

UNTOLD TALES OF FALMOUTH

from the archives of Museums on the Green

Indispensable Sources

Part One: *Book of Falmouth* and *Spritsail*

Which books of Falmouth history would you take to a desert island?

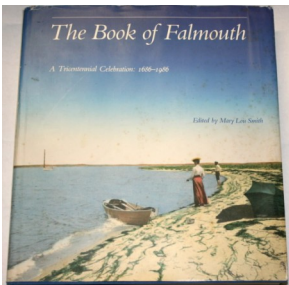
The research department just wrestled with a similar conundrum, caused by our move into temporary quarters for the duration of the Conant House restoration. We typically welcome several researchers, and answer dozens of phone and email queries, every month. To maintain this level of service in smaller quarters, with most of the research library in offsite storage and thus unavailable, we had to consider carefully which books we truly could not live without. Which ones did we always turn to first, whenever a new question arose? Which 10-15 sources answered 90% of our queries, or at least set us on the right track to finding an answer?

Eventually we came up with two shelves of indispensable Falmouth history sources, and thought it was a good idea to share their titles with those who might be researching independently, or trying to build their own collections of local history.

The blue ribbon without a doubt goes to *The Book of Falmouth*, edited by Mary Lou Smith. This volume is not only a comprehensive overview of the town's first three hundred years (1686-1986). It is also a work of art, with stunning black and white vintage photographs reproduced on nearly every page. Dozens of writers contributed sections on their areas of expertise. The chapters, grouped by neighborhood, cover topics as broad as whaling and as focused as "The Glass Factory on Shore Street." Need to know something about the old Hatchville airport, nightclubs in West Falmouth, ice harvesting, hurricanes, or Waquoit oysters? *The Book of Falmouth* should always be the first place that you look. Even if there is no essay devoted to your topic,

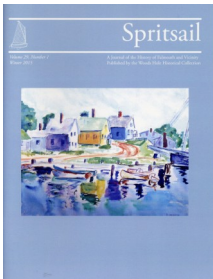


Mary Lou and Paul Ferris Smith were largely responsible for our top two indispensable sources.



there will likely be hints that point you in the right direction for further research. The reverse timeline that runs in the margin of the first chapter is helpful when looking up quick facts, such as when the first zoning law was adopted (1926) or when the trains stopped running (1963).

Often people assume that the Falmouth Historical Society and the Museums on the Green published *The Book of Falmouth*, but that honor goes to the Falmouth Historical Commission. Some of the photos used are in Museums archives, but many come from private collections, or belong to SPNEA (now Historic New England). As copyright holder, the Historical Commission has given the Museums permission to digitize *The Book of Falmouth*, so visitors can now search and view the book on our research library computer. Eventually we would like to post the digitized version online, but its sheer size makes that problematic at present. In the meantime, hardcover copies can be purchased at Eight Cousins, or at our gift shop in the summer season. If you buy only one book on Falmouth, this has to be it.



The journal was named for the craft seen in the oil painting "Woods Hole Sprintsails Racing Great Harbor," by Franklin L. Gifford. Photograph by Paul Ferris Smith, 1974.

Our second most indispensable source is the historical journal, *Sprintsail* (rhymes with schnitzel). Again, Mary Lou Smith was a driving force behind this twice-yearly periodical, produced by the Woods Hole Historical Collection since 1987. Articles we consulted recently include Gordon Todd's "Fire Fighting in Falmouth: Early Times Through 1947," Lewis White's "The Portuguese in Falmouth, 1870-1930," and E. Graham Ward's essays on the *Nimrod* and the War of 1812. Back issues of *Sprintsail* are available online at www.woodsholemuseum.org. At the home page, click Publications, then *Sprintsail*, then the blue word "here" at the end of the text. To purchase copies or subscribe, inquire at the Woods Hole Museum. The public library also has a complete set.

Mary Lou's husband, Paul Ferris Smith, shared her love of history and contributed to the making of *The Book of Falmouth* and *Sprintsail*. As a founder and longtime president of the Woods Hole Museum, Paul was instrumental in establishing its Model Boat Show, boat restoration program, and scale model of the village. To learn more about this First Couple of Falmouth history, follow [these links](#) to *Sprintsail*.

In weeks to come, please watch for more posts describing items that are on our list of indispensable sources.

Meg Castello