Town History

David Farnham
The Falmouth Historical Society
October 18, 2022
What Is a Town Historical Society?

- Place to go for “finding your roots”
- Social group for recalling the “good old days”
- Warehouse for displaying and storing artifacts and documents
- Public charity providing educational services to the community
What Do Town Historical Societies Do?

Historic preservation
• To inform present and future generations

Historic research
• Discovering the stories of our town’s people and places

Historic education
• Sharing the stories of our town
• Often through others

Making history fun!
Falmouth Historical Society

One of 145 town historical societies in Maine

Founded 1966

All-volunteer organization

Collections housed at the Museum & Barn

• Open to the public most Tuesdays in summer (June-early October)

Expanding online presence

Falmouth Heritage Museum
60 Woods Road
(next to Transfer Station)
## Ancient Falmouth Timeline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Before 1600</td>
<td>Aucocisco band of Wabanaki</td>
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<tr>
<td>1632-1633</td>
<td>First English settlement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1658</td>
<td>Seized and chartered by Massachusetts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1675-78</td>
<td>King Philip’s War</td>
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<tr>
<td>1689-97</td>
<td>King William’s War</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1702-13</td>
<td>Queen Anne’s War</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1713</td>
<td>Rechartered by Massachusetts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1765</td>
<td>Cape Elizabeth (with South Portland) splits off</td>
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<tr>
<td>1775-1783</td>
<td>Revolutionary War</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1786</td>
<td>Portland (Falmouth Neck only) splits off</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1812-1815</td>
<td>War of 1812</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1814</td>
<td>Westbrook (Saccarappa with Deering) splits off</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
How Well Do You Know Falmouth?

How did Falmouth get its name?

- The first English settlers were from Cornwall
- Later settlers came from Cape Cod
- The Fore River was originally named the Fall River ("Fall-mouth")
- Settlers thought "Falmouth" was a pretty name
- It resulted from Maine being on the losing side of the Civil War
How Well Do You Know Falmouth?

Answer: **Maine was on the losing side of the English Civil War**

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| 1652 | Cromwell’s Roundheads are victorious  
King Charles I is deposed  
Puritan Massachusetts decides to annex Maine |
| 1658 | Spurwink and Casco were the last to surrender  
Massachusetts charters a new town named Falmouth |
| 1820 | Maine is emancipated from Massachusetts |

Pendennis Castle overlooking Falmouth, Cornwall, was the last royal stronghold to fall to Cromwell
Community

FHS serves a broad community in Falmouth, or with connections to our town

- Residents
- Businesses
- Nonprofits
- Government
- Schools
- Press
- People from “away” with ties to Falmouth

Ancient and modern Falmouth
Preserving History

Your Town’s Attic!

Collections include:

• Artifacts
• Documents
• Photographs
• Books, serials, maps

“Thar’s gold in them thar files!”

2021 was a bonanza when everyone cleaned house

Major effort underway to make everything discoverable via digital catalog
Preserving History

My Favorite Artifact

Copybook of David Leighton

- Lived in West Falmouth (1767-1825)
- From a prominent Quaker family
- Book contains lessons while learning the business of farming and trade during the Revolutionary War
- Includes doodles

Pages from David Leighton’s Copybook
Discovering History

History Detectives!
Research is driven by queries from our community
- Family history
- Property history
- Local history

Nearly all require research
- We have a methodology, knowledge, and our “special sauce”

This is fun!
Discovering History

Don’t ask us to find the story of your home or family unless you are prepared for surprises

Researching one home uncovered a tragedy
  • Gruesome suicide with a sword-cane!
  • Gruesome murder with beheading!
  • Members of family declared insane!
  • Stories about the supernatural!
  • Exorcism!

Exorcism must have worked
  • Home is still in the same family three generations later
Sharing History

Storytelling!

- Visitors to the Museum
- Presentations & papers
- Responses to queries
- Online publishing

It’s hard to know where you’re going unless you know where you’ve been

Falmouth Elementary Second Graders visit Museum & Barn

Image: FHS
Small, dedicated team of volunteers who share an interest in history
- “Accidental historians”
- Newcomers and long-term residents

Challenges
- Upkeep of a 19th-century-fixer-upper
- Finances
- Volunteers

That’s What We Do

Mission
- Preserve Falmouth’s heritage
- Make it accessible to community

Programs
- Collections
- Research
- Education
History Can Be Fun!

Join our Society!
• Even better, volunteer!
• All skills needed

Interesting work
• Become an “accidental historian”
• Great way to learn about our town

Nice, congenial group
• No drama
• Transparency
How Well Do You Know Falmouth?

Why doesn’t Falmouth have a quaint village center like many other Maine towns?
How Well Do You Know Falmouth?

Answer: **We do! It is Portland’s Old Port.**

- “Old Casco” was the commercial center of Falmouth after “Falmouth Neck” was resettled in 1716
- Falmouth Neck split off to become Portland on July 4th, 1786

Falmouth became a collection of villages
- Colonial patterns of commerce persist
Keepers of Town History

History is big part of what makes our town special
• Draws people to live here

Four centuries of recorded history
• That’s a lot of stories

Our job is to preserve and share those stories

Pictures: George Knight House
26 Middle Road
Built 1726
Top is in 1888
Bottom is in 2019