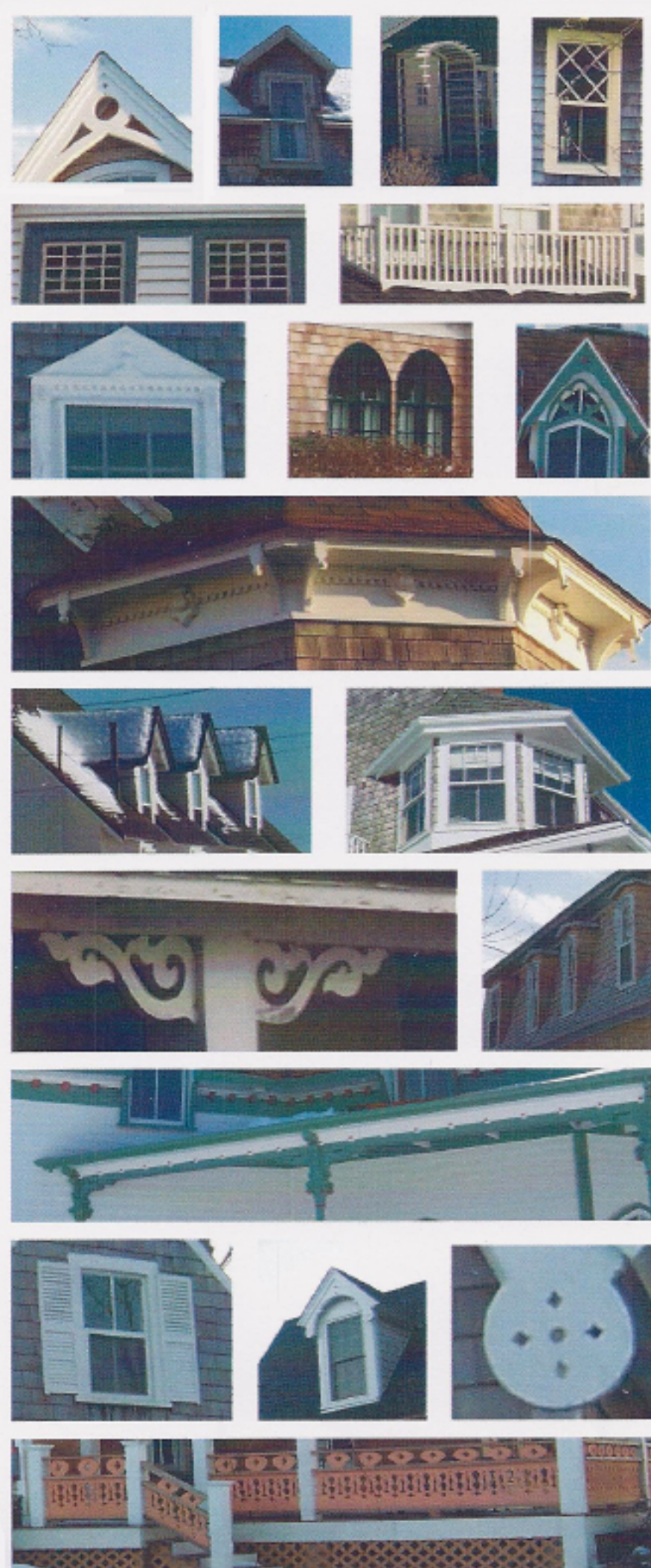


# A Brief History of Falmouth Heights



*Observatory Crown Circle  
Circa 1880*



Summer residents and visitors have fond memories of the Tower House Hotel, Oak Crest Inn, Terrace Gables, the Cottage Club and Casino, Lawrence's Sandwich Depot, and the Vineyard Sound House. Several of these landmark building survived until quite recently.

Although the original developers disbanded over 100 years ago, their vision for Falmouth Heights remains. Many original buildings, the 1870's streetscape and park system, and the beautiful location and ocean views give evidence of the foresight of the original planners.

## *Falmouth Harbor*

What is known today as Falmouth inner harbor was, prior to 1906, called Deacon's Pond. Joseph Davis, deacon of Falmouth's Congregational Church, owned extensive land along the shore of the pond-thus the name, Deacon's Pond. This landlocked body of fresh water was separated from the ocean by a causeway of land that connected Falmouth Heights to Belvidere Plains. Clinton Ave. crossed this causeway and it was the primary access route to the Heights from town, with horse stables for the cottages and hotels located on the Falmouth Heights side of the pond.

As Falmouth grew as a summer resort, the need for a good harbor became apparent. After much consideration, Deacon's Pond was chosen. The town would have to approve a contribution of \$10,000 and the state would supply \$25,000. In 1907 town meeting approved the necessary funds and construction began. George Washington Goethals, who later worked on the Panama Canal, was hired as consultant. On September 12, 1908 the first boat entered Falmouth's new harbor.

