:12	we've had a bridge there for about 200	
14:14	years at this point which sort of ends	
14:17	you know the early the upper part of the	
14:19	business district itself but then making	
14:22	our way down to Smith and Bigelow and	
14:24	the WHOI	Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute #whoi Gunning_WoodsHole_Bldg_0735 through 744
14:25	buildings that are there that go back to	
14:26	1930 across the street from that you	
14:29	know a lot of those buildings 150 160	
14:31	years old uh back to when uh Woods Hole	
14:34	was a whaling port four whaling ships	#whaling

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14:36	were built in Woods Hole 14 other ships	
14:38	uh we refurbished to the point that	
14:40	Woods Hole was deforested at one point	
14:42	as there was so much work that was done	
14:44	so everything from the Woods Hole wharf	
14:46	down past Captain Kidd and Woods Hole	
14:47	Market those were buildings that had to	
14:50	do with cooper with barrel making with	
14:52	sail making provisions um continuing the	
14:55	walk down to what really is MBL the old	
14:58	Candle House which was uh uh served as a	#candlehouse Hunt_WoodsHole_Bldg_535
15:00	place for spermaceti uh candles being	
15:03	made there down to waterfront park the	
15:06	beautiful view of of the Woods Hole	
15:08	passage at that point I mean people ask	
15:10	you know how did Woods Hole get its name	
15:12	well the reality was we don't know who	
15:13	Woods was but hole of course is a	
15:15	nautical term smaller body of water	
15:17	between two larger bodies of water and	
15:19	in this case we've got Vineyard Sound on	
15:20	one side and Buzzards Bay on the other	
15:22	so the Woods Hole passage is that hole	
15:24	but as you make your way down through	
15:26	the Elizabeth Islands you've got	#elizabethislands
15:27	Quick's Hole and Robinson's Hole going out	

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15:29	all the way to Cuttyhunk so we usually	
15:31	make a turn there you know I talked I I	
15:34	walk behind Lillie and Crane	Gunning_WoodsHole_Bldg_0679 through 0686
15:37	beautiful view of Eel Pond you know	
15:38	looking	
15:40	east at that point toward you know the	
15:42	Woods Hole School make our way up by the	
15:44	Marine Resource Center and then cut up	
15:47	the other side of Water Street	
15:49	going uh really across you know into the	
15:51	WHOI area as well the WHOI campus uh the	
15:54	past the old Methodist church it's now	
15:56	the WHOI exhibit center uh the choirs	
15:58	across the Michael Walsh Garden uh with	#michaelwalsh
16:01	all the rambler roses and all the other	
16:02	garden and you know beautiful pollinated	
16:04	garden that WHOI has done for that then	
16:06	past Challenger House which Mrs. Swift	Gunning_WoodsHole_Bldg_0625
16:09	was attacked in 1777 by the British she	
16:12	drove them off with a broom after they	
16:13	stole most of her livestock and we wrap	
16:15	up back at the museum itself so it's a	
16:17	it's a fun walking tour and what's nice	
16:20	is for the people that come we have some	
16:21	people that are Falmouth residents that	
16:23	know a lot about Woods Hole but a lot	
16:25	come in they're either there they're	

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16:27	visitors heading to the Vineyard they're	
16:28	there because the scientific community	
16:30	whether it's WHOI MBL NOAA	National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
16:34	you know	
16:35	Woodwell Climate Institute whatever it	
16:36	might be um others are artisans you know	
16:39	I talk a lot about the artistic	
16:41	community we have the currently the	
16:43	Community Hall which has been in	
16:44	existence	
16:45	for well over 100 years at this point	
16:47	has an art show there	
16:49	we've got parts of the Woods Hole Film	#woodsholefilmfestival
16:51	Festival the box office will be using	
16:53	the old fire station so Woods Hole has a	
16:55	lot of things to a lot of different	
16:57	people and	
16:58	it's a very fascinating place to come	
17:00	and certainly the library and the museum	
17:02	are major parts of it wonderful so one	
17:05	of the highlights on the tour and and I	
17:07	just learned	
17:09	several things	
17:11	during your virtual tour just now of the	
17:14	village starting at the library but one	
17:15	of the sites you mentioned was the Woods	
17:17	Hole School when I was a kid	

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17:20	it was still	
17:21	a public elementary school	
17:23	and so people my age went	
17:26	some went to elementary school there so	
17:29	and the linkage between	
17:31	learning	
17:32	at the library and	
17:34	learning in general is is significant so	
17:37	yeah	
17:38	is there any sort of history between the	
17:41	Woods Hole School and the Woods Hole	
17:42	Library that you're aware of absolutely so you	
17:44	mentioned that yeah both my parents were	
17:46	proud graduates of the Woods Hole School	
17:48	um it is interesting also that the Woods	
17:50	Hole School is the only building in Woods	
17:52	Hole that's on the National Register of	#nationalregisterofhistoricplaces
17:53	Historic Places even the Candle House	
17:55	part of MBL is not	
17:57	there's been this very strong connection	
17:59	between the Children's School of Science	
18:02	and the library itself and when the	
18:04	Woods Hole Library did have students	
18:06	before they they went to Mullen-Hall	
18:08	there were extensive programs that took	
18:10	place many of the teachers brought their	
18:12	classes over to the library itself again	

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18:13	you had a perfect set up with you know	
18:15	tremendous like you know there were	
18:17	books obviously a smaller library at the	
18:19	Woods Hole School but they they brought	
18:21	their classes over during class after	
18:23	class and you know many students would	
18:25	come over and do their homework	
18:27	at the library itself with with some of	
18:28	the desks and areas that were set up	
18:30	it's it's always been very very children	
18:32	friendly uh place	
18:34	wonderful	
18:35	so	
18:37	anything else you want to share with us	
18:39	well no thank you very much Troy I	
18:40	appreciate uh given the opportunity to	
18:43	tell the Falmouth community about	
18:46	all the wonderful things about the Woods	
18:47	Hole Library and the Woods Hole Historic	
18:48	Museum and please come down and visit	
18:51	they would be happy to have you and a	
18:53	lot to see in Woods Hole and happen to	
18:55	stop by the museum we do have some of	
18:56	the brochures from the tours themselves	
18:58	who you can do your own walking tour if	
19:00	it's a day that that I'm not giving	
19:02	tours wonderful well Rob Blomberg thank	

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19:05	you so much I always say it takes a name	
19:07	to make a town but people to make a	
19:09	community so thank you for being one of	
19:11	the people that keeps the spirit in the	
19:13	history of Woods Hole and the Woods Hole	
19:15	Library alive thank you very much Troy	
19:16	appreciate it	