

The Falmouth Historical Society Annual Meeting

Falmouth Town Hall and Online via Zoom
January 23, 2024

The presentation slides are posted on the Society website at:

<https://thefhs.org/resources/Documents/FHS%202024%20Annual%20Meeting%20Full.pdf>.

David Farnham, president, called the meeting to order at 7:05 p.m. He announced there would be a short business meeting, as required by the bylaws, followed by two presentations illustrating what the Society is doing.

All officers and directors were present in-person or online. A quorum of the membership was present.

Secretary's Report

Suzanne Farnham, secretary, noted that the minutes for last year's annual meeting were approved by the board so we would dispense with the reading.

Members of the Society and community are urged to attend board meetings; the calendar is posted on the Society website. The board and committees meet regularly using Zoom.

Minutes, along with reports and presentation slides, for annual meeting and board meetings are posted online at the Society website under the "Documents" tab. For those thinking about becoming more involved, that's where you can learn more about what the Society is doing.

The Society's membership continues to grow slowly but steadily. There are 108 members including five corporate sponsors. Alas, several long-term members passed away during 2023.

Treasurer's Report

David, as interim treasurer, presented the Society's financial condition.

The summary shows that the Society is solvent, it stuck to its budget during 2023, and its income exceeded expenses. As of December 31st, the balance in our operating accounts was \$16,601. During calendar year 2023, our income was

\$14,763 and our expenses were \$11,526. Our expenses were \$1,430 below budget but that includes a \$1,000 rebate for a prior-year expense making the actual difference \$430 below budget. Detailed financial reports can be found under the Documents tab on the Society website.

A closer look reveals that half of the funds in the operating accounts are grants reserved for the Marion Perkins Memorial Scholarship, so the Society's coffers are not as flush with cash as we would like.

During our monthly board meetings, the treasurer's report presents a list of financial metrics using "traffic light" (red, yellow, and green) icons. Nearly all the metrics are consistently "green" which is good. The one consistently "yellow" metric is "Projected Year-end Gain" which was a negative \$558 this month. That means we are spending a little bit more than we are taking in. We have an austere budget and stick to it. Our goal is to attract additional donations to put the Society's finances on a more stable and sustainable footing.

Carol Kauffman, a member of our Board and a former Society president, convened a meeting of the Audit Committee last summer to review our financial records for fiscal years 2022 and 2023. The Committee found that the Society's financial statements and governmental filings are complete and accurate. Their report is posted online under the September 2023 Board Meeting.

Committee Reports

The Society has a committee structure to make it easier for volunteers to connect with their areas of interest.

Programs. Sally Farneth, director and chair of the Education Committee, reminded us that the Society has three program areas:

- Collections where we preserve the heritage of our town,
- Research where we discover lost and forgotten stories about our town, and
- Education where we tell the story of our town.

We work closely with Falmouth Schools to support history education. Our biggest activity is the field trip to the Museum and Barn by Falmouth Elementary School second grade students. In 2023, we expanded the presentations. Teachers said the kids really enjoyed the visit and learned a lot.

Thanks to the generosity of the Perkins Family, last year the Society sponsored a \$5,000 scholarship for a deserving graduate from Falmouth High School. The

recipient was Francesca Pound, now a first-year student at UMass Amherst. This year's scholarship will be \$5,000. The four Perkins siblings, the living children of Marion Perkins, Falmouth's town clerk in the 1960s, are all graduates of Falmouth High.

Last year we participated in eight public events beyond the Museum. Five were in-person, two were hybrid (in-person and online), and one (the annual meeting) became online only when we had problems getting into town hall. We gave one public presentation related to the history of our town and co-sponsored two others with the library. At four events, our volunteers manned tables where people of Falmouth could bring questions about the people, places, and events in our town over the past four centuries.

Museum Operations. Betsy Jo Whitcomb, director and chair of the Museum Operations and Exhibits Committee, reported that the Museum and Barn were re-opened in May in time for Falmouth School second graders to come for a visit. They learned what life was like for children their age two centuries ago. We broke the students down into smaller groups and cycled them through four stations.

The Museum was open to the public on Tuesdays (and by appointment) from early June until the weather turned chilly in October. It hummed with activity as we entertained a steady flow of visitors. More people are coming to the Museum with specific questions about places, people, or events in Falmouth. Most stay for more than an hour as we retrieve information to answer their questions.

