

Looking Back: Falmouth at Work

Introduction by Jacki Forbes

Early in 1998 Carol Chittenden and Paulette Loomis, members of Falmouth Council for the Arts, discussed the paucity of public art in Falmouth with a few friends. The discussion led to a decision to present the town of Falmouth with a bronze bas relief of something about Falmouth. At that time Falmouth was implementing its Main Street revitalization project, and the idea was to put the bas relief sculpture directly into the sidewalk for people to enjoy and touch. The year 2000 seemed like a reasonable target for presentation of such a gift, and the friends set about realizing their goal. This was the beginning of the Committee to Encourage Public Art.

Paulette, Carol, Polly Seliger Egelson, Mary Orr and Linda Davis, formed an ad hoc committee, discussed the idea with the Selectmen (who were in favor), began drawing up plans for choosing an artist, and submitted a grant proposal to the Falmouth Cultural Council to help with start-up costs. The Council was interested and awarded one of their larger grants. Shortly thereafter the ad hoc committee sent out requests for proposals and chose a judging committee including Edith Bruce, artist and owner of Woods Hole Gallery; Nancy Lambert, owner of Cape Gallery Framers and member of the Falmouth Village Association; Douglas Jones, member of the Falmouth Public Library Board of Trustees; Heather Harper, assistant to the Town Administrator; Ramona DeFilippis, Principal of the East Falmouth School, and John DeMello, retired banker and member of the first Arts Lottery Council which had begun in 1981.

While all the submissions were interesting, Sarah Peters' idea stood out and won unanimously. She called

her project "Looking Back: Falmouth at Work," and presented nine sketches of representations of industries that had been important in the formation of Falmouth as we know it today. The committee chose two of those industries and began contacting and working with the various town departments to determine exactly where and how these plaques would be installed.

Having selected the artist, the committee's fundraisers began in earnest. Dan Solein of Horiuchi and



Artist Sarah Peters assists Jose L. Carvalho of Fall River with the installation of bronze plaques on Falmouth's Main Street in 2003. *Falmouth Enterprise* photograph by Michael Stewart Sowers.



Carol B. Chittenden and artist Sarah D. Peters put on an easel the first bronze plaque to be installed along Main Street in 2000, one of 11 highlighting the early industries of Falmouth. This plaque depicts the salt industry. *Falmouth Enterprise* photograph by Daniel W. Webb.

Solein Landscape Architects in Falmouth; Margaret Hough Russell of the *Falmouth Enterprise*, and Regina Kyle, an artist then sharing space at the Open Door Gallery with Linda Davis, signed on. Heather Wright agreed to serve as Treasurer. By this time they were meeting weekly.

One of the town boards whose approval the committee needed was the Historic Districts Commission. They were so enthusiastic about Sarah Peters' idea that they challenged the committee to fund all nine plaques, and add two more for a total of 11 plaques. Each plaque tells of a completely different facet of the town, its people, and its history: from eel fishing in pre-colonial times to the present day resort community; from industries that covered the whole of Falmouth, even the whole of Cape Cod, such as the saltworks, sheep farming and the woolens industry, to industries specific to small areas such as the Pacific Guano Company and marine sciences, both

in Woods Hole. The accompanying articles also illustrate how our diverse ethnic population arrived and fit into the community.

Clearly such a challenge could not all be accomplished by the year 2000, and the committee debated long hours before finally agreeing to take on the enormously expanded task. The amount of money that had to be raised grew so dramatically with this expansion that members of the ad hoc committee knew they would have to become a non-profit organization to offer donors a tax deduction. But the project was so exciting they agreed to take it on.

By 2001, a few committee members had gone on to other things and new members had been found. I joined in 2001; my graphic design skills were needed as Mary Orr had to resign. Jill Tompkins joined at the same time and immediately began writing proposals to granting agencies. Regina Kyle had opened her own gallery and was busy more than full time with other things. But the core group steadfastly pursued the goal of using these plaques to promote education about our early history both in the schools and among other Falmouth residents.

By 2003 six plaques had been completed, and we decided to get them safely installed while Sarah Peters worked on the remaining five plaques. For one thing, it would probably help funding efforts for people to be able to see the quality of the work they were getting for their donations. One of the committee's early decisions had been to establish an advisory board. One member of that board, Dr.

Arlene Mollo, a professor at the University of Massachusetts, Dartmouth, spearheaded an effort to publicize the work. With her guiding the effort, we joined forces with the Falmouth Historical Society and the Woods Hole Historical Museum to produce a series of articles about the industries represented by the six plaques that had been completed. That entailed a request for a substantial grant from the Massachusetts Foundation for the Humanities. We got the grant, along with some serious encouragement. *The Falmouth Enterprise* strongly supported the effort and agreed to publish the articles in all its four area newspapers. *The Enterprise* also financed, with only a little help from the committee through some of the grant money, the publication of a compilation of the six articles in the fall of 2003 in a newsprint tabloid format; again distributed in all four of its publications.

And finally in the fall of 2005, with the remaining five plaques back from the foundry, plans were made for installation in the spring of 2006. William Lopes of Tavares Landscaping agreed to do this final installation for a fraction of what it would have cost through anyone else. And a good thing that was! Costs for everything had gone up substantially from our original estimates, and our coffers were low.

At each dedication, both for the first six plaques in 2003 and the final five in 2006, people poured out from all parts of town, to stand next to the plaques they had contributed towards – or next to the plaques that most closely represented their part in Falmouth's history.

In 2006 we applied again for funding from the Massachusetts Foundation for the Humanities for a series of articles describing the industries represented by the remaining five plaques – those

installed in April of 2006. But rather than the tabloid, we wanted a more permanent format for the compilation, one that included all 11 plaques in one place. We approached the *Spritsail* committee, and they agreed that this was a worthwhile endeavor for *Spritsail*. Because we wanted extra copies to be distributed to the Falmouth Public Schools and all Falmouth libraries, as well as shared with the community, we approached the Woods Hole Foundation, which has been very generous to this project over the years, and the Friendship Fund for help with printing costs. Both felt this project was worth supporting.

One of our fundraising strategies was to offer anyone who contributed \$500 or more their name on a bronze plaque beside the industry plaque. What we perhaps failed to appreciate, until we began to see these names on paper, was how much the names themselves contribute to the whole intent of the project. Both the Wampanoags and the Eastman



Paulette C. Loomis and Linda Davis confer during a 2000 presentation about the plaque project. *Falmouth Enterprise* photograph by Daniel W. Webb.

family (Chuck is an eel fisherman from way back) have their names on the Eel Fishing plaque. The Summer Resort Community plaque was donated in full by family and friends in honor of Paula Crook Clifford, a long-time summer resident. Many families of Strawberry Farming descent are listed on that plaque. Cranberry growers are listed on the Cranberry Harvesting plaque. The Marine Sciences plaque was funded in full by Woods Hole scientific organizations. The names of individuals, families,

and organizations come from all over town and beyond and they speak of the diversity that is Falmouth today. It turns out that this project, while created by Sarah Peters and facilitated by the Committee to Encourage Public Art, is really about Falmouth and by Falmouth.

So we present to you here the story behind the bronze plaques which illuminate graphically eleven distinct chapters in the history of our town.



Sculptor Sarah Peters of Falmouth points out the Bowerman home in the woolens industry plaque during the installation celebration at the Arts Alive Festival in June of 2006. Donor plaque visible in foreground above the plaques adjacent to the grass. Photograph by Jacki Forbes.