



# UNTOLD TALES OF FALMOUTH

From the Archives of Museums on the Green



## The Disappearing Road

*Terry White and Meg Costello*

Fans of the Beebe family may have heard of Tanglewood, Highfield's sister mansion that sadly fell to the wrecking ball in 1977.<sup>1</sup> But very few know about the road that once led to Tanglewood's front door. If you've ever traversed the bike path behind Falmouth's bus station, you've probably seen this abandoned road without realizing what it was.

If you walk north on the bike path between the Falmouth bus station and the Steamship Authority parking lot, you may

notice off to the left, behind a section of post and rail fence, a depression in the ground heading up the hill. Its appearance resembles a dry riverbed. There is no marker to inform you that this depression used to be the driveway to Tanglewood. You also would probably never guess that the driveway went under the railroad tracks that have long since given way to the Shining Sea Bikeway.

The railroad came to Falmouth in 1872, and the Beebe estates on the hill were constructed soon after that, around 1878. At Tanglewood, J. Arthur Beebe stayed with his wife and three children, while Highfield was the preserve of his unmarried siblings Pierson, Emily, and Frank. They were a close-knit family, sharing the forest and trails that we know as the Beebe Woods. At first, they also shared a single access to the two residences, but J. Arthur soon decided that he wanted his own road.

J. Arthur may have been put off by the surface railroad crossing at the junction of Depot Avenue and Highfield Drive. Anybody bound up or down the hill was forced to wait there for trains to stop, unload, and pass by. Moreover, the end of Depot Avenue had a distinctly industrial flavor. Starting in 1890, a busy grain mill operated just a few hundred feet down the tracks. Delivery wagons and tourist conveyances clogged the area around the depot. It just didn't look or feel like the entrance to a gentleman's vacation retreat.

**The sides of Tanglewood's drive were marked by stone retaining walls, some of which can still be seen. These walls mark where the road descended the hill. Photos by Tom Mountford.**





**Left:** Beebe caretaker's house and driveway on Depot Ave.

**Below:** View from bus access road, looking down into thicket. Traces of the road's retaining wall are visible in the center left. Elks parking lot is in the background. Photo by Tom Mountford.



stone wall marked the beginning of a driveway that, at present, is cut short by a group of trees. In J. Arthur's time, however, this drive continued to run north for some distance before taking a turn to the west and passing under the railroad tracks, then proceeding up the hill to Tanglewood.

If you stand on the bus access road, at a point just after it turns left to approach the station, you can look down into an overgrown thicket and make out traces of a stone retaining wall. These ruins line up with the "riverbed depression" coming down the hill. Together, they show where J. Arthur's family used to outwit the trains by going under them.

Philip H. Choate describes this underpass in the *Book of Falmouth*:

Between the Railway Express Agency and the freight house was a small wooden bridge; a road passed under this bridge and climbed the hill to the Beebe estate at Tanglewood. As kids we would dare each other to stand under the bridge as a train passed over.<sup>ii</sup>

The structure that allowed the Beebes' horse-drawn carriages (and later, cars) to pass under the tracks was likely similar to the still existing underpass near mile 1.5 on the Shining Sea Bikeway, where Fay Road passes beneath. Stone walls on each side support large wooden beams on top of which is a wooden surface for the road bed. Sufficient height was required for the horse and carriage to clear the beams of the bridge.