Collections. Ron Scorsone, director and chair of the Collections Committee, reported that a team of volunteers made great progress reorganizing our large collection of documents. Material for some topics had been scattered across several filing cabinets or shelves. Visitors tell us our files contain pure gold—information found nowhere else. Now it is much easier to mine that gold.

We received the usual donations of books, documents, and artifacts, plus one gigantic donation of historical files from Marge Merrill Devine, a local historian and former president of the Society. Her papers fill fourteen bins and contain material she had accumulated during decades of research. Volunteers are now organizing her vast collection for accessioning, after which details will be transcribed into our online catalog.

One of our prized artifacts is the violin crafted by a local blacksmith more than a century ago. Descendants of the blacksmith recently visited the Museum to view

artifacts crafted by their ancestor. They were accompanied by a local luthier and dealer in antique instruments who shared fresh information about the instrument. More about the violin can be found in our winter newsletter.

During the coming year, we plan to conduct a full inventory of the collection. The Museum's digital catalog is accessible at the Society website under the "Museum" tab.

Local History Committee. David observed that in an all-volunteer Society, volunteers wear many hats. He is also co-chair of the Local History Committee. This past year added information about the history of Falmouth and Ancient Falmouth to the Society's website. We were especially pleased to add the 1804 "Galvin" survey of Falmouth Roads to our page of "Falmouth Historical Maps." This is the oldest detailed map showing Falmouth, Westbrook, and the Deering section of Portland. The original had been sealed in Maine Historical's archives for preservation. They took it out of the case long enough to make a high-resolution digital copy which was then posted on the Maine Memory Network and is available to all.

This spurred us to join the Maine Memory Network. The first item we plan to post is a high-resolution digital copy of the town plat for 1957. This map is invaluable when researching the history of property in Falmouth.

Last summer, our volunteers worked with Debi Curry of Maine Old Cemetery Association to build a comprehensive list of Falmouth cemeteries. Debi created a digital map using Google Earth showing the precise locations of 34. We'd like to make that accessible to the community as well.

We received roughly the same number of requests from the community as the year before. These came from people researching the history of their families or property; from businesses and government organizations with questions of historical significance; from teachers and students wanting to know more about local history, and even a few from the press.

Many of our responses are Falmouth's version of "Finding Your Roots." We answer the question. We also tell the requestor how and where we found the answer, along with the local historical context needed to understand the answer. When we have the time, these responses will be added to the "Members Only – Local Research" section of the Society website.

Communications. We know that our members want us to keep them informed about what we are doing and what we are learning about the history of our town.

Our level of communications this past year was about the same as the year before—better than it had been but not as good as it should be.

During the coming year, we will try to publish four newsletters. You have told us that you are most interested in stories about the history of Falmouth. There's lots for us to tell, although, at times we fall victim to writer's block.

We have begun making better use of Facebook which seems to be the most popular social media channel among our members. We don't have a monopoly on Falmouth History. When we see relevant items posted by other groups, we are now sharing those along with a brief explanation of why we found the item to be significant.

Summer is our busy season with visitors coming to the Museum. To keep our Board of Directors up to date, we send out an email covering "This week at the Museum." Several Board members have observed that these notes—some of which go into detail about what we discovered—would be of interest to the membership and we'll try to share more of that information this coming summer.

This is an area where a tech-savvy volunteer is needed!

Merchandise. Sue, as chair of the Merchandise Committee, reported that Falmouth Heritage Bookstore sold \$1,065 in merchandise last year. She listed the many places to purchase Falmouth-related books and our Falmouth-themed merchandise:

- Falmouth Heritage Museum on Tuesdays in summer when we are open.
- Falmouth Town Hall where there is a display case filled with our merchandise.
- FHS table at a public events including the Cumberland Fair.
- Online at the FHS website. We deliver locally in Falmouth and nearby. We also provide mail order in Maine and New Hampshire. We plan to add other states if we can find an easy way to handle the sales tax.

Buildings & Grounds. Ron, as chair the Building and Grounds Committee, reported that thankfully there were no horror stories about the basement in 2023.

The sump pump installed last year has kept the basement dry. We now have a backup sump pump that can be used as a replacement or a supplement should the need arise. The network-connected sensor has been continuously monitoring conditions in the basement including the water level in the sump. We also installed a stand-mounted, high-capacity dehumidifier which has kept humidity in the basement around 40%.

The snow and rain two weeks ago brought more water into the sump than the pump could handle. There was some overflow. Fortunately, we were alerted by the sensor and responded quickly. We had to mop up some water, but this was nothing like the catastrophic flooding in past years.

