



UNTOLD TALES OF FALMOUTH

from the archives of Museums on the Green

Top Three Swimming Spots in 1850

I like [Siders] pond because I first learned to swim there, although I came near losing my life in doing so. We had an old boat that we enjoyed tipping over and pushing backwards and forwards. The older boys liked to take it out in the deep water to dive from. One day I was in it as it floated along in the shallow water. When I was off my guard, one of the big boys gave it a push and before I knew it, I was floating with a fair wind towards the other end of the pond. It was a question whether to jump, or be carried half a mile or more to the other end of the pond and walk back over the sharp stones and through brambles and brushes.

Not realizing how deep the water was, I jumped, and the water I found was a foot or more over my head. As I came to the surface I made my arms go as I had seen the others do, and then down I went and so I continued each time, getting nearer the shore. It was a happy moment when I could stand up with my nose out of the water, and a happier one yet when I finally reached the shore and expelled from the stomach that part of Siders Pond with which I had no use. From that day I could swim and was counted as one of the best of the long distance swimmers. Later I swam from the usual swimming place (almost back of where the Episcopal parsonage now is) to the extreme lower end of the pond and part way back.

Occasionally, after leaving our cows in the pasture, Charlie and I hurried over to Long Pond for our morning swim. The pond at that time looked more beautiful even than it does to-day. There were no houses near it. It was entirely surrounded by woods. As we approached it early in the morning, the sun shining on that beautiful



Siders Pond, Long Pond, and the Old Stone Dock, as depicted in postcards of the early 20th century. We have no photographs of them dating back to Oliver's childhood.

sheet of water with a breeze just rippling its surface from shore to shore, the island in the middle and the wide sandy beach at the west end was a beautiful sight. Do you wonder that we always enjoyed our morning plunge into its crystal water? We were not encumbered by any bathing clothes, and we dried ourselves by running up and down the beach and then by lying in the sun in the green grass. Then we hurried home by the shortest way, over the fences, across lots to our homes in time for breakfast and ample time to dress for school.

We occasionally took a trip to the shore. It was in those days a fine place for a swim. The wharf at the foot of Shore Street at that time was well kept up. It consisted of two piers about one hundred and fifty feet apart, extending straight out into the sound about the same distance and then turned at right angles towards each other for fifty feet, leaving an opening at the end of about fifty feet, and by that means forming an entrance for vessels and a shelter for them after they had entered. The end of the piers was the swimming place and none but boys who could swim well ventured. The bottom was

white sand. The water was usually very clear. The top of the piers was six to eight feet high above high water mark and the depth of water from twelve to fourteen feet deep, according to the tide and wind. When a boy was able to dive from the top of the pier, go to the bottom, grab a handful of sand, swim to the opposite pier and back without stopping, he could do as well as most could. There was seldom any floating sea weed, no stones to hurt your feet, no sand to wash off before dressing and on the whole was an ideal place to enjoy a salt water bath. Of course, we had a way of pushing unsuspecting ones off and seeing them go down and get a stomach full of salt water and many other things which foolish boys are apt to indulge in, but I never knew of any serious accident.

Dear children, do try to learn to swim. I never knew of a boy who could not learn if he was conscientious in his efforts to do so. It may save your own life or some other. It is something you will never forget how to do . . . and if you are thrown unexpectedly into the water, you will without thinking commence to swim.

Oliver Franklin Swift



Clockwise from top: Bathers at Menauhant, 1915. Barbara Gass, Menauhant Beach, 1915. Unidentified diver, ca. 1925. Taft family, North Falmouth, ca. 1900.