

Postcards from Falmouth Oral History Transcript

Recorded: February 24, 2020

Oral Historian: Reverend Will Mebane, Jr.

Interviewer: Troy Clarkson

Topic: Saint Barnabas Church

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

00:00	[Music]	
00:45	so	
00:45	welcome and my first question is I'd	
00:48	like to begin by asking you to tell us	
00:49	your full name and the postcard you will	
00:51	be discussing	
00:53	so I am the Reverend Will Mebane the rector	
00:56	at Saint Barnabas	#saintbarnabaschurch Gunning_Village_Bldg_0316 through 0343
00:57	Memorial Episcopal Church here in	
00:59	Falmouth and I'll be talk	
01:01	talking about the postcard that has the	
01:04	structure the building of Saint Barnabas	
01:07	Church and so	
01:10	Saint Barnabas church has a rich history	
01:13	in this community	
01:14	uh the cornerstones were laid uh	
01:18	many many years ago that's right uh by	

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01:21	uh people with a name that still	
01:24	resonates throughout our community	
01:26	so tell us a little bit about that so	
01:28	there is no Saint Barnabas without the	
01:30	Beebe family and so that name does	#beebe
01:33	resonate	
01:34	throughout the community and to this day	
01:37	the cornerstone was	
01:38	laid in 1890 it was a memorial	#1890
01:42	to the Beebe family the mother and father	
01:47	of the family	
01:48	by their eldest surviving son Edward	
01:51	Pierson Beebe	
01:53	the origin of the parish is	
01:58	somewhat interesting in that the Beebes	
02:01	were not	
02:02	originally Episcopalians they were like	
02:04	most folks in New England at the time	
02:07	Congregationalists but they used to	
02:08	summer in	
02:11	Woods Hole and the Church of the Messiah	#woodshole #churchofthemessiah Gunning_WoodsHole_Bldg_0565 through 0569
02:14	in Woods Hole is the first Episcopal church	
02:16	in town	
02:18	and they used to make the trek down to	

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02:20	Woods Hole from Falmouth	
02:22	from the Village Green where they stayed	#falmouthvillagegreen Gunning_Village_Sts_0053 through 0078
02:24	at an inn	
02:25	for services on Sunday but that got to	
02:28	be	
02:29	old pretty quickly and the	
02:32	the family decided that they would	
02:34	prefer not to have to make that foul	
02:36	five mile trek down to uh to Woods Hole	
02:41	and one of their own parish now	
02:44	parenthetically lots of people in	
02:46	Falmouth say to me today	
02:48	Woods Hole is so far but can you imagine	
02:52	how far it was back in 1888	
02:55	having to use a buggy and carriage of	
02:57	horses to get down there	
03:00	but the Beebe children decided to	
03:04	when the James Madison Beebe died	
03:07	the Beebe children wanted to build the	
03:10	parish	
03:10	in memory of their mother Esther and	
03:13	their father James	
03:16	that's great and so and from that point	
03:18	uh	

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03:20	there uh there is a long history of the	
03:23	development of	
03:24	the uh the the church itself uh and of	
03:28	continuing generations	
03:30	uh of of babies and	
03:33	uh and and other prominent members of	
03:35	the community supporting not only the	
03:37	building but the congregation itself	
03:39	so there's uh another interesting	
03:42	bit about the formation of	
03:46	Saint Barnabas parish originally	
03:50	the as I said the family was worshipping	
03:53	in Woods Hole	
03:55	and then they began to have the	
03:58	pastor from Woods Hole do services at	
04:02	the	
04:02	town	
04:05	town hall Falmouth Town Hall on Sunday	
04:08	afternoons	
04:10	and from that they decided to	
04:13	want to build their own parish but the	
04:16	in order to build a parish	
04:18	or to start a parish in a community	
04:22	you cannot do so if there is another	
04:24	Episcopal church within the same	
04:26	boundary	

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04:28	not without getting approval from the	
04:29	standing committee	
04:31	of the diocese of Massachusetts and that	
04:33	was the case here	
04:35	and when the petition was put forth	
04:38	to start a parish in Falmouth	
04:43	the Falmouth village and it was not	
04:47	received enthusiastically by the diocese	
04:50	and in fact the	
04:51	president of the standing committee	
04:54	argued very forcefully against	
04:58	authorizing the formation of this parish	
05:01	and approval from the standing committee	
05:03	is necessary	
05:05	to get a new parish started so already	
05:08	in the beginning you have the president	
05:09	of the standing committee saying no	
05:10	to this idea because he felt that	
05:14	the Beebes were really trying to form a	
05:18	parish that was basically for their	
05:21	benefit only	
05:22	or primarily in fact the Sunday	
05:24	afternoon worship services	
05:26	were attended primarily by the Beebes their	
05:28	family members and their guests	