Ron listed maintenance work planned for summer:

- Scraping and painting the entrance door to the Museum.
- Treating the ramp (which has taken a beating during recent winters).
- Touching up the paint on the southern end of the barn where there has been some flaking.

Volunteers are needed!

Looking into the future, installation of the sewer line along Woods Road is complete. We are required to connect within the next ten years. The cost of connection is roughly equal to our annual budget, so we will be seeking a grant.

Technology. Ron, as a co-chair of the Technology Committee, reported on visits to the Society website—the Society’s digital museum with a growing online presence. He noted that there is usually a surge of activity around public events.

For those who come to our “brick and mortar” Museum to conduct research, we recently added a network-attached printer to make it easier for visitors to print or copy materials.

President’s Report

David noted that the committee reports have shown how a small band of dedicated volunteers is delivering what the community expects from its town historical society. We are “doing history.” We are doing it well. We are doing a lot with very little.

He observed that the Society’s operational tempo has plateaued. We are running at capacity. He understands that there are many deserving nonprofits in

Falmouth leading to “charity fatigue.” That said, if we cannot attract more volunteers and funding, we will be unable to sustain our current level and could backslide.

When we say the Society “does history,” that means remembering the stories of our town, discovering the stories that were forgotten, and sharing those stories with others.

A recent national survey revealed that there are 21,588 organizations in the United States that “do history.” Our Society is one of 9,190 organizations in the lowest tier which was dubbed, “Very, Very Small.”

Fortunately, Falmouth is a place where history matters. History is part of what draws people to Falmouth.

As president, David sees how the Society serves the community. He shared two recent examples.

He read in the news about a policy statement involving history issued by a local government. The wording in the statement looked familiar. They had lifted the text verbatim from our website. They were looking for facts and came to us to get them. That’s why we’re here.

In another case, we received a routine request for information about a historical event from the producer of television documentaries. We provided the requested information and suggested they contact Maine Historical.

We received a nice reply thanking us for our timely response. They mentioned that Maine Historical had punted to us. We blushed. Only then did we realize the producer was working for a filmmaker well known for telling a story from the perspective of those who were involved. We pointed the producer to an essay in a recently published book that provided a local perspective of the historical event. The next day she told us they had ordered copies of the book for the entire production team. The essay put the event in a fresh context. They weren’t sure how they would use this information, but it added depth to the story.

In just one of the many requests the Society receives from the community each year, we had gotten an indirect pat on the back from our flagship historical society, and we had turned up new information for a film being produced for PBS.

Our Society may be “Very, Very Small,” but it makes an impact.

David thanked everyone for helping us preserve our town's heritage and tell its story.

New Business

There being no new business, the annual meeting of the membership was adjourned at 7:45 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Suzanne Howe Farnham
Secretary

The business portion of the meeting was followed by two presentations illustrating the Society's research into local history.

We say our research is "community-directed." Most of it is done in response to requests from our community, and the volume of requests is enough to keep us hopping. We received more than 50 requests last year and currently have a backlog.

For the Annual Meeting, we picked two we felt had broad interest. One delves into the history of a neighborhood on the western side of Falmouth—parts of West and North Falmouth to the west of Blackstrap Road. The other presentation reconstructs the narrative for an artifact belonging to the family that lived where Falmouth Memorial Library sits today.

The Annual Meeting of The Falmouth Historical Society finished at 8:40 p.m.

Falmouth Historical Society Annual Meeting

FHS Presents! — Falmouth’s Western Frontier

The Story of Mast Road and its Families

In-person and Online via Zoom—January 23, 2024

Betsy Jo Whitcomb and Sue Farnham shared what they learned while reconstructing the narrative about four families who shaped the history Mast Road in West Falmouth.

Our community turns to us for stories about the history of Falmouth. We’re happy to oblige. Researching the history of our town is what we love to do.

Presentations at the last two Annual Meeting featured Falmouth Foreside. Here it’s West Falmouth’s turn to be in the spotlight.

We say that our research is “locally-directed.” That is because most of our research is done in response to questions from our community.

We average five queries a month about the history of Falmouth people, places, or things. We seldom have ready-made answers sitting on the shelf. Most require research. This is no exception.

We recently received a pair of routine questions about the history of two properties on Mast Road. Before we could answer questions, we had to discover the facts. For this, we have a standard methodology we call the “three-legged stool.” For every topic, we blend family history (genealogy), property history (deed-diving), and local history to reconstruct the narrative for the subject of our question.

