

Central Park in Falmouth Heights was a gift to the town from an early summer resident, Elvira M. Goodwin. The ballfield is one of the town's key playing fields for both organized and informal sports.
(Photograph by Teri Stanley)

A Century Ago, Elvira Goodwin Gave Falmouth Heights Its Numerous Parks

By AUDREY MARZANO

Over the past 100 years, Falmouth has enjoyed the generosity of several prosperous families who found much delight in the unique pleasures of seaside summers here in Falmouth and its villages. Well known are the Beebes, the Fays, and the Lillies and their gifts of land and buildings: Highfield Hall, Beebe Woods, St. Barnabas Episcopal Church, Goodwill Park. Many know the stories of these benefactors, and rightly so.

But Falmouth had another benefactress, unknown by most residents, even old-timers. One hundred years ago this month, an elderly Worcester widow gave to Falmouth the parks in Falmouth Heights, all for the sum of \$1. Who was this woman? What was her story? Why did she make this gift of almost 11 acres?

About 24 months ago, Winifred Grant, a longtime resident of Grand Avenue North in the Heights, while doing research, came upon a copy of a deed whereby "I, Elvira M. Goodwin of

the City of Worcester...Widow of Charles H. Goodwin, formerly of the Town of Falmouth, in consideration of One Dollar, paid by the Town of Falmouth...do hereby release...forever...all my right, interest and estate in...the land in and represented by the following Parks: Worcester Park south of Grand Avenue, Central Park, Crescent Park, Chapel Park, a small park between Wyoming and Fairmont Avenue, and a small park between Gertrude and Bellevue Avenues."

The gift was subject to the following conditions: "That no building or other obstruction be placed upon any of the above land, but that the same shall always be kept open for the Public use...[and] for the free use of the Property holders of Falmouth Heights...I...hereunto set my hand and seal this twenty-second day of April in the year one thousand nine hundred and three."

The story unfolded slowly, with research from many sources, expected and unforeseen. The first clue came from a call to city of-

fices in Worcester. Elvira and Charles were married there on May 24, 1870. He was a carpenter/builder, 54, born in Billerica, and she, 36, was born Elvira Peck in Sutton.

Ann Sears, administrator for the Falmouth Historical Commission, obtained from the Worcester Library the obituaries of Elvira and her son, Harold. My last Worcester connection, Barbara Fletcher, also of Falmouth, unearthed the date of Charles's death. No obituary was found.

Betty McKenna, of Pennsylvania Avenue, also a longtime resident of the Heights, suggested contacting Sturgis Library in Barnstable, never dreaming that this would be our best and most bountiful source of all! At Sturgis, I was put in touch with another Falmouth resident, Kathy Terkelsen of Ballymeade, an Internet searcher.

From her came the following: Elvira Peck, born in Sutton on March 13, 1832, daughter of Pomroy and Amanda Searles Peck.

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Married in 1846 to town cobbler, Andrew Jackson Kimball, first child, a son, Harold Allston Kimball, born May 15, 1847. Daughter Matilda Ann, born July 1, 1849, who died a month later on August 15. July 10, 1860, probably widowed, living with her mother, Amanda.

Son Harold, who enlisted in Co. F, 36th Regiment MA Volunteers in July 1862 at age 15, had many exploits in the Civil War: 18-plus battles, twice wounded, Presidential favorite, battlefield promotions, mustered out June 8, 1865, three weeks after his 18th birthday. But that's another story to be told another time. Elvira met Charles some time between 1860 and 1870 when they married in Worcester.

Meanwhile, six of the most prominent businessmen of Worcester were returning from Oak Bluffs by ferry. Standing at the rail as they approached Falmouth, they discussed acquiring land on Martha's Vineyard to start their own summer colony based on the 'cottage plan' of Oak Bluffs. Suddenly, they noticed Great Hill, the highest point of land along Vineyard Sound.

With high bluffs, unspoiled beaches, marvelous views and beautiful natural landscape, this was the perfect setting they had been seeking. Within weeks, they purchased the Hill and the plain below as far as Lake Lemman [sic] (now Little Pond), and the last operating salt works on the shore of Deacon's Pond (now Falmouth Harbor) from George and Silas Davis for \$2,382.

Employing a famous Worcester architect, Elbridge Boyden, to make a master plan for the summer colony, on January 1, 1871,

the newly formed Falmouth Heights Land & Wharf Company filed this plan at the Barnstable Registry of Deeds.