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05:30	and maybe a few people from the village	
05:34	so there was a um a struggle with the	
05:38	standing committee and the Beebes to get	
05:41	the church built	
05:42	but ultimately the Rev. Phillips Brooks	#phillipsbrooks
05:46	who was at that time the rector of	
05:49	Trinity Church Boston	#trinitychurch #boston
05:51	very influential church then and now	
05:54	uh sided with the Beebes that he thought it	
05:58	would be worthwhile to have a parish in	
06:00	Falmouth village	
06:01	and that really turned the tide turn the	
06:03	opposition	
06:05	and allow for the construction of Saint	
06:08	Barnabas	
06:10	the cornerstone was laid on the 11th of	
06:13	June in 1890	
06:16	on Saint Barnabas Day	
06:20	now there's doubt and	
06:23	about why are there questions about	
06:26	why that particular day was chosen what	
06:30	was significant about	
06:31	Saint Barnabas and the only thing	
06:35	that anyone has been able to discover	
06:38	today	

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06:39	is that there was probably or may have	
06:42	been	
06:42	a family member with the name Barnabas	
06:45	in the Beebe family and that is one of	
06:48	the reasons they chose	
06:50	the name Barnabas for the parish	
06:54	very interesting wow so of course	
07:01	somewhere contemporaneous with that the	
07:03	Beebes also constructed	
07:05	and had then two beautiful	
07:09	summer uh estates up on the hill yes	
07:12	that we now know today is Highfield Hall	#highfieldhall
07:14	and the other	
07:15	uh is no longer there right that was	
07:17	Tanglewood	#tanglewood
07:18	right yeah yeah yeah so	
07:22	and they had acreage	
07:25	that now was known as Beebe Woods right and	#beebewoods
07:27	so the uh	
07:28	the everlasting influence of that family	
07:31	is as you said very much still felt	
07:33	today yeah very prominent	
07:34	even today I think it was 95 acres if I	
07:36	remember correctly	
07:39	so since that time that the cornerstone	

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07:41	was laid	
07:42	both the building and the congregation	
07:45	that is gathered there has seen	
07:47	quite an evolution can you walk us	
07:49	through that a little bit	
07:50	sure let me do that but I want to first	
07:53	talk a little bit about the	
07:55	architecture because that's what people	
07:57	are going to see on the postcard	
08:00	and so it was designed by Henry Vaughan	#henryvaughan
08:05	known as the mentor for the Gothic	#gothic
08:08	revival	
08:09	movement in America he himself	
08:12	was an Englishman and the Beebes	
08:15	found him and from their connections in	
08:18	England and got him to come over	
08:22	and to design the the building	
08:25	made out of a red sandstone and	
08:29	that style for Saint Barnabas	
08:33	was the first in a series of nine	
08:36	churches nine parishes that Vaughan	
08:39	designed	
08:40	three of them in southern New England	
08:43	there's one in Swansea and	
08:47	one in New Bedford and then Saint	
08:49	Barnabas and the other	

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08:51	six are outside of southern New England	
08:55	Vaughan was well respected but it said	
08:58	that	
09:00	he was not interested in fame or	
09:03	influence how well you did your work was	
09:06	more important to him	
09:08	so the building has survived very well	
09:12	thanks to Vaughan's design	
09:16	and we still today get hundreds if not	
09:19	thousands of people visiting Saint	
09:21	Barnabas to admire the the beauty	
09:24	of the structure	
09:27	Historically Saint Barnabas has been a	
09:30	community parish by that I mean a	
09:34	place that was open to the community	
09:37	to organizations uh non-profits and the	
09:41	like	
09:42	to together and to	
09:46	hash out their strategic agendas	
09:50	and so we today do the same thing at Saint	
09:52	Barnabas	
09:53	we like to be known as the parish of the	
09:56	community	
09:57	so we are constantly opening our doors	
10:00	and welcoming	

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10:02	non-profit organizations and other	
10:03	entities	
10:05	to use our beautiful campus as a	
10:07	gathering for	
10:09	retreats and for organizational meetings	
10:12	and for community meetings of all types	
10:17	and so that legacy continues today	
10:21	that that's wonderful uh	
10:24	to go back to the architecture for just	
10:26	a minute the	
10:28	architecture itself and the style it	
10:30	really draws a very nice contrast	
10:32	to the other more traditional New	
10:35	England	
10:36	buildings including the the	
10:38	Congregational Church across the green	#firstcongregationalchurch Hunt_Village_Bldg_001 Hunt_Village_Sts_152 Gunning_Village_Sts_0073 Gunning_Village_Bldg_0346 through 0365
10:41	and to me that symbolizes	
10:45	what I call the mosaic of the community	
10:48	because	
10:49	all of the buildings around the green	
10:50	are shining tiles in that mosaic	
10:53	but Saint Barnabas in particular I think	