These were property history questions. We began by tracing the deeds. We’re good at that. We get lots of practice. That tells us who lived at the property.

Next, we built mini-genealogies for each of the families.

Then we added our “special sauce.” We brought in local history to provide context.

And that's what we did for these two questions.

When we are looking at property history going back more than a century, we begin with the 1857 and 1871 maps.

There were only four families on Mast Road in 1857. There were only four in 1871.

As we began running the deeds, we were surprised to discover that three of those families were descended from the original settlers who built those homes in the 1700s. We learned that all three families stuck around, well into the 20th century.

This was shaping up to be an interesting story. It got better when we found close ties between two of the families. This was the rare case when four families influenced Falmouth's history spanning three centuries. The stories of those four families were the stories of our town. We began reconstructing the narrative for Mast Road.

The story begins before the arrival of English Settlers in 1633. Reliable accounts about the Aucocisco, the band of Wabanaki who lived here, are uneven. In this case, the property we are researching abuts Highland Lake. Falmouth records tell us that archeological research has turned up evidence of human habitation there. Some of what the archeologists found goes back in time potentially thousands of years—well before the Aucocisco.

When does our narrative begin? We know there weren't any English settlers living in that part of Falmouth before 1725.

Prior to 1675, the area around Highland Lake was wilderness. There were no roads other than trails made by Native people. Willis' map showing Falmouth prior to 1690 shows us there were no settlers living in the interior away from the Presumpscot River.

The next 50 years brought nearly non-stop violence. First it was an uprising of the Native people. That was followed by two wars with France on one side and England on the other. King Louis XIV didn't like people from New England encroaching upon *Nouvelle France*. Making matters worse, the English were Protestant heretics encroaching upon good Catholic soil. He told his governor to clean them out, and that is just what was done. At one point, nearly 240 men, women and children of Ancient Falmouth were massacred in what today is

Portland's Old Port. It was nasty. It was bloody. Settlers fled south below York for safety. Some semblance of peace returned in 1725. Settlers returned to Falmouth, but they tended to stay close to the water for transport and (if things went bad again) an avenue for escape.

Back then, Maine, including "Falmouth on Casco Bay" (so-called to distinguish it from that "other" Falmouth on Cape Cod), was part of Massachusetts. Those Puritans didn't come to the new world looking for religious freedom. They wanted to live where their austere, ultra-conservative, Calvinist faith was the official religion. Life could be difficult for those who didn't conform, such as Quakers. For people who weren't Puritans, it was prudent to keep your distance from Boston.

During the wars with the French when most of Maine was a battleground, Quakers found refuge in New Hampshire and towns in southern Maine like Berwick. After things settled down, they migrated north.

Quakers were industrious and had a closely-knit society. This was a time when Portland was still part of Falmouth. Many settled along "Quaker Lane," today's Old Washington Avenue beginning just behind Lib's Ice Cream at Allen's Corner. As their community grew, it extended north, along Lambert Road onto Blackstrap Road (where they established a meetinghouse), and across the Presumpscot River.

Many of Falmouth's finest old houses are along Blackstrap Road and its side roads extending all the way to the Cumberland line. Most of these homes belonged to Quakers. We believe the migration into western Falmouth began around 1750. By the late 1700s, a majority of the people living within what today are the bounds of Falmouth were Quakers.

That brings us back to our question: When was Mast Road settled?

It had to be before 1763 when the Purinton House was built.

Timber. There is good reason to believe that when the Quakers arrived, the wilderness wasn't quite so wild. They probably took advantage of logging roads. It is likely that roads such as Blackstrap, Hardy, and Mast were carved out of the wilderness by foresters.

One such forester was William Huston who worked for the Royal Mast Agent. He purchased land on what is now Mast Road and built a log cabin before 1750. (Records say 1739 or 1749, and we haven't been able to locate the deeds.) While overseeing timber operations near Blackstrap Hill, he would have become very familiar with the area.

Why was there a Royal Mast Agent in Falmouth? At the time, Falmouth was the center of the mast trade in Colonial New England.

This takes us back to the real reason Massachusetts seized Maine, town by town, between 1652 and 1658. It is reasonable to assume that Massachusetts coveted Maine's natural resources. That's true, but not in the way many people think.

It was all about wood. Massachusetts desperately needed wood for domestic needs—building everything from fires to homes. Wood was also something that could be exported to create the kind of trade that enabled colonists to import needed goods from England. Topping the list was wood for ships' masts. In particular, masts for ships of the Royal Navy.

