

Charles S. Burgess

by Tucker M. Clark



His Falmouth contemporaries knew Charles S. Burgess as a successful businessman, an engaged citizen who sat on many town and church committees, and an enthusiastic booster of Falmouth and Cape Cod. We know Burgess because he was, ultimately, a newspaperman. From that position he not only influenced Falmouth residents but also revealed himself. Burgess bought the failing Cape Cod Independent newspaper in 1895, renamed it *The Enterprise*, and for the next 30 years chronicled life in Falmouth as well as in the state, the nation, and the world.

Every Saturday from January 4, 1896 through September 12, 1925, Burgess provided the kinds of communication that bind and build a community: official town business, of course, but also church suppers, school trips, public events, private parties, births, deaths, convalescences, residents' out-of-town trips and in-town visitors. He scolded drivers who sped as fast as 40 mph through town and warned boys who shot out electric street lights with BB guns that they could be "in serious trouble" (Jan. 21.1911). He called for cushions for the town hall seats after a two-and-a-half-hour Memorial Day presentation gave "cramps to even the most robust" (June 3, 1911).

He praised equally the rain, for refreshing the earth, and the town, for the "tarviating of Main street [which] may be inconvenient but it has made it one of the best roads in the state." His was the first Cape Cod newspaper to announce on April 7, 1917, the US declaration of war on Germany voted the previous day.

The only child of Elisha and Jane Burgess, Charles Burgess was born on May 4, 1855 in his parents' house at 49 Locust Street, where in 1886 he brought his 19-year-old wife, Bertha Swift Burgess, and where they raised their only child, Sumner, who was born in 1887.

Burgess attended local schools. He worked at a grocery store and taught in the Falmouth district schools and at Lawrence Academy. At one time, he earned commissions for organizing the Barnstable County lodges of the Order of Aegis, a new fraternal organization, and held county sales rights for a washing machine. In the summer of 1889, he was an agent for the Philadelphia Ice Cream Company of Boston.

By 1892, he had settled into the insurance business, acting as agent for six insurance companies that ranged from Portland, Maine, to Boston, Providence, and New York City. His desk was in



Courtesy Falmouth Historical Society.

In December 1896, a Burgess editorial read: "When you come to town to buy your Christmas presents, don't forget to place your Enterprise subscription and get an 1897 calendar. We give cordial invitation to all and sundry to make our office their headquarters. Leave your bundles. They will be taken care of free of charge. Come in and get warm. We have steam heat."



The Independent Press building today.

FINE

BOOK & JOB PRINTING

PROMPTLY EXECUTED

AT THE

INDEPENDENT PRESS,

FALMOUTH, MASS.

C. S. BURGESS, PROP.

The Enterprise January 4, 1896

A. E. TATLOW,

Vitaphic and Clairvoyant Physician,
Member and Diplomast of Psy-
logical Institute, England.

EAST FALMOUTH, MASS.:-

N. B. I will diagnose the disease of
man or beast without asking questions.

EVERY DISEASE TREATED.

Burgess, who boasted at least once, "We carry more advertising than any other Cape paper," (June 1908) always sought more. He occasionally acknowledged distaste at running such puffery but explained that he needed these advertisements to pay the bills.

The Race.

The New Year's Day trial of speed of the equine beauties of this vicinity was a decided success in every particular. The strong wind from the Northwest was decidedly cool and was rather disagreeable but it did not deter the lovers of racing from showing their

appreciation of the sport by remaining as witnesses of it until its close.

Herbert Lawrence's slick little animal "Frosty" won the colt race and did it handsomely. Howard Swift's sorrel beauty "Alamaada" proving a good second, while Ed Pierce's chestnut gelding came in under the wire a close third. Jap Lambert's colt taking fourth place.

In the first class Nickerson Bros. "Conrad" secured first honors. He was well driven and is a fine horse. Capt. Asaph Wicks' horse came in second. He is a very fast animal and if properly driven and properly harnessed would be a hard one to beat. Capt. Caleb Hamblin's "May Girl" was feeling altogether too good to stick to her gait, but she is a flyer and don't you forget it, and should be ashamed of herself to come in third at the finish.

In the second class E. E. C. Swift's little seal brown gelding "Sleepy Knox" won easily hands down in three straight heats going over the finish mark on a jog. He is a fine colt and was finely driven, young Gene handling the ribbons. "Tutti Frutti" came in second in this class. Mr. Cammet's pacer "Baby" third, and Ellsworth Handy's "Dandy" fourth.