## *A Brief History of Falmouth Heights*

Before 1870, Falmouth Heights was known simply as Great Hill. Being the highest point of land along Vineyard Sound, its landmark bluff rose high above the ocean shoreline.

Local tradition holds that the first summer resident of Falmouth was Awashonks, Queen of the Narragansett Native Americans, who regularly summered at the Heights in the 1600's. Queen Awashonks would encamp at Falmouth Heights each summer during her annual visit to Cape Cod. She is said to have chosen this location because of the beautiful view and cool summer breezes. It was also midway between her subjects on the mainland and Martha's Vineyard.

In the late 18th century, Dr. Francis Wicks, a Falmouth physician and early advocate of small pox vaccination maintained a small pox hospital in the area. He felt that the then isolated location was best for his work. The Tower House Hotel was later built on this site. Other activities on Great Hill included the salt works, which was an early Cape Cod industry. Using windmills, ocean water was pumped into wooden containers on land. The water would evaporate in the sun and the remaining salt was collected and sold. In the event of rain, movable roofs would cover the containers.

Around 1870, a group of Worcester businessmen spotted the Great Hill bluff while returning from a trip to Martha's Vineyard where the men hoped to find land to buy and develop. Investigating further, they decided that Great Hill would be an ideal investment. Incorporating themselves as the Falmouth Heights Land and Wharf Company they purchased the one hundred acres around the hill and renamed it Falmouth Heights. Their goal was to create a first-class summer resort community complete with hotels, cottages, chapel, observatory, stores, and transportation services. Eldridge Boyden, a Worcester resident, was hired as architect and master planner. Boyden filed his first plan for the area on January 1, 1871. His plan shows several hundred small house lots, most of them 50 x 75 feet, placed around numerous parks and open spaces. This plan is essentially the streetscape seen in Falmouth Heights today. Among the street names given were Worcester Park Ave, Wachusett Ave, Quinapoxet Ave and Quisigamond Ave. These were place-names in Worcester at that time and reflect the early Worcester connection of the developers and residents. The first structures built were the Tower Hotel, fourteen cottages and an observatory sited on the summit of the hill. Since there was no harbor at the time, the lumber for construction, two story timber cut in Maine, was transported by schooner to Vineyard Sound and rafted ashore. The buildings were designed to reflect the then current architectural taste of Carpenter Gothic, which is also referred to as Gingerbread. This style features curved or pointed doors and windows, fanciful trim around the windows, doors, railings, and eaves and open porches and balconies.

The new resort was off to a good start. Many early homeowners and visitors were from Worcester since the developers advertised heavily in that area. Many lots were sold, houses built, three more hotels opened, and numerous visitors enjoyed the beautiful community. Although the Land and Wharf Company dissolved in 1880, development and visitor interest remained strong. At the beginning of the 20th century Falmouth Heights became the place to vacation. President Kennedy's grandfather, Boston mayor John F. Fitzgerald and his family spent several summers in Falmouth Heights.

By 1901, Mrs. Elvira Goodwin held title to most of the parkland and open space. Wanting to ensure that these beautiful spaces remained undeveloped, she sold them to the town for \$1.00 with the stipulation that they remain as first intended-for the enjoyment and pleasure of the residents of Falmouth Heights.

## *The Falmouth Heights – Maravista Improvement Association*

The Falmouth Heights Improvement Association first met in the summer of 1889 at the Cottage Club-later called the Casino. The association was responsible for the construction of a boardwalk that extended the entire length of the waterfront, the installation of street lights, park benches, stairs to the beach and the purchase and maintenance of a water cart to wet down the dusty streets. The association was reorganized in 1945 "for the mutual benefit of the residents of Falmouth Heights, a section of the Town of Falmouth, seasonal or permanent, and the promotion of the general welfare of the community." In early 1956, because of the interest of many residents of Maravista, the association was expanded to include that area and it became known as the *Falmouth Heights-Maravista Improvement Association*. Over the years, the association has actively supported public safety issues such as parking and traffic control efforts, efficient police and fire protection, control of group rentals, and noise and litter pollution. The association has more recently worked with the developers of the just completed Casino-Wharf complex. A major association accomplishment, that has undoubtedly greatly impacted the quality of life in the Heights, was the elimination of nightclub operations in the former Terrace Gables building and the subsequent construction of residential units at the site. The then FHMA president Robert T. Smith worked tirelessly during this difficult time in the Heights history. In his memory, a scholarship in his name is sponsored by the association and given annually to a graduating senior at Falmouth High School.

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