As an island nation, England depended upon its Navy. It depended upon its Navy to protect the island and its colonies... to protect trade... to ensure survival of the nation.

Today, navies enjoy strategic advantage from technological improvements. 300 years ago, warship technology had changed little in two centuries. Back then, the strength of wooden ships was determined by botany.

Masts and spars needed to be lightweight, durable, and supple. Only certain long-grained softwoods met this requirement. Only specific species of pine or spruce trees grown in narrow climatic bands would perform adequately on a ship of the line. Most forests in England had been denuded. Moreover, trees best suited for masts didn't thrive in England's soil and climate. England had gotten suitable trees from the Baltics, but those had become more difficult to obtain. White pines of Maine and New Hampshire were perfect. Moreover, foresters could find the massive trees needed for mainmasts in the virgin forests of northern New England.

The mainmast for a 74-gun two-decker (the workhorse of the fleet) needed to be three feet across and 108 feet long. It weighed about ten tons.

For England, the mast trees of Maine were of upmost importance to national security. And those massive pines thrived in the woods near Blackstrap Hill in Falmouth.

Timber was the biggest (and most important) industry in colonial Maine. The fishery was important but took second place to timber. Farms were there to feed the people working in timber. The trouble was—timber was so lucrative, there weren't enough farms to put food on the table.

Ancient Falmouth became the center of the mast trade when Colonel Thomas Westbrook became Royal Mast Agent at Falmouth in 1727. After fires destroyed pine forests near Portsmouth, the bulk of masts shipped to the Royal Navy came from Falmouth. All of this came to a sudden halt on the eve of the American Revolution in 1775. Colonists seized and carried off masts awaiting shipment to England. One load was dumped into the Fore River where the trunks rotted for decades.

There was a dark side to the timber trade. It was hard, dangerous work. Timber operations in New Hampshire relied on Scottish prisoners of war who had been shipped to America and put into indentured servitude working in the sawmills. Their indentures expired before 1760, and African slaves were imported. That speaks volumes about the nature of the work. Most of the people working in timber were paid poorly. A small number of politically powerful merchants grew enormously rich on the mast trade. Samuel Waldo was one.

The nature of the timber industry led to major consequences during the American Revolution.

Colonists in northern New England deeply resented the “King’s Broad Arrow” edict of 1729 which gave the Crown ownership of trees on private property in Massachusetts (which included Maine) and New Hampshire. That it didn’t apply in England only enraged colonists more. This fueled revolutionary sentiments.

Captain Mowatt of the Royal Navy became involved in attempts to enforce the edicts in Falmouth. Colonists took him prisoner to prevent his interference. Seething after he was released, Mowatt returned with a flotilla of five vessels and burned Falmouth Neck—present-day Portland’s Old Port—to the ground in 1775.

When militia from Gray and Brunswick were summoned to help Falmouth defend itself against Mowatt’s attack, they saw that many of the burning homes

belonged to the fat cat merchants and lawyers who had exploited them in the timber trade. The militiamen looted what they could and returned home.

Of greater consequence, England's only source of North American mast trees became Canada. As England's reserves were depleted, replacement of worn-out masts and spars was deferred. When the English tried to block a French fleet from assisting the American rebels in 1778, the English ships were shattered in a storm leaving many badly damaged and limping back to port. A strong case can be made that the loss of masts and spars from Falmouth altered the balance of power at sea, thus affecting the outcome of the Revolution.

That was the all-important role of timber in Colonial Falmouth. Now let's switch our sights to the four families of Mast Road

Huston. The first to settle on Mast Road was William Huston Jr. He was Scots-Irish. His family had fled Presbyterian persecution. Family legend says that his family came on one of the several ships from Ireland in 1718. Some said they were among the unfortunates to spend the brutally cold winter on the ship in the Fore River, but this is unlikely. Records tell us that William Huston Sr lived in the Scots-Irish community at Pleasant Hill in Falmouth before 1740.

William Huston Jr is believed to have lived somewhere in West Falmouth during the 1730s before acquiring land on Mast Road and moving there, possibly by 1740. According to family legend, he built a log cabin, but it was burned by Native People. (This was around the time the Pigwackets were making their presence felt in nearby Windham.) He rebuilt the cabin only to have it burned a second time. Family legend has it that he invited Native People to dinner at his home. Visitors reported seeing Native People sleeping near his home. His hospitality appears to have kept his property safe.

