



UNTOLD TALES OF FALMOUTH

From the Archives of Museums on the Green

Cocktails with a Mermaid

by DeWitt C. Jones, Jr.

Editor's note: These reminiscences are excerpted from a memoir written by Mr. Jones in 1967. Most of what he wrote was eventually published in the Book of Falmouth, pp. 366-373. A few parts that didn't survive the editor's cut are printed below.

In the summer of 1919, the Prohibition Amendment had become effective, and for a time thereafter everyone, even those many who disapproved of it, tried to give the appearance at least of being law-abiding and were not as blatantly contemptuous of prohibition as later on. Also, many people had acquired a bigger or smaller cache of pre-prohibition liquor, and had not as yet been driven to bath-tub gin.

When I arrived back [in Quissett] from my visit to Nantucket, Father told me, not only that he had met some delightful people at the Harbor House, but, in a whisper, that Lou Coe had invited six or eight of us men for cocktails in his room, but "he does not want it known what goes on, so we must creep up to Lou's room, one by one, and not attract any attention."

The group silently gathered, and Lou produced a bottle of gin and some orange juice. But he had no ice, and for a shaker he had a metal tea kettle. He did not want to give himself away by directly ordering ice. Some genius suggested that he ask the office for a pitcher of ice water, which was regularly supplied, and that there should be enough ice in it to take care of things. So, in dead silence, the guests sat there, while one of the office boys handed Lou his pitcher of ice water, with lots of ice in it.



Then the problem arose that the ice and the other ingredients, when shaken up in the metal tea kettle, would make quite a racket and give the party away. This was solved by wrapping the kettle in a bath towel and shaking it only very gently. The outcome was that all of us sat on Lou's and Mrs. Coe's beds and drank a libation out of china tooth mugs. It was one of the most enjoyable cocktail parties I have ever attended...





A few days later, we were swimming and were seated on the raft. Father, who always had an eye for a good-looking woman – he certainly had married one – grabbed me and said, “Here comes a most attractive girl I met the other day. I’ll introduce you.”

“No,” I replied, “I don’t want to meet any girls.”

“Don’t you be a damn fool.”

A very good looking mermaid hauled herself up on the raft. That summer of 1919, Peggy was the



scandal of Quissett. She had just come back from England, where she had been for three years during the war, and by today’s standards, wore a very modest bathing suit, but it was *one-piece, and she wore no stockings*. She was looked at askance by all the ladies, who put up with the spectacle by reminding themselves that “she had served in the British Army for three years, and so should be forgiven for her immodest way of bathing.”

“Miss Wyman,” said Father, “I want you to meet my son, Clint.”

I made a very formal bow, and said coldly, “How do you do, Miss Wyman,” and immediately dove overboard and swam for shore.

A little more than a year later she and I were married and spent our honeymoon at Quissett in Peggy’s house, after a winter’s courtship in New York, where she was at the Arts Students League, and where we dined in the most expensive and plush restaurants I could find, until

she capitulated. For the rest of the winter and spring we ate at Childs...

Ever since we were married we always had a boat of some sort. Of course, anyone who goes out a lot in boats, as we always did, falls overboard now and then. Sometimes it was not even unintentional. Peggy, before her arthritis got so bad, was an enthusiastic water rat and a fine swimmer...

Late one afternoon a crowd was sitting on the Harbor House porch when a fairly large sailing party approached the dock, Peggy being one of the party. Suddenly one of those on the porch jumped up and shouted, “Quick! A woman has just fallen overboard from that boat.” Someone who knew better replied, “Oh, sit down and shut up. That’s only Peggy Jones.” It seems that the boat was making slow progress, and Peggy was in a hurry to get home, so she had jumped overboard with all her clothes on and swam in to the dock...





For a number of years we had a handy man, Joe, who used to cut our grass, weed the garden, and do minor repairs, so he had a key to the house. Joe was somewhat irritating at times, but he was completely honest . . . A shutter on a window in Peggy's bedroom got loose and banged a lot when there was a wind. I asked Joe to fix it during the coming week, which he said he would do. When I came back the next weekend nothing had been done. This went on for four weeks and the shutter was still banging.

On the fifth weekend I was thoroughly annoyed and said, "Joe, I'm pretty sore about this. For five weeks you have promised me you would fix that shutter, and you've done nothing. I damn well want it fixed before I come back next week."

Monday morning, after I had gone back to New York, Joe appeared and remarked to Peggy, "Mr. Jones seemed kind of mad at me on Saturday."

"Yes, Joe, he was very annoyed at you for not having fixed that shutter."

"Well," said Joe, "I got to thinking about it Saturday night. Then I remembered that he works in Wall Street, and so is very irritable, so I have forgiven him."

I finally fixed that shutter myself...

To celebrate her 60th birthday, down at the beach, Peggy stood on her head and hands and waved her legs in the air with the water up to her waist. She was broken-hearted when her health prevented a repeat performance on her 70th birthday...

May I, in closing, be a bit sentimental? Two people loved [Quissett] more than any other place on earth...Of course, I mean Sally Francis and Peggy.

Now, in one of our favorite phrases, they have both "gone west." But I am sure that Sally and Peggy would be happy to know that memories of them. . . stay green and warm in the thoughts of the many of Quissett who knew and loved them.



TOP: Yachts in Quissett Harbor c1900. **RIGHT:** Burgee (pennant), Quissett Yacht Club, made by order of its first Commodore, Joe Holland, c1912. Photo and pennant are both in the Museums' collection