



UNTOLD TALES OF FALMOUTH

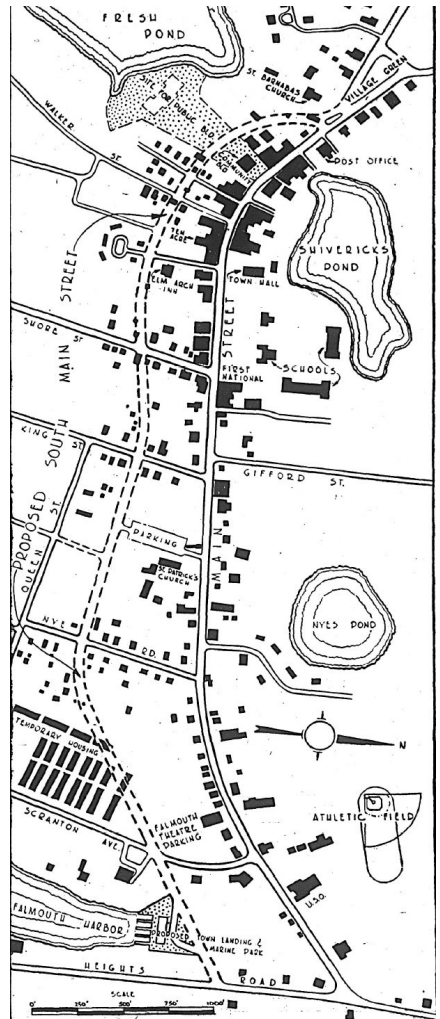
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South Main Street

by Terry White and Meg Costello

A traffic bottleneck. That's what Falmouth's Main Street had become by 1951, but city planner Sidney Shurcliff thought he had the perfect solution. The town needed a South Main Street, he told the Planning Board. His proposal was part of a Master Plan prepared for the town's future development.

Shurcliff made a diagram that showed South Main in dotted lines to the left of Main Street. The 60-foot wide road was to be located a block south of Main Street, running from the Village Green to Heights Road. Construction of the new street would have required the removal of six small residences, two private garages, the former Red Men's hall and the St. Barnabas rectory. The Planning board liked Shurcliff's idea. They asked the town meeting to vote \$700 for a preliminary survey.



The Falmouth Village Improvement Society supported the proposal, although Milford R. Lawrence noted there was nothing new about it. Town planner John Nolen had raised the same idea back in the early 1920s. The Enterprise had published a letter in 1923 from an unnamed resident who favored the plan and suggested that both roads should be made one-way streets. This letter writer pointed out that South Main “would give rear entrances to the present stores on Main Street and relieve Main Street of deliveries by teams and trucks.”



By “teams” the writer meant teams of horses, which shared the road with motor vehicles well into the 1920s.

After much discussion, South Main Street was turned down in 1929 because of the cost. Rejecting town improvements because of cost was a recurring experience for Falmouth. In 1951, Milford Lawrence noted, “We muffed this opportunity 21 years ago . . . I hope we won't do so again. The sooner we do it, the less it will cost.”

When making his proposal in 1951, Shurcliff noted that Falmouth was following a “ribbon” development pattern, i.e., the business district was continuing to grow, but along a single street, Main Street. With the parallel South Main Street, it would be “easy for shoppers to move around the business district” and increase the use of existing parking lots, such as the community building lot and the parking at St. Patrick's Church.



The alternative, Shurcliff suggested, would be the development pattern increasingly used around the country, where shopping centers were located away from the downtown area and constructed around a large parking lot.

Shurcliff was proven right in 1955 when Stop & Shop placed a “big box” store at the corner of Heights Road and Main Street (Davis Straits), followed in 1960 by the creation of a shopping center, called Falmouth Plaza, adjacent to the grocery. Liggett's, W.T. Grant and Woolworth stores were among the first to occupy the new Plaza.

Since 1951, Falmouth has added more shopping centers, but South Main Street remains an imaginary address. Katharine Lee Bates Road, constructed in sections between 1957 and 1962, has become in effect “North Main Street,” taking some pressure off the Main Street bottleneck. If the planners from 1923 or 1951 could come back today, what would they think of downtown Falmouth? Still too much traffic and not enough parking? Maybe, but would anybody really miss the horses?