This was the hinterlands and not far removed from wilderness but, as a forester for the Royal Mast Agent, William would have been familiar with the area around Blackstrap Hill.

The farmhouse was built around 1764. It has undergone successive renovations over the years.

In 1870, the farm was occupied by Stephen Huston, William Jr's great-grandson. With 100-odd acres, and agricultural production typical for a farm of that size, Stephen self-identified as a yeoman. The Puritans brought the English system of

social classes to Massachusetts, and it took hold. A yeoman was the head of a fully self-sufficient farm of at least 60 (and preferably 100) acres. The Yeomanry were the backbone of agriculture in 19th century New England.

Six generations of the Huston Family farmed there for at least 177 years.

Purinton (down the hill). Elisha Purinton came from Hampton Falls, New Hampshire, where his father was a very successful clockmaker. Elisha learned the trade from his father but became a blacksmith instead.

We do not know why he came to Falmouth, but he was a leader in the Quaker community. The migration of so many Quakers to Falmouth may have been what drew him to Maine. He married Sarah Huston, William Jr's daughter. Their wedding present was the land upon which his farmhouse sat.

The farmhouse was built around 1763. It is one of the best preserved and most attractive colonial homes in Falmouth. It is listed on the National Register.

In 1860, the farm was occupied by Francis, Elisha's grandson. With 200 acres and agricultural production typical for a farm of that size, Francis self-identified as a Yeoman.

Three generations of the Purinton family farmed there for about 100 years.

Pride. The Purinton farm was purchased by the Pride family in 1867 and their name continues to be associated with the property today. It was a struggle to keep the farm operating during the Great Depression. The sale of antiques made it possible to keep the farm solvent. Three generations of the Pride Family farmed there for almost a century. Fortunately, recent owners possess the means and desire to preserve this fine old home.

Purinton (up the hill). The farmhouse was built around 1790. His father sold Abraham an 85-acre tract across the road the following year.

In 1860, the farm was occupied by Abraham's son George. With 90 acres and agricultural production typical for a farm of that size, George self-identified as a Yeoman.

Two generations of the Purinton family farmed there for about 105 years. Part of this farm was cleaved from Elisha's farm. Taken together, three generations of Purintons farmed on Mast Road for 132 years.

The 125-acre farm was purchased by a Purrington from Bath who was so distantly related to the Falmouth Purintons that they were probably unable to discern how they were connected. Thanks to Ancestry, we were able to make the connection: they were fourth cousins twice removed.

Lord. The farmhouse was built around 1791. Not much is known about the Lord family that lived on Mast Road. They came from Berwick and some of their kin were Quakers. Inheritance of the farm followed a tortuous path, often through the female line.

Five generations of the Lords or their Lowell descendants owned the farm for 173 years.

Camps. The "rustication" movement really took hold in Falmouth around the turn of the last century. We saw the proliferation of seasonal cottages on the Foreside, sometimes on postage-stamp sized lots.

Construction of seasonal camps on Highland Lake was slower with only a handful appearing in 1900. The number had grown to 28 by 1911. Today it is about 100. Unlike the Foreside where seasonal cottages became year-round homes after WWII, many of the lakeside camps are still seasonal.

At first the camps along Mast Road were built on land belonging to the three landowning families. We didn't find records of leases, but those may not have been recorded. Only after the landholding families sold their land did the camps appear in land records as privately owned.

There have been community associations for over a century. Now there are also camp road associations. Gathering information about the history of Falmouth's seasonal camps on Highland Lake is a good topic for future research.

Anyone who spends time delving into the history of Falmouth is prone to think of Highland Lake by its original name of "Duck Pond." Oral history and written records suggest a strong-willed woman of Westbrook convinced the Postal Service to change the name to Highland Lake because "Duck Pond" had no class. This provoked drama that lasted decades.

There seems to be less controversy over the change from Duck Pond to Mast Road. We can only speculate about the choice of name.

Most “Mast Roads” led to Mast Landings where mast trees could be loaded onto vessels for transport. That isn’t the case here. Samuel Manning’s excellent book, “New England Masts,” goes into detail about twitching and baulking of mast trees. Assuming that pines of Blackstrap Hill were harvested for masts and other purposes, getting the “sticks” off the hill to a mill would have been the first challenge. Alas, we have come across no accounts of how this was done in the area that is present-day Falmouth. Mast Road may have been the best route for moving trees near the ridge to lower, more level ground from which there were several options for milling or moving.

The arc of history in western Falmouth differs from the Foreside.

Settlement began about a century later.