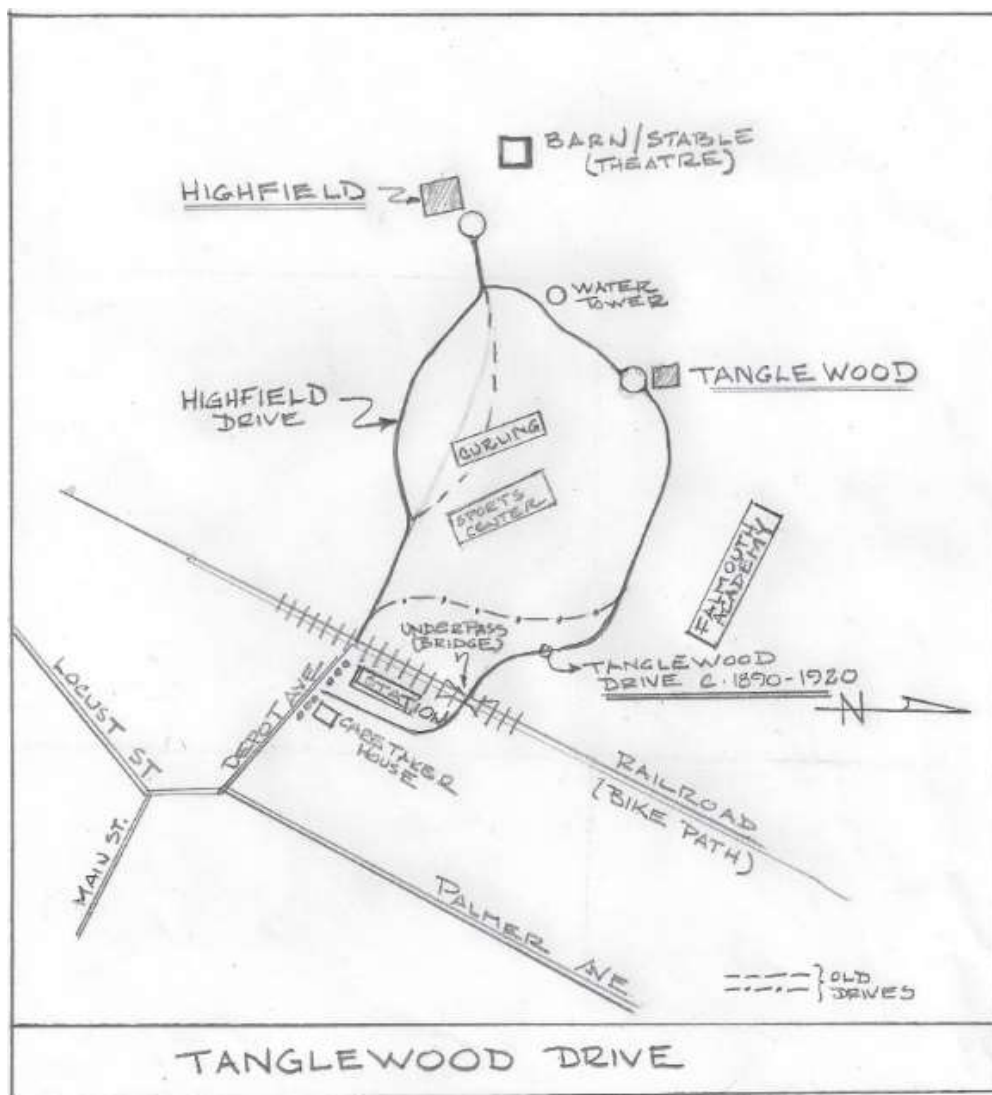
After passing under the tracks, the Beebe road wound its way up the hill to the mansion, passing just south of (now) Falmouth Academy. Tanglewood, with its outbuildings, stood about 500 feet northeast of Highfield, on land that is now privately owned. Two residences and a communications tower stand in the mansion's place today.

**Tanglewood's underpass must have looked similar to the Fay Road underpass of today, seen here. Photos by Terry White.**



The three different routes to Tanglewood are preserved on maps in the Museums' archives. The earliest of these is an 1880 map, at which time the drive up the hill started at the railroad tracks and quickly split into two separate drives. Sometime later, but before 1907, the drive through the underpass was constructed. A map of 1927 shows that this route was still in use at that time.

At some point, probably after the death of the last Beebe resident in 1932, the Tanglewood drive was considered no longer necessary, and the underpass was filled in, leaving only depressions on either side of the railroad tracks to mark where the drive once lay. Highfield Drive remained as the sole access road to the two mansions.



Composite map, showing Beebe access routes of 1880, 1907, and 1927. Drawn by Terry White.

The Beebes were particular about their riding trails in the woods, as well as the driveways from the station. Workers on the estate regularly cleared and swept these passages. One day a week, in season, members of the public were allowed to drive through the Beebe estate and enjoy its shady trails. Presumably many of these visitors used the Tanglewood approach. In 1908 the *Enterprise* reported a mishap:

Miss Helen Lockhart was thrown from her wheel [i.e., bicycle] while riding down the hill from Tanglewood, one day recently, and she received a severe cut on her forehead and also injured one wrist quite badly.<sup>iii</sup>

Two years later the paper announced, "The driveway leading from Depot avenue to Tanglewood is to be lighted by electricity, the lights having been installed this week."<sup>iv</sup>

Once so brilliantly lit, the Tanglewood road is now fading back into nature. The mansion itself passed through a series of owners who used it for various endeavors, including a theatre, hotel, and health spa. After a period of disuse, the old house was demolished without notice in 1977. Other elements of the Beebe estate have disappeared as well. Most notable of these was an 1892 water tower once situated between the two mansions. Its tank stored water supplied from a pump house near the train station. The water tower was torn down in the late 1970s.



Thanks to J.K. Lilly, who donated the bulk of the Beebe Woods to be preserved from development forever, and to the citizens who rescued Highfield Hall from its sister's fate, the Beebe family's estate is now a playground for us all. J. Arthur's old road may be nearly forgotten, but people have found their way up the hill just the same—and most of today's visitors aren't even merchant princes.<sup>v</sup>

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<sup>i</sup> Two standard reference works about the Beebes and Highfield Hall are *Ring Around the Punch Bowl* by George Moses (1976) and *Cape Cod's Highfield and Tanglewood: A Tale of Two Cottages* by Kathleen Brunelle (2012). Both books are available at the public library; Brunelle's book may be available in bookstores as well.

<sup>ii</sup> Philip H. Choate, "Rails to the Shining Sea," *Book of Falmouth*, p. 75f.

<sup>iii</sup> *Falmouth Enterprise*, Saturday, May 09, 1908; Page 4.

<sup>iv</sup> *Falmouth Enterprise*, Saturday, August 13, 1910; Page 5.



<sup>v</sup> Many thanks to Tom Mountford, who contributed research and photography for this article.