



UNTOLD TALES OF FALMOUTH

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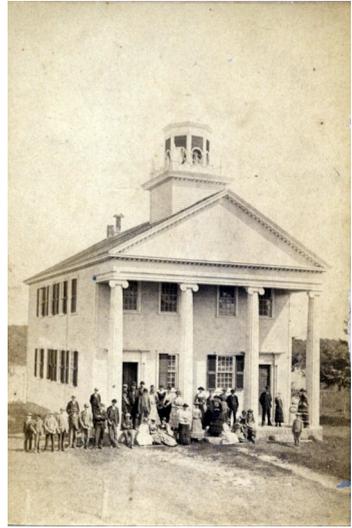
Back to School with Oliver Franklin Swift, circa 1850

I do not know how old I was when I first attended the district school. Our teacher was Miss Harriet Butler, a most estimable Christian woman, full of good words and works and possessed with the desire to do the best she could for those whom she was called upon to teach. That we did not learn much from books was not her fault. I do know that we gained much from experience and our association with each other. That little school house. It seems as if I could see it now. It was situated on the cross road between the Woods Hole and the West Falmouth Road, nearly opposite where the road turns up towards the Falmouth Railroad Depot. It was a small, brown, one story building with three windows on a side and one at the back, all having green shutters. A beautiful, large wild cherry tree hung its graceful and beautiful branches over it, covering nearly half the roof. In the spring time, the birds were flitting among the leaves and hopping from branch to branch, singing their sweetest songs, as if to welcome us to school, apparently as happy and as care free as the children assembling for their daily task. In the later summer the boys and birds would vie with each other to see which would get the largest share of the little black cherries. Oh! My! They were good. At this time I said something that pleased my mother very much, because she said it showed the dawn of intellect. At this distance I very much doubt the intellectual part of it, but at that time it made me feel well satisfied with myself.

Why is a boy in the cherry tree like a certain bird?

Because he is a-robin the cherry tree.

How old I was when I commenced to attend school at Lawrence Academy, I do not know. I do know, however, that it was a happy time for me. There my circle of ac-



Oliver attended Lawrence Academy at what is now the Chamber of Commerce. We have no photos of his district school. It was demolished in 1856 for a new school, which later became the Odd Fellows Hall.

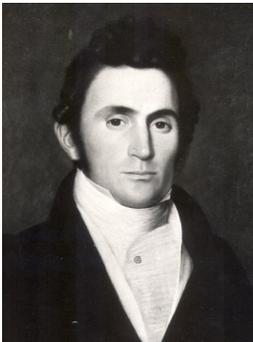
quaintances was very much enlarged. Joshua Robinson came up from Waquoit, eight miles away and rode a little black pony coming in the morning and going home after school. He was envied by all the boys. Tom Fish also came from Quissett some times walking and bringing his dinner and often driving his father's horse. Of all the boys, Tom was my particular friend from out of town.

When I first attended the Academy School, we were let out two hours earlier on Wednesday afternoon and we only had school in the forenoon on Saturdays. Other days from eight thirty to twelve o'clock and from one until four thirty o'clock. Not much time left for play, you will say. If we had been one-half as diligent and careful in our studies as we were in the time devoted to play, it would have been better for us. We certainly did have some enjoyable times. I remember thinking I had the hardest time of any. Saturday morning I had to split up kindlings for the fire in the brick oven. I could not go out to play in the afternoon until I had blackened all the shoes for the family for Sunday and had learned and recited my Sabbath School lesson to mother.

As the long days of summer commenced to shorten I found more time than before for play with my school-mates. It was at that time foot ball was in order as it is now-a-days. Then we had no such contrivance or no game like the present. Our foot ball was home-made. When the village butcher appeared with his overalls in a bundle and his big knives done up in an apron, a bunch of boys would surround him, each crying

"Give me the bladder! Give me the bladder!" The fortunate one with a straw and the help of his friends inflated it. After carefully tying a string below where the straw was inserted, it was the kind of foot ball we used. In the game each one for the most part worked for himself. The fastest runners and strongest boys usually got the best chance for the greatest number of kicks as we chased it up and down the field. The ball often came to an untimely end. When a disappointed boy kicked and to emphasize his displeasure, dropped a rock on the ball, [it] exploded with a loud sound as if it was a squad of soldiers shooting a volley over the last resting place of a comrade.

Oliver Franklin Swift



Oliver Franklin Swift grew up in the house pictured above. It is now the Congregational minister's house. His father, Oliver Cromwell Swift (left) received the house as a gift from his own father and business partner, Elijah Swift.