Timber was a big part of the story for the first half-century. There is land along Mast Road still belonging to “S.D. Warren” (now Sappi).

Camps along Highland Lake are seasonal and many of the trappings (e.g., associations) persist.

Farmland has been carved into residential property (as is the case for much of Falmouth), but zoning and limited utilities have preserved much of the rural character.

What makes Mast Road stand out is the extent to which four families, owning 700 acres over the course of 200 years, have shaped this two-mile-long neighborhood.

By comparison, this would be the equivalent of a half-mile-wide swath on the Foreside from Waites Landing Road to the Cumberland line. That four families living along Mast Road for a period spanning three centuries left such a profound mark on their neighborhood is indeed remarkable.

Falmouth Historical Society Annual Meeting

FHS Presents! — The Story Begins with a Sword

The Iverson Brothers in Cuba

In-person and Online via Zoom—January 23, 2024

David Farnham shared what he learned when researching the history of an artifact at Falmouth Memorial Library.

Every artifact has a story. An artifact presented without a story is begging for the history detectives to go to work. That's what happened here.

There have been libraries in Falmouth going back 250 years. Efforts to establish the Falmouth Memorial Library began in 1943. Funds were raised from wartime scrap drives. The home at the corner of Depot and Lunt Roads had been the home of Iver Iverson from 1908 until his death in 1948. His widow died two years later and left the house to her brother. He died a short time afterwards and the heirs sold the home to the library association in June 1951. Falmouth Memorial Library opened in the former Iverson home in May 1952 and has been there ever since.

There had been renovations and expansions of the library over the years, but none as extensive as the work completed in 2022. A ceremony was held to rededicate the library. During the ceremony, a sword that Iver Iverson had carried during his military service in Cuba was exhibited.

The "sword" was a Model 1860 light cavalry saber that had been issued to cavalry troopers since the Civil War. And that was the mystery: How did a young man from Falmouth come to be a cavalryman serving in the US Army in Cuba?

According to family legend, Iver had been a "rough rider," and some took this to mean he had charged up Kettle Hill with Teddy Roosevelt.

A quick search of Ancestry turned up a pension application from 1927 in which Iver Iverson (ending with "on") claimed service in L Troop of the 8th US Cavalry.

It was only later we thought to search for Iver Iversen (ending with “en”) which is how the family spelled their name before WWI.

We needed to know more about Iver’s family.

Iver’s father was Marin Hansen Iversen. He was born in a rural part of southern Denmark called the Duchy of Schleswig. Along with adjacent Holstein, the people living in this area were a diverse lot. Some spoke Danish and their allegiance was to Copenhagen. Others spoke German and had closer ties to German-speaking nations to the south and east. We believe that Martin’s family were Danes living in a Danish-speaking parish on the west coast of Schleswig.

Denmark had repulsed a previous attempt by Germans to annex Schleswig and Holstein. There were large swaths of German speakers who would have welcomed annexation. In 1864, Prussia invaded Schleswig. This time, the Germans prevailed, and the Danish King ceded Schleswig to the Germans. By 1770, annexation was a done deal.

This led to an exodus of Danes who wanted to stay Danish across the border into Denmark. There wasn’t land for them. There weren’t jobs. Many looked west to America.

A surprisingly large number came to Maine. Many had been farmers. They must have liked the climate and the culture because they of them settled in Falmouth and thrived.

Martin Iversen married the daughter of another family of Danish refugees. They had four children.

Spanish-American War. Before we explore Iver’s military service, we need some context. Exactly when was the Spanish-American War?

It’s a toss-up as to which war went more swiftly—the Spanish-American War of 1898 or the Persian Gulf War of 1990. It’s brevity and relatively light loss of life (when compared to the Civil War) led to it being dubbed the “Splendid Little War.” Fighting was pretty much done by August 12th.

The Army wasted no time pulling out of Cuba because everyone was sick, mostly due to Malaria. They left three regiments as an army of occupation.

These were the 24th Infantry along with the 9th and 10th Cavalry.

They were “Buffalo Soldiers.” They were, in the parlance of the time, “colored troops.” In what today seems like an extraordinary bit of reverse racism, it was believed that people of African descent had stronger resistance to tropical disease.

Time proved this assumption false, and it wasn’t long before there were calls for reinforcements. Cavalry units were needed for their mobility. The Army sent three regiments. The 8th Cav arrived in Nov 1898 and occupied the center of Cuba. The 8th had its headquarters and a garrison at Puerto Principe (which is now called Camaguey). They had another garrison at Nuevitas.

