



UNTOLD TALES OF FALMOUTH

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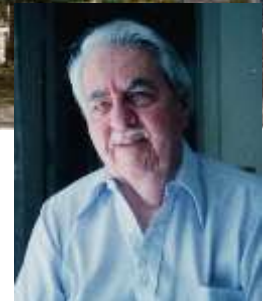
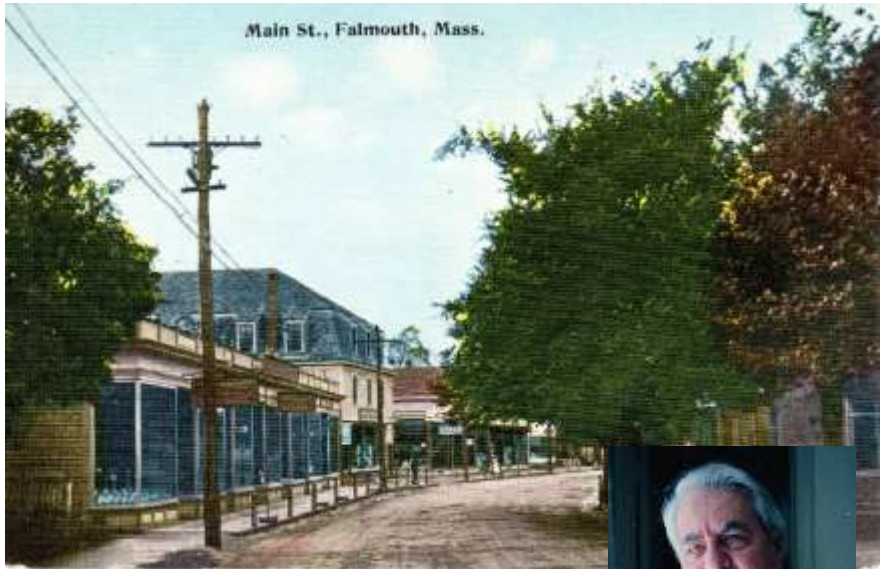
Nightingale on Main Street

by Lloyd T. Nightingale (1915-2010)
Excerpt from a memoir written c1994

As we stroll along Main Street, I will describe some of its more interesting aspects from the 1920s.

The present fire station was built in 1929 and it looks as good today as when it was built, even though sixty-five years have passed. Over to the right of the present station, in the corner of the lot, was the original wooden fire station. It once housed a pumper and a hook and ladder. These vehicles were painted bright red and decorated with gold leafed letters and stripes.

To pass the fire station at twelve noon or at four-thirty was an experience to remember. It was at these times when the daily alarms were sounded. Suddenly, you would find yourself involuntarily airborne to at least two feet above the ground.



Counterclockwise from Top: Main Street, Falmouth; author Lloyd T. Nightingale; The Falmouth House; Falmouth Fire Dept.

WOW!

The Falmouth House, on the corner of Shore Street, was a popular lodging house for out-of-towners. Included in its accommodations was a large dining room, a bar and a porch with dozens of rockers, which enabled the visitors to sit and observe the "passing parade."

A friend once invited me to dinner at the Falmouth House. The occasion was the monthly meeting of the Falmouth Rod and Gun Club, of which he was a member. We were seated in the dining room and engaged in the usual chatter. The smoke was pretty thick but I figured I could put up with it. The drinking was in full swing. All of a sudden dinner rolls were flying back and forth across the room.

Great fun! Soon the fun changed and escalated into something more serious. Everything, including knives and forks were flying thick and fast. About then, I decided to get out of this no man's land. I never returned. It's a good thing the members had left their guns at home.





"The Greeks" was a combination soda fountain and candy store. What a heavenly place for any kid. Their banana splits were fabulous and not the puny things one gets today. They sold for only twenty cents. The air of the place was always permeated with a delicious fragrance. The candy counter had a large selection and it cost only five cents for a candy bar that was bigger than the ones you buy today for sixty-five cents.

Sheehan's bakery was an oasis on Main Street. I not only enjoyed looking at the pies, cakes, cookies, eclairs displayed in the window, but the heavenly aroma of fresh baking bread gave me goosebumps. Ah! What a delicious memory.

Nickerson's Hardware was located on the corner of Cahoon Court and Main Street. The owner was Judah Nickerson. His son Ed was a good friend of mine who became a town selectman in his later years. The store dealt mostly with hardware, but in the spring, vegetable and flower seeds were a part of the inventory. At the end of the season, the leftovers were discarded in the trash behind the store. I was always "treasure" hunting behind all of the stores, and when the seeds went out, I was on hand to salvage them.

Greene, the photographer, had a most interesting window display. It was here that I saw my first exhibit of marine oil paintings. They were painted by a local artist, E.F. Lincoln. Most of them were of square-riggers and they were superb. Oh, to be able to paint like that.

Morrison's Market dealt only in meats. Whenever I went there with my mother, the butcher would always give me a frankfurter to chew on. The floors were covered with fresh sawdust each day. The butchers were very friendly and would cut the meat to order. Their dress was always the same; a clean white shirt and apron, dark trousers and a straw hat. I guess the hat kept their heads warm when they entered the walk-in freezer.



Top Left: Bowman's Home Bakery and Greene's Photo Studio.

Top Right: Newspaper ads, c1915.

Right: E.E.C. Swift Co. Meat Provisions, Depot Ave., c1920.



Top Left: The New York Clothing Store, run by the Malchman brothers, eventually became known as Malchman's.

Below: Lloyd T. Nightingale illustration.