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10:56	draws	
10:57	uh our attention to the fact that	
11:01	a church can look differently but still	
11:03	be very much part of the community	
11:05	you raised an interesting point about of	
11:08	the history	
11:10	of Saint Barnabas with the	
11:11	Congregational Church 19th century now	
11:16	and Congregationalists and the	
11:20	Episcopalians didn't play well	
11:22	together and	
11:25	in fact there's a story that has been	
11:27	verified that when	
11:29	Saint Barnabas was finally being built	
11:33	the spire and the tower	
11:37	fell during the construction	
11:40	during a autumn storm	
11:44	and a member of the Congregational	
11:46	Church	
11:48	remarked I am so glad that is exactly	
11:51	what I've been praying for	
11:56	and it took several uh	
12:00	years before the Congregationalists and	
12:03	the Episcopalians began to play well	
12:05	together	
12:06	uh fortunately the pastor at the First	

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12:10	Congregation and I	
12:11	see one another a lot and we're very	
12:13	involved in lots of the same	
12:15	projects and causes around town	
12:18	but yeah they didn't start out that way	
12:22	but today both stand as pillars not only	
12:25	of the	
12:26	faith community but of the larger	
12:27	community and one of the	
12:29	the themes that's emerging during these	
12:31	uh interviews	
12:33	the topic is the postcards but really	
12:36	what's developing is a sense of how	
12:38	incredibly connected our communities are	
12:42	and in many ways through	
12:44	our faith communities yes Falmouth I	
12:47	think someone told me there's something	
12:48	like 27	
12:51	faith communities in and around the	
12:53	Falmouth area	
12:55	which is a large number	
12:58	and very diverse and we also	
13:02	have a Saint Barnabas has also had a	
13:04	very	
13:07	positive and cooperative relationship	
13:10	with the Falmouth Jewish Congregation	#falmouthjewishcongregation

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13:12	for example there was a time in their	
13:14	history	
13:15	when they needed a place to worship	
13:18	and Saint Barnabas made its chapel space	
13:22	available	
13:23	for that congregation to worship and	
13:26	in the spirit of recognizing that we are	
13:29	one people under	
13:30	God and we should be being good	
13:33	neighbors	
13:34	to one another my concern today	
13:37	is for	
13:41	obviously the future of Saint Barnabas	
13:43	as well	
13:45	and I have concern about the climate	
13:48	crisis	
13:48	in which we're we find ourselves today	
13:53	it's been forecast that in within the	
13:56	next 50 years	
13:58	that what we now know as Surf Drive in	#surfdrive Gunning_Village_Sts_0085
14:01	Falmouth	
14:02	will be at the front steps of Saint	
14:05	Barnabas	
14:07	that's difficult for us to wrap our	
14:10	heads around	

Falmouth Public Library – Postcards from Falmouth

14:12	and but that is what the scientists are	
14:15	projecting and we have great scientists	
14:17	in this area	
14:18	and so what does that mean for First	
14:22	Congregational Church	
14:23	on the Green there and for Saint	
14:25	Barnabas on the Green there	
14:27	so it's not something	
14:30	anyone probably ever thought they would	
14:32	have to worry about but there is	
14:33	something now that is a concern of ours	
14:37	if there is a silver lining in that	
14:40	cloud as the communities in Falmouth	
14:43	have	
14:44	that history that you referenced of	
14:45	working together	
14:47	and helping each other out so uh	
14:50	being the eternal optimist that I am we	
14:53	see opportunities in the future	
14:55	yeah for uh for the faith communities to	
14:58	once again	
14:59	uh work together to ensure that there's	
15:01	a there's always a place to gather	
15:05	since I've been here I've been here just	
15:06	over a year and a half now	
15:08	and I'm grateful to my clergy colleagues	

