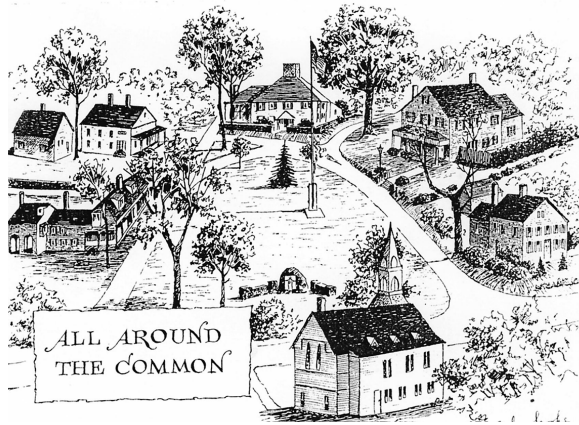


# A WALKING TOUR THROUGH OLD YARMOUTH PORT



By Donald Wood

(Originally published for the Barnstable County Tercentenary in 1985; updated in 2009 and 2022)

Printed by the Historical Society of Old Yarmouth

**The Historical Society of Old Yarmouth is pleased to publish this walking tour for all of those who would like to know more about our historic town.**

## A WALKING TOUR THROUGH OLD YARMOUTH PORT by Donald Wood

Come walk through the years with us in historic Yarmouth Port! We'll stroll about a mile through the village center – a short part of that old highway from Plymouth Colony that the first settlers followed to Cape Cod. For untold years it was only an Indian path, but the early comers of the 1600s soon homesteaded along the way. The 1700s brought stagecoach and mail service, and many small farms supported towns along the route. But the most rapid development of the village came about during the 1800s as salt making, manufacturing, shipbuilding and maritime commerce brought a heady prosperity. The Cape was booming after the War of 1812 – and much of the charm and character of old Yarmouth Port is still available for you to see and enjoy.

The road we follow has had many names; called the King's Highway (Queen's Highway at one point) and the Grand Army of the Republic Highway after the Civil War. It has locally been called Hallet Street, Main Street, and the Cranberry Highway. It is known as the Old King's Highway and is an historic district from Bourne to Orleans.

Let's start our walk at the First Congregational Church – a hard to miss landmark and a handy place to park. From this church west to Barnstable, it was known as "up street;" to the east, "down street." This church started with the first settlers in 1639 and their first services were held at what is now Ancient Cemetery on Center Street. This 1870 building is the fourth church building. High on a hill, the steeple was a welcome sight to mariners in the Bay. The location had a windmill known as Charlie's Folly prior to the church. The steeple has been twice lost to storms.

From the church, take a left (west) along Route 6A. Along the way, you'll notice a lot of buildings with black schooner plaques, indicating that sea captains at one time lived there. Several are now inns or public buildings. This part of Route 6A is known as Captains' Mile, and there is a separate map identifying each of the captains' homes. One of the first that you'll encounter is the Colonial House Inn. Its architecture was changed to reflect the French fashions of the day. The Colonial House Inn is also famous for its ghosts, but that's another story.

Just past the Inn, a short way on the Village Green, you'll find the Captain Bangs Hallet house. The

original front of the house was a store, but it was cut off and moved in the 1830s and now resides at 39 Summer Street. The house was rebuilt in the 1840s.

Captain Hallet, retired from the China-India trade, acquired the house from Captain Allen H. Knowles in 1863. This Greek Revival home is now owned by the Historical Society of Old Yarmouth and is the only furnished captain's home open to the public on Cape Cod. It's well worth a visit, as is the giant European Weeping Beech Tree just behind the building!

Directly across the green is the Edward Gorey Museum. Originally a sea captain's home, it was purchased by the author-artist-designer Edward Gorey in 1979 and he lived there until his death in 2000. Winner of a Tony Award for "Dracula," the museum draws large crowds of Gorey fans from around the world.

Directly across the highway from the green is the beautiful "New Church" or Church of the New Jerusalem. It is often called the Swedenborgian Church and is now being restored by the New Church Preservation Foundation. While this church was built in 1870, Swedenborgians have been in Yarmouth since the 1840s, at one time using the second floor of what is now Parnassus Book Store.

A few doors down stands the circa 1780 Winslow Crocker house, owned by Historic New England. The house originally stood about nine miles to the west on Route 6A in West Barnstable. It was disassembled and moved to its present location by Mary Thacher in the 1930s. She restored its pine paneling and wainscoting and it is furnished with antiques, being open two Saturdays a month during the summer.

Right next door on the corner of Thacher Street is the Colonel John Thacher house (c. 1680). The original house consisted of the eastern section only. The family needed plenty of room – Colonel Thacher and his wives were blessed with twenty-one children. Colonel Thacher was the son of one of the first founders of Yarmouth.

Across the street to the west of the Post Office is the Benjamin Gorham Cobbler Shop. This building and the addition behind it are the headquarters, administrative office, and archives of the Historical Society, and it is open Tuesdays and Thursdays. Behind the Post Office is the gate house which acts as the entrance way to the more than 50 acres of nature trails owned and maintained by the Historical Society. The trails were originally Wayside golf links,

set up by Henry C. Thacher and the first golf course on Cape Cod.