Iver Iversen, a 20-year-old man of Falmouth enlisted in the regular Army in November 1900. This was two years after the Spanish-American War was effectively over. Soldiers were needed for the army of occupation supporting the US military government running Cuba until a Cuban-led government was strong enough to stand on its own feet.

Iver was sent (probably by way of Fort Riley, Kansas—the 8th Cav’s home station) to Cuba and assigned to L Troop. Here he underwent Army training. He spent the next 15 months performing the duties expected of the cavalry in Cuba: patrolling and providing military escorts in the hinterlands of Puerto Principe Province.

Iver must have performed well because he was promoted to corporal and probably became a squad leader. As Cuba prepared for independence, the 8th Cav was ordered back to Fort Riley. Iver’s troop left in February 1902.

He spent the rest of his hitch in garrison and was honorably discharged when his enlistment was up in November 1903.

No, Iver didn’t serve during the Spanish-American War. All cavalry troopers serving in Cuba came to be called “Rough Riders,” but he didn’t charge up Kettle Hill with a future president.

The Army didn’t have three regiments of cavalry riding around the countryside armed to the teeth without cause. Iver’s duty in Cuba was definitely not spent sitting on a sunny beach sipping a piña colada.

Time for some more historical context. The fellow who was “El presidente” in Cuba when the US left in 1902 didn’t last very long. He tried to rig an election three years later. This led to a revolt in 1906 and the government collapsed. The US government, under the authority of a 1903 pact with Cuba, sent the Army back to Cuba to reestablish the government.

Now it was Iver’s brother Lawrence’s turn to serve his country. He too was sent to the cavalry—this time it was I Troop of the 15th US Cav at Fort Ethan Allen in Vermont.

When things fall apart in Cuba, the 15th Cav was one of the regiments sent to be part of the “Army of Pacification.” (For those of us old enough to remember the war in Vietnam, now we know where the term originated.)

Iver was promoted to corporal and served as the leader of a machine gun section. He was on detached duty providing security at fixed locations around the coastal town of Cienfuegos.

You don’t need crew-served automatic weapons in sandbagged emplacements to discourage pickpockets.

When Lawrence’s three-year hitch was up, they shipped him to Fort Monroe in Hampton Roads, Virginia, where he was honorably discharged in April 1907.

Iver and Lawrence returned to Maine. They found brides (from other Danish families) and got married. Lawrence had three children between his two wives. One of his granddaughters visited the Museum this past summer.

Both Iver and Lawrence became carpenters and lived on Depot Road. Iver died in 1948. Lawrence followed a decade later. Both are buried at Pine Grove. Iver received a medal for his service in the Army of Occupation. Lawrence got a medal for his service in the Army of Pacification.

As a historical society, we are accustomed to reconstructing narratives of military service from spotty records. Our biggest problem is the large number of WWII records lost in a blaze at the records center in 1973. Usually, we can learn a lot from unit rosters (sometimes called muster rolls).

In this case, there was nothing. No personnel records were maintained for enlisted soldiers in the regular army—only a “Register of Enlistment.” Beyond that, we found no unit histories, no rosters or musters, not anything.

Military histories usually fill in the gaps. Not so much here. The histories tended to be broad in scope and seldom identified individual units.

We found a wealth of information in an unlikely source: Newspaper accounts. Who needs spies when the press provides regular reports on unit deployments, readiness, and morale? We were amazed to see newspapers (archived in GenealogyBank.com) identifying units down to the company or troop level.

Puritan roots run deep in New England and that applies to Falmouth. Historians are quick to tell us that the phrase “Puritan New England” is three lies for the price of one. Our community in Falmouth was built by waves of immigration over the past four centuries.

Many fled oppression or religious persecution in their homeland. They came seeking opportunity and found it.

Many of these immigrants showed their appreciation to their new country through military service. An Iverson from a later generation was the first son of Falmouth to give his life during military service in WWII.

If Martin Iversen had not come to Maine, he certainly would have been conscripted into the Prussian army. The phrase “cannon fodder” comes to mind. Instead, he came here and packed two of his sons off to serve in the army of the nation to which he had chosen to belong.

The Iverson Family is just one more chapter in a story where we could fill several large volumes with the tales of Danes who sought refuge in Maine. Their heritage is still evident today with the names of so many townspeople ending in “sen” or “son.” One Iverson descendant—Carol Iverson Kauffman—is a former president of our Society and currently sits on our board of directors.