Capt. Jim Handy's sorrel "went it alone" and proved himself to be the champion runner—running away three times during the afternoon and had to be ruled off the track, as being dangerous. Never mind! Wait until the Captain gets him broke and he will show you a burst of speed that will astonish the natives. S.

THE ENTERPRISE,

Published every Saturday at the

Independent Press,

FALMOUTH, MASS.

CHARLES S. BURGESS,

Editor and Proprietor.

SUBSCRIPTION PRICE

One Year,	\$1.50
Six Months,	\$1.00

Invariably in Advance.

ADVERTISING RATES FURNISHED
ON APPLICATION.

Entered at the postoffice as second class matter.

SATURDAY, JAN. 4, 1896.

In 30 years, Burgess raised the annual subscription price by only 50 cents.

In later editions, he added his phone numbers: 46-12 for his office, and 132-12 at home.

E. P. DAVIS COAL & WOOD

OAK WOOD	per Cord,	\$5.00
PINE WOOD	"	4.50
SLAB WOOD	"	4.25

OFF. DEPOT FALMOUTH, MASS.

the front of the building that housed the Independent Press and *Cape Cod Independent* office, now Caline's for Kids at 149 Main Street. The *Independent* had replaced Falmouth's first newspaper, *The Falmouth Local*, which had failed 14 years earlier. Now the *Independent* was failing, too. Burgess was 40 years old with no previous newspaper experience, but he saw an opportunity, and in 1895 he purchased the *Independent*. Perhaps because he was busy with his insurance business and civic commitments, he immediately leased out his new business. The two leasees were inexperienced and incompetent; they left town ignominiously before the end of the year.

Burgess had taken full control of the paper as editor and proprietor by January, 1896. He had also bought the Independent Press – the newspaper was really an adjunct of that printing business – and a stationery store whose original purpose was to supply the newspaper and press.

In his first editorial on January 4, 1896, Burgess wrote: "It is the purpose of the present manager and proprietor to give the people of Falmouth and vicinity a first class country paper; and if the citizens of the town will take an interest in its welfare by giving us their support in the way of advertising and subscriptions, the future of the Falmouth printing establishment will be bright and prosperous... Items of news from anyone will be thankfully received." However, he insisted that submissions be signed. He wrote that anonymous notes "regardless of how meritorious" will be "consigned to the wastebasket" (May 15, 1909).

Nearly every edition of Burgess's *Enterprise* encouraged readers to subscribe and advertise and asked subscribers and advertisers to pay their bills. On May 6, 1911, Burgess wrote, "We aren't begging when we ask for our fellow citizens' patronage because we are benefiting the town in return."

Even as a private citizen Burgess benefited Falmouth. Before he was a newspaper editor and proprietor, he was interested in the education of Falmouth's children. He served on the school committee from 1891 until 1918, including as secretary and chairman, except for one year (1903), when he wasn't re-elected. He was secretary of the building committee for the village grammar school in 1904.

He also gave his time to the Village Improvement society as president, to the Falmouth Historical society [sic: in old articles society, association aren't capitalized] as treasurer, and, from April 1893 through May 1931, to the Oak Grove Cemetery association as secretary-treasurer. He served St. Barnabas Memorial Church for more than 32 years, 14 years as a vestryman, 17 as a junior warden, and one year as senior warden. He was a charter member and grand knight of Nobska Lodge, Knights of Pythias, an international, fraternal organization. More than once he ran unsuccessfully as a Republican to be first Barnstable District representative to the General Court. In addition to ongoing commitments, he stepped forward for ad hoc committees, such as the 1892 Columbus Day Celebration and, during World War I, for the Falmouth branch of the Red Triangle War Work Fund Campaign.

Burgess's lasting influence was as an editor. Whether his fellow citizens agreed or disagreed with him, they knew where he stood. If he had no opinion on a particular town election, he said so.

He claimed the ethical high ground. In 1911, the editor of the *Wareham Courier*, referring to a Congressional vote, wrote that Burgess's paper was "a consistent Republican organ." Burgess responded: "We are republican in principle because we can see no better principle in sight but we are not so nar-

row as the *Courier* editor who can see no good in anything but his own ideas. We admire men with broad minds; men who before voting for a measure will study it carefully and fully satisfy themselves as to its merits....We are much interested in our brother's editorial comments, but he should remember that there are others" (May 6, 1911).

Reflecting on Burgess's legacy, the *Enterprise* wrote in May 1945, "Editor Burgess fought for the best as he saw it...and in many such debates the side espoused by the newspaper triumphed."

When his paper published the town warrant, Burgess regularly included his recommendations. In 1909 he wrote: "Since the closing of Clinton avenue on account of Deacon's pond harbor all the travel must go by the old road to the Heights, and it is certainly a public necessity that this road be stoned. There should not be a dissenting voice." Burgess called for "yes" votes to protect the bluff in Falmouth Heights and, if money were available, to protect the opening to Deacon's pond and to widen Sippewissett Road. Depending on the cost and the possible income it would derive, he urged extending the water system to North Falmouth (Feb. 6, 1909).

Burgess consistently warned his fellow citizens not to raise taxes "if Falmouth wants to keep its current taxpayers and attract other wealthy people."

Cooperation and civility were among his espoused values. He chided townspeople to be "courteous enough to hear citizens' requests even if there isn't enough money to fund them." Before the 1909 town election, he admonished, "Let each one as he casts his ballot consider the best interests of the town and don't vote for the sake of spiting someone" (Feb. 11).

He aimed for fairness. In early 1913, he questioned the announced cost of the Eel Pond drawbridge

project and warned that it would cost more than \$30,000, not the \$23,500 put forward by Dr. Gilman Drew of the building committee. The following week, however, he printed Dr. Drew's explanatory letter and directed readers to it: "[The letter] puts a different light on the matter of the Eel Pond bridge. This is just what the people want to know."

Burgess reminded residents that the time to spray the elm trees was before the elm-leaf beetles arrived. He worried when the weather was too warm for ponds to form ice for summer refrigeration. He suggested that, "The persons who will crack peanut shells during an entertainment to the annoyance of the audience should immediately be put out and his admission fee forfeited" (March 20, 1909). But his suggestions weren't only practical. He was encouraging an awareness in the schools of one of America's greatest men when he suggested that school children should be involved in observances of Abraham Lincoln's 100th anniversary: "We think this plan would be much more satisfactory than to hire some man to deliver an oration in the town hall in which a very few people would be interested" (Jan. 23, 1909).

A West Falmouth summer resident who was a state representative from Allston put forward a resolution to the state legislature that would allow every Massachusetts city and town to decide for itself how to regulate observations of the Sabbath. Burgess disagreed. "It seems to us that this would be a dangerous bill to pass, for it would be possible for a town to vote to allow any and all sorts of amusements on the Lord's day. The laws as they now appear on the statute books had better be left as they are," he wrote on January 30, 1909.

As a natural and self-proclaimed booster, Burgess noted on May 1, 1909 that the New York New Haven and Hartford Railroad had started advertis-

ing the Cape as a vacation destination. He asked, “Why don’t the people of Falmouth get together – business men, real estate men and hotel men – and boom Falmouth as a summer resort. It is an acknowledged fact that we have the most beautiful town on the Cape...all we need is to come together and form a plan of advertising that will bring people here.” He also proposed “a first class five-dollar-a-day hotel” that would be filled three months a year.

He encouraged the town to organize a board of trade so that the good of the town – good roads, a low tax rate, and agreement among town officers – would be brought to town meeting by a large group of interested citizens rather than “little knots of men gathered in private rooms or clubs” (Feb. 18, 1911).

In 1925, when he was 71, Burgess sold the newspaper, press, and stationery store to Harry B. Albro, a Falmouth selectman and representative to the General Court. Four years later, Mr. Albro sold the newspaper and printing business to George A. and Clara S. Hough but kept the Enterprise stationery store. A year later Burgess, who was finding retirement “irksome,” repurchased the stationery store and operated it until 1933.

Burgess died on August 13, 1933. His obituary in the *Enterprise* praised his success including the introduction of the *Bourne Enterprise* in 1920: “The local printing business which had tried and defeated its earlier managers in Falmouth prospered under the Burgess regime.”

He was buried in the Oak Grove Cemetery. His pallbearers, a “who’s who” of Falmouth families, included Sumner I. Lawrence, J. Edward Nickerson, Hiram Hall, and honorary pallbearers George W. Jones, F.T. Lawrence, H.V. Lawrence and E.E.C. Swift Jr. Burgess’s estate had an estimated value

of \$10,000. It is impossible to estimate the value of his legacy.

Burgess once wrote in *The Enterprise*: “The columns of this paper will uphold the right on all occasions and we will with equal earnestness condemn the wrong. Our principles are good government and good citizenship and on that platform we will stand and there is where our friends and our enemies will find us.” There is where we find him today, telling us about life in Falmouth between 1895 and 1925.

About the Author

Tucker Clark was a reporter for the *Falmouth Enterprise* before she joined the staff at Falmouth Academy, where she held several positions including assistant to the head of school and director of public relations and development. She retired from Falmouth Academy in 2014.