



UNTOLD TALES OF FALMOUTH

from the archives of Museums on the Green

Dawn's Early Light at Nobska

by *Oliver Franklin Swift (1840-1918)*

My grandfather Weston Jenkins died before I was born, and I can tell you only what my mother told me about him.

At the commencement of the war with England in 1812, he was considered one of the rich men of Falmouth. He owned part or all of ten or twelve crafts which were engaged in trad-

ing along the Massachusetts coast and as far as New York City and Albany. For fear they would fall into the hands of the enemy, many of [the ships] were taken up to the head of Buzzards Bay and hidden away in Wareham River.

One day the enemy stole in there and set all the vessels on fire. Standing on the hills in Falmouth, people saw their riches take wing and fly away, and the accumulation of years go for naught.

There was a [British] privateer hidden away in Tarpaulin Cove. From there it sent out boats with eight or ten men. They would land at unprotected places along Vineyard Sound and Buzzards Bay and rob and molest persons living adjacent to the shore. Pigs, chickens and especially sheep were their delight.



Gravestone in Oak Grove Cemetery.

Captain Jenkins said this must be stopped.

He told the people he would undertake to do so, if they would cooperate with him. More volunteers than he needed came forward. Mr. John Parker, as a boy, was one of them and he described it to me as follows:

“We all met at Woods Hole. Some of us had guns, but others had anything they thought would kill, such as scythes, knives, and clubs. I had a pitchfork. Captain Jenkins selected a sloop which had been carrying wood. The wood was re-piled around the outside of the deck as high as a man's head. We were told to gather within the hollow square and down in the hold out of sight. Jenkins commanded us to stay there until he gave the sign by stamping on the deck.



The Sloop Two Friends of Falmouth at Tarpaulin Cove by J. Evans, now on display in Conant House.

“He was dressed in oil skin clothes with a sou’wester on his head and stood at the helm. He was the only living person in sight with the exception of a boy helper.

“Captain Jenkins said he was going to capture that privateer in Tarpaulin Cove or die in the attempt. He would depend upon everyone to do their part.

“As we set sail from Woods Hole, the wind was light and the sky was over-cast. When we entered the cove, the wind died down and we went floating along with scarcely wind enough to fill out the sails. Then the clouds lifted, and we discovered the object of our search very near. At the same time we heard the watch on the privateer hail us.

“Who goes there? Answer!”

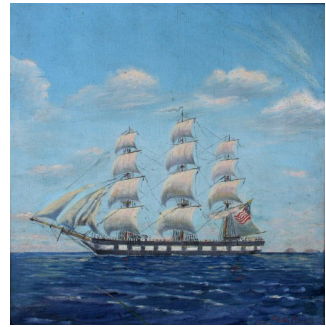
“The good sloop *Mary Ann* loaded with wood bound for Nantucket.”

“At the same time *Mary Ann* sailed directly toward the privateer. The

signal was given; the men rushed on deck and over the side of the armed ship. The guns, shovels, axes and scythes came into action with good effect. The vessel was captured and the officers and men were made prisoners.”

It had been arranged that on their return, in case of success, the American flag would be displayed on the top mast. The hills near Nobska were covered with anxious, sober people long before sunrise. Sweethearts, mothers, sisters, all were hoping for good news from their dear ones.

As the sunlight came, the vessel was seen with the American flag flying.



Orion by Franklin L. Gifford,
owned by Museums on the Green.