Next door to Morrison's Market was another market, run by an old guy named Wallace. He was a typical Cape Cod character--kindly, but also a sly one. When weighing meat he would concentrate his gaze up on the number gauge a little longer than usual, and of course this would draw your attention up there, too. This was designed to give you the impression of his intent to read the gauge correctly, all the while he was putting his thumb on the scale. No matter how small the piece of meat, he would announce, "That's just a dollar", then quickly, as a diversion he would ask, "How's your mother?" "Just a dollar Wallace," as he was nicknamed, made more money off his thumb, than off all the meat he ever handled.

Malchman's Clothing Store on the corner of Main and Walker Streets was established by two brothers, Thomas and Harris Malchman from New York. They wandered into town one day with only packs on their backs. Soon after their arrival, they acquired a small piece of land in the center of town. Here, the New York Clothing Store came into business. As time passed, the business flourished and eventually it became known as Malchman's.

The Falmouth Enterprise was located on the upstairs floor of a building across the street from Eastman's Hardware. While the lower floor was a regular print shop, the upstairs contained the Linotype and newspaper press. I liked to watch the Linotype in operation. The typist punched out stories and the hot lead slugs slid down a chute and into a trough. They were then picked up by an assistant and locked up tight in a case, ready for the press bed. The old fellow in charge of the press, Albert Powers, looked as though he had just stepped out of a *Saturday Evening Post* cover by Norman Rockwell.



Above: *The Falmouth Enterprise* was printed in this building at 149 Main Street in Falmouth.

Next door to Eastman's Hardware was San Souci's Barber Shop. I always had Joe Czpiel cut my hair. The price was fifty cents. Harry San Souci was a heavy set man, almost completely bald and wearing half eyes. The strange thing was, he never looked through them when cutting hair, but over them. I always wondered why he wore them. Harry was my landlord when I lived on Walker Street. Every Sunday morning, Harry would leave a bouquet of prize gladioli on the steps of each of his tenants. They were surplus from a field of prize winning flowers, which he raised as a hobby.



Left: The Super A&P market was one of two main grocery stores in Falmouth.

Right: Summer policeman Norman Wright, c1925.

One summer, someone had the bright idea of placing a policeman at the intersection of Main and Walker Streets. On one

particular Saturday, a patrolman named Laban Robbins was on duty. He had been furnished with a "booth" that consisted of a canvas covered frame of pipes, about four feet high. Standing in the booth, Laban went through the routine of directing traffic – not that anyone paid much attention.

Suddenly, a very confused lady drove her car into Laban's stand, knocking it over and punching a hole in the canvas. Laban wasn't hurt, but his pride suffered. He was as mad as a wet hen and the best he could do was write her a ticket.

Saturday night out was always the big event of the week. After an early supper, everyone headed to town to do their weekly grocery shopping. There were two main grocery stores, the A&P and the First National. Grocery shopping was quite different from today's methods. The various items were displayed on shelves behind a long counter. There were no carts or checkouts. Customers were served on a first come basis by four or five clerks who would take your order, one item at a time, and then rush about, nearly colliding with one another.

Heavier items were kept on the lower shelves while the lighter things were on the top shelves. These were retrieved by a clamp, operated at the end of a long pole. If the clamp slipped, it made better sense to be bopped on the head with a box of corn flakes than a can of beans.

Coffee came roasted, whole, in bags. It was ground to order as the other items were being bagged and totaled. There were no adding machines, so the prices were totaled on a brown paper bag with a pencil. If you found an error, you brought the bag back for refiguring and a possible reimbursement. The fragrance of grinding coffee filled the store.

One evening, I was with my parents as they shopped. I noticed a young man in overalls, waiting to be served. Suddenly he jumped in the air, yelling and slapping at the seat of his pants. Smoke was pouring out of his back pocket. In those days safety matches hadn't yet been invented and men carried Ohio Blue Tips. These matches would ignite when rubbed on any surface or on each other, as had happened in this instance. Finally, he spotted a way out of his dilemma. He quickly immersed his fanny in the vinegar of an open pickle barrel, extinguishing the blaze.



Top: Donnelly Barber Shop
Above: Lloyd T. Nightingale illustration.



After the shopping was completed nearly everyone went to the Elizabeth Theatre to take in a movie. There were two showings -- 7 p.m. and 9 p.m. The show was usually a western, starring such actors as Tom Mix and Buck Jones. The pictures were in black and white and, of course, there was no sound. Occasionally a dog picture was shown, starring either Rin-Tin-Tin or Strongheart. All shows were accompanied by Pathe News, a cartoon and, of course, commercials.

The Elizabeth Theatre has at least one claim to fame. Jimmy Stewart made his debut there in 1928. A Falmouth producer had spotted Jimmy in a Cape tea room, playing an accordion. The act was so bad that he felt sorry for him and gave him a bit part in a play at the Elizabeth.

Jimmy returned with Henry Fonda to play in summer stock at the Old Silver Beach Playhouse. This establishment was run by Lou Walters. I did

a lot of work for Lou over the years and he always introduced me as the best sign painter he ever knew. The little girl I often saw running around the playhouse (she was about 10 or 12) was his daughter, Barbara Walters.

On the last facet of our walk down Main Street, we go to the north end of Main Street--nearly to the Heights corner. On the west side of the street is a big, old, wooden building, which once housed the town's poor. Today its occupants have either passed away or are spending their last days in a nursing home.

The place is no longer a residence for the poor, but has been converted into a home for the Falmouth Art Guild. You figure it out.

Left: Jimmy Stewart and Henry Fonda played in summer stock at the Old Silver Beach Theatre.



Top Left: Main Street with Elizabeth Theatre marquee on left.
Top Right: "The Beautiful City," "Little Annie Rooney" and "The Phantom Express" played at the Elizabeth Theatre.