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15:12	from the other denominations and faith	
15:14	traditions and	
15:15	the reenergizing of the Falmouth Clergy	#falmouthclergyassociation
15:19	Association	
15:21	of which I'm an active member myself	
15:24	because we do need to have that	
15:25	collaborative relationship uh because we	
15:28	never know when we might need one	
15:30	another for	
15:32	any number of reasons is there anything	
15:35	we didn't cover that you'd like to	
15:36	discuss	
15:38	just take a look here this will be	
15:41	edited yep	
15:42	yep	
15:47	there is one story I would love to tell	
15:49	but I don't know that it's	
15:51	true so I'll share with you	
15:54	not for uh insert uh	
15:58	that Mrs. Beebe uh	
16:02	not only did they get tired of going to	
16:04	Woods Hole	
16:05	to Church of the Messiah but she is said	
16:08	to have said	
16:10	that she got tired of her	
16:13	petticoats getting dusty on the ride	

Falmouth Public Library – Postcards from Falmouth

16:15	down two weeks old	
16:17	and that was the determining factor	
16:22	I would love to find out if that's true	
16:23	I haven't found that any	
16:25	anything I've ever seen so far no there	
16:27	was no painting back then	
16:29	right oh okay yeah did you imagine yeah	
16:31	I mean that was	
16:32	that was an effort uh let's see	
16:37	we talked about that	
16:45	yeah so this is going to be three	
16:46	minutes so I think you may have enough	
16:50	Kim has anything that you oh great idea	
16:54	what's that we'll talk about Strawberry	#strawberryfestival
16:57	Festival	
16:58	oh yes yes yes yes one of the	
17:01	I would say iconic uh	
17:04	event that connects Saint Barnabas to	
17:06	members of the community who may not	
17:08	gather there in worship	
17:09	is the Strawberry Festival which uh	
17:12	which brings together the	
17:13	agrarian history of our community uh	
17:16	with	
17:17	the parish of Saint Barnabas so tell us	
17:20	a little bit about that	

Falmouth Public Library – Postcards from Falmouth

17:21	yeah so the Strawberry Festival uh is	
17:24	indeed a seminal event each year	
17:26	in the life of Saint Barnabas people	
17:29	come from near and far	
17:31	for this they they look forward to it	
17:33	each year	
17:35	we just celebrated our 90th Strawberry	
17:38	Festival	
17:40	uh let me check I need to check that	
17:41	that may not be right and	
17:43	because we have so many it was the 90th	
17:46	it was the 90th of the Christmas Fair	
17:49	not the Strawberry Festival	
17:50	Strawberry Festival has actually been	
17:52	going on longer than that	
17:53	I can't remember the exact it's a	
17:56	hundred and	
17:56	some years but the Strawberry Festival	
18:00	at Saint	
18:01	Barnabas brings the community together	
18:03	and what I'm most proud of	
18:05	today is that a	
18:08	significant portion of the funds raised	
18:12	from the Strawberry Festival	
18:13	go back into the community a	
18:17	conscious intentional decision	

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18:20	has been made by the parish that if the	
18:22	community is going to support an event	
18:24	like the Strawberry Festival	
18:26	the proceeds from that should go back	
18:29	out in the community	
18:30	to support the needs of the community	
18:33	so it has had a very long history there	
18:36	have been times when	
18:38	there have been there's been concern	
18:40	about whether	
18:42	they could pull it off but somehow	
18:45	miraculously	
18:46	it continues and some individuals have	
18:49	been doing	
18:50	that organizing for	
18:54	decades that's great and then	
18:57	the uh	
19:01	are the strawberries locally sourced do	
19:02	they come from	
19:04	there was a time when they all came from	
19:09	farms farms in the area and people would	
19:11	go out	
19:12	members of the congregation would go out	
19:14	and do the picking	
19:16	and I think we've had to	

Falmouth Public Library – Postcards from Falmouth

19:20	upgrade to more contemporary means for	
19:23	gathering	
19:24	the strawberries now because of course	
19:26	I'm guessing	
19:27	uh more than a hundred years ago when	
19:28	the Strawberry Festival started	
19:31	a good portion of the land any East	
19:33	Falmouth	
19:34	particularly Davisville where I grew up	#davisville
19:36	were strawberry farms yes yes	
19:38	yes yes and Tony Andrews is probably the	#tonyandrewsfarm
19:41	only	
19:41	working strawberry farm left and that	
19:45	is where most if not all of the	
19:48	strawberries for the Strawberry Festival	
19:50	uh are sourced	
19:53	yeah that's one that's right yeah	
19:56	great well thank you very much for	
19:59	spending this time with us	
20:00	and sharing the rich history of Saint Barnabas Troy	
20:03	always a pleasure to be with you I'm so	
20:05	grateful to the Falmouth Public Library	
20:07	for this series and I look forward to	
20:09	learning more about Falmouth's rich and	
20:13	great history	

Falmouth Public Library – Postcards from Falmouth

20:34	[Music]	
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