Henry C. Thacher's descendant, Guido Perera, gave the Captain Bangs Hallet house and the lands to the Historical Society in 1956. A few yards down the trail is the 1873 Kelley Chapel and the blacksmith shop. The chapel was built by David Kelley, a Quaker. This non-denominational chapel was donated by Amos Kelley Haswell on behalf of the Kelleys of South Yarmouth. It has original 18<sup>th</sup> century Quaker pews and is open for seasonal services, weddings, and other events.

Just west of the Post Office is the Old Yarmouth Inn, the earliest portion of it a stagecoach stop built in 1696. Goodie Hallet, the reputed witch and girlfriend of the pirate Black Bellamy, reportedly worked briefly at this inn. Today, the OYI is a famous northside restaurant, frequented by locals.

The Greek Revival building next door, complete with columns, has been a residence, an annex to the Old Yarmouth Inn, and an inn by itself. Across Summer Street, on the corner is one of the few remaining village pumps – a feature of life that was common years ago. The pump and stone watering trough date from 1886. The wrought iron memorial was erected in 1928. Summer Street was known as Cow Lane and Hawes Lane in earlier times – a dirt trail to lead the cows to a village watering hole at Dennis Pond. It was also the quickest way to get to Hyannis by foot or horse.

Across Route 6A is the popular Parnassus Book store with its outdoor bargain shelves. Named Parnassus because it is owned by the Muses, it is a well-known location for people searching for hard-to-find books.

A few buildings further west from Parnassus is the old Lyceum Hall – the center of the community's cultural and social life in years gone by. This one, now a private home, would still be in use but for the total lack of land for parking.

Across the street and sprinkled liberally throughout the village, stand many fine representatives of traditional Cape Cod architecture. These are very special, as these were the houses seen by Reverend Timothy Dwight of Yale in the early 1800s when he first named the architecture as Cape Cod. On the Summer Street corner a three quarter Cape, then a full Cape followed by four half Capes.

Half Capes were sometimes expanded to make three quarter or full Capes, but more often the ells were added to the rear. Many half Capes were reportedly given as a dowry to unmarried daughters – many much larger Cape Cod homes developed from a humble beginning as a half Cape.

A short distance west is what might be called euphemistically downtown Yarmouth Port. Three more restaurants, all frequented by locals, along with antique shops and businesses make up this area. Hallet's Drug Store, now a soda fountain and luncheon establishment, has a fine collection of early Yarmouth pictures and artifacts, as well as great ice cream! Across the street from Hallet's is Captain Frederic Howes' cottage, his summer home in the 1850s. Howes is famous for inventing the double rig sails for square-rigged ships, allowing vessels to sail with fewer crew. Now the house is the Optimist Café.

The south side of the street holds more Capes and on the northside of the road are the two houses of the Eldridges, (# 92 and #100) perhaps the most famous of the sea captains of Cape Cod. Asa lived in #100 and still holds the title for the fastest sail crossing of a commercial vessel (the clipper *Red Jacket*) between New York and Liverpool. Asa was lost on the steam packet *Pacific* when it disappeared on a trip from Liverpool to New York a few years after he set his record.

Wharf Lane used to be called Central Street when Central Wharf was thriving. This all changed after sail lost out to steam and a terrific storm known as the Portland storm of 1898 laid waste that commercial area. On the east side of Wharf Lane and Route 6A you'll notice a house with an extension jutting out a few feet from ground to roof. This is known as a "Beverly Jog" – why I really don't know.

Across the street are more captains' homes and the Liberty Hill Inn, site of where one of Yarmouth's liberty poles stood during the Revolutionary War. The building across Willow Street has been many businesses, the most famous being the original home of the now famous Christmas Tree Shops.

Mill Lane is a wonderful extension of the tour. The house on the corner was formerly a cobbler's shop, now with many additions. The vacant land on the left is the site of the first home of Yarmouth's first resident, Stephen Hopkins. A half mile down the road skirts the mill pond and a wonderful bridge. There was a working mill at the bridge site and you can see

the surging power of the changing tide under the bridge.

Turning on to Water Street, a few hundred yards ahead on the left take the dirt road which leads to what is left of Central Wharf. This was the PORT of Yarmouth Port.

When you reclaim your car at First Congregational Church, turn east on Route 6a for 2/5ths of a mile and then turn left on Center Street. After half a mile you'll come to Ancient Cemetery on your left, and the site of the first Congregational Church. The empty area in the southeast corner is where the bodies of Indians and African-Americans were moved by the town in 1826, in a display of intolerance our history is all too famous for. The cemetery also contains a stone with a curse, a modern one dating from the 1980s.

Another half mile and a left fork leads you to Gray's Beach at Bass Hole. The site of the town's original port, until it silted in during the early 1800s, a 900 foot board walk gives incredible views of the great march, Sandy Neck peninsula with its lighthouse, and to the right of the creek, the Aquacultural Research Corporation, known to locals as the Clam Factory.

Legend has that Bass Hole was used by the Vikings when they explored America in 1003 AD. More certainly, Bass Hole of the 1700s had shipyards capable of turning out fishing and trading schooners up to 150 tons. There are picnic facilities for you to use to enjoy your lunch, unless you prefer to head back to Route 6A to stop at one of Yarmouth Port's great eating establishments.