

UNTOLD TALES OF FALMOUTH

from the archives of Museums on the Green

A Town Called Nobska

Over 100 years ago some wealthy shore-dwelling summer residents proposed to divide Falmouth into two distinct towns because for years they had felt aggrieved about being taxed to pay for improvements voted at town meetings that ignored their needs.

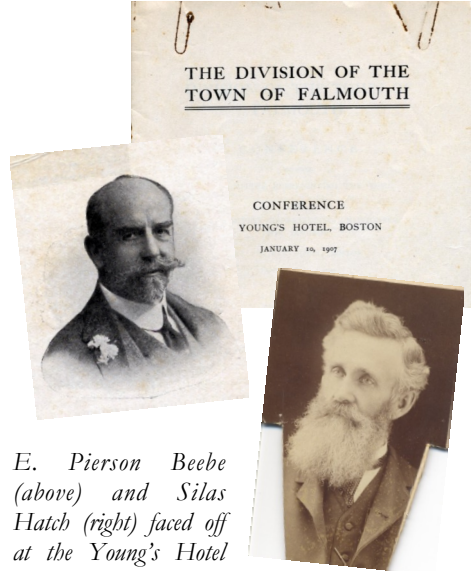
Their spokesman was realtor Horace S. Crowell, the developer of Penzance Peninsula in Woods Hole. It was not an idle threat. Crowell was backed publicly by wealthy Bostonian Henry H. Fay, a son of the late Joseph Story Fay, who in 1850 and 1852 had purchased a large part of Woods Hole from Ward M. Parker. Henry built a summer residence on Nobska Point in 1879.

In December 1906 Crowell filed “An Act to Incorporate the Town of Nobska” at the Massachusetts General Court. If it became law, the new town would

consist of all coastal lands on Buzzards Bay from Woods Hole to Bourne and all land west of a line bisecting Long Pond thence to the western edge of Deep Pond in Hatchville and finally to the town line where Sandwich and Bourne meet. It would contain three-fourths of coastal Falmouth.

Henry Fay and others pounced on the actions taken at the February 1906 town meeting as justification for an act of secession. They protested, specifically, the town’s purchase of John S. Bleakie’s private water system, new schools and a library.

But it was the funding of the Article for an inner harbor at Deacon’s Pond, the most contentious issue at the February 1906 town meeting, which likely led Fay and his cronies to move ahead with his plan for secession. The debate pitted influential citizens



E. Pierson Beebe (above) and Silas Hatch (right) faced off at the Young's Hotel Conference.

Selectman Hatch declared that the idea of division “has made me feel very unpleasant. I was born and brought up in the old Town, and I hope to live and die in it.”

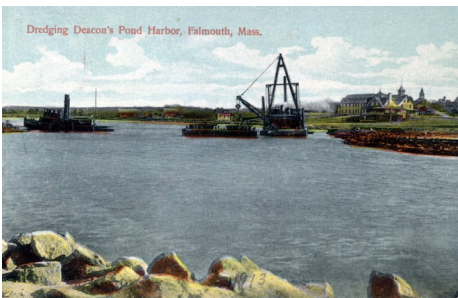
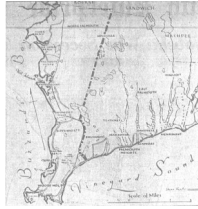
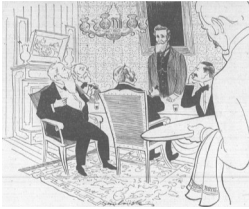
who wanted a free harbor run by the town, which would lift Falmouth's status as a summer resort, against Fay and E.P. Beebe, who favored an outer harbor at the old stone dock and salt pond. At that town meeting the vote was 183 to 11 to raise \$11,000 from the sale of bonds for the town's contribution to inner harbor project.

Afterward, an editorial in the February 17, 1906 *Enterprise* praised the town meeting as harmonious, because everyone wanted to keep the tax rate low, and that: "There was a noticeable absence of offensive personalities." Meanwhile, the petition of separation for the General Court was prepared.

After they learned of the secession plan, an editorial in the December 15, 1906 *Enterprise* had a different tone. Commenting on the proposed division of the town, the editorial justified the February 1906 town meeting appropriations but also noted that: "In many cases they (the summer people) have been treated shamefully by our townspeople." The editorial called for the citizens to respect the business skills of the summer people, acknowledge their financial contributions to the town and to consult them.

A meeting was arranged at Young's Hotel in Boston in early February 1907: the town called on Silas Hatch, the nominal head of the Hatchville clan and the longest serving Selectman, to lead the town's representatives. They came to the meeting pledg-

ing unity and good government. The secessionists at the meeting included E. Pierson Beebe, F.H. Beebe, N.H. Emmons, Henry H. Fay, E.N. Fenno and others. Their position was that there would either be good government or town division.



Top left: Artist's depiction of Silas Hatch at the Young's Hotel Conference. Top right: Map of the proposed boundary between Falmouth and Nobska. (From *Falmouth Enterprise*, May 25, 1962.)

Bottom: Postcard ca. 1913 from Museums' archives. The divisionists had wanted a harbor at the Old Stone Dock, not at Deacon's Pond.

At the Boston meeting the two sides debated whether the residual town of Falmouth could survive without the new town of Nobska? Not likely, the town's men argued: even if they increased taxes the town would still not be economically secure. The school system would be in shambles. And without the harbors, especially Great Harbor in Woods Hole, economic development would slow.

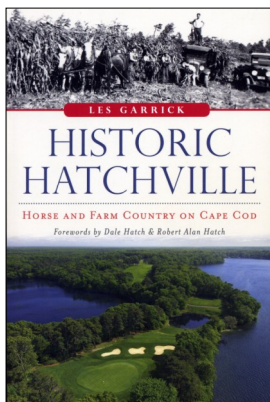
Needless to say, division was the talk of the town before the February 1907 town meeting. Meanwhile, the development of the inner harbor continued, and

the first boat sailed into it from Vineyard Sound on 10 September 1908.

As the February 1907 town meeting approached, Fay spoke out again. Falmouth's problems, he asserted, "resulted from mismanagement, extravagance and carelessness" – particularly high salaries, which should be halved; an interesting proposal from a man who had seven servants at his Beacon Street home. He urged a vote "for those in whom we have confidence." In other words, elect men at town meeting who would cut expenditures, or else.

Town meeting of February 1907 reduced appropriations by 18 percent and salaries of town employees by 25 percent. Selectmen's pay was cut from \$800 to \$500. Apparently, these budget cuts were one price this town meeting had to pay to have the petition for the new town of Nobska withdrawn and a semblance of harmony restored. The other price was the adoption of a report by Fay and Fenno, which codified transparent procedures for town meeting and town officers.

Les Garrick



Learn More

To learn more about Silas Hatch and the village he called home, read Les Garrick's *Historic Hatchville*, available at local bookstores and online. For more information, please visit <http://historichatchville.blogspot.com/2014/06/historic-hatchville-book.html>.

To learn more about the Beebes, the Young's Hotel Conference, or the creation of Falmouth Harbor, visit the Conant House Research Library at 65 Palmer Avenue, open on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 10 till 2.