On September 8, 1871 Charles and Elvira purchased Lot 7 Crown Circle and moved to Falmouth, where Charles, carpenter and builder, was soon to become a successful businessman.

The summer colony was off to a great start. Many lots were sold and houses built. The Tower House Hotel opened and Falmouth's businesses were growing. The financial panic of 1873 brought sales to a trickle, and possible financial ruin to the Land & Wharf Company.

By 1878, it was bankrupt, and all properties unsold were divided between two of the company's partners. Finally, the nationwide depression ended, and the next decade saw a revival of public interest in summer resorts. The extension of rail service to Falmouth and Woods Hole, via the Old Colony Railroad, had made access available to all of southern New England.

In 1880, Elvira and Charles open the Goodwin House facing Crown Circle. An advertisement of the day lauded its 'Beautiful location with a fine view of Vineyard Sound—Excellent Table—Rooms Large and Comfortable—Pleasant Family Home near bathing beach and fishing grounds.' Business prospered, and additions enlarged the Goodwin House over the next few years. Each summer, Elvira's grandsons, Allston and Frank, explored every inch of the Heights, and with their parents enjoyed the many amenities available to summer visitors.

Elvira and Charles joined the

Falmouth Congregational Church becoming very active and generous members, especially Elvira.

Then, on January 20, 1888, The Falmouth Heights Land & Wharf Company was formally dissolved and "all rights and interests in land and parks" were sold to Charles. He now owned much of Falmouth Heights.

Tragedy struck Elvira, first in 1890 with the death of her youngest grandson, Frank, at the age of 15, followed by that of Charles on May 18, 1891. Elvira soon sold the Goodwin House to the Reverend H.K. Craig family which operated the family hotel, now called the Craig House, for more than 75 years. Later it was known as the Oak Crest Inn and, after a few turbulent years, was demolished in 1978. Serene Oak Crest Park now occupies this lovely open area.

At her son's behest, Elvira moved to his home in Worcester, but returned every summer to her house at the corner of Byron Avenue and Circular Drive. Her remaining grandson, Allston, died in 1898 of wounds suffered in the Battle of San Juan Hill during the

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Spanish-American War. On April 22, 1903, Elvira made her lasting gift to Falmouth.

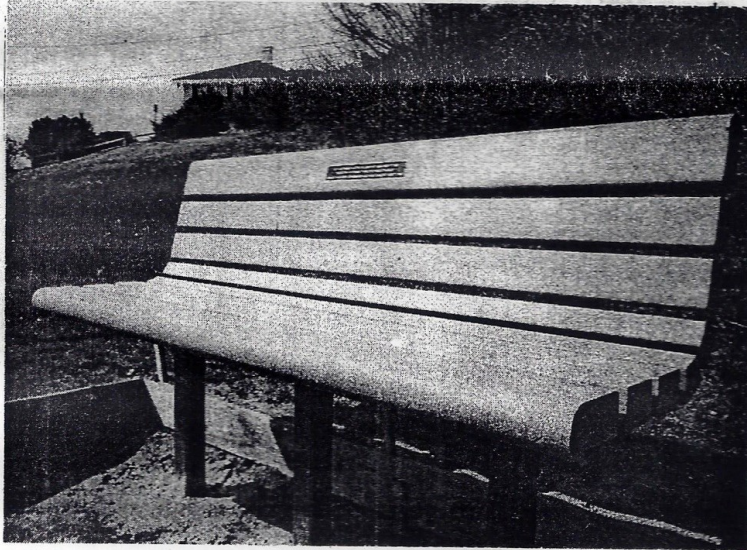
In the Falmouth Annual Town Report of 1903, the park commissioners expressed the town's

gratitude: "For the above gift, Mrs. Goodwin well deserves, and will receive, a large meed of praise from all who are interested in the future growth and prosperity of Falmouth.

"Its results will be seen in every vein and artery of the body politic and preface a brighter day to a spot that with an 80 foot boulevard connecting with the shore drive would have made it the prettiest gem on the New England coast; it comes very near it now."

Elvira Peck Goodwin died at her son's home in Worcester on February 17, 1917, at the age of 85. Why did this farmer's daughter, cobbler's wife and widow, Civil War hero's mother, hotel co-owner and manager, prosperous builder's wife and widow, owner of extensive lands and parks give it all to the Town of Falmouth? We will have to answer that for ourselves.

In Central Park, the Falmouth Heights—Maravista Improvement Association will dedicate a memorial bench today in memory of the neighborhood's benefactress. One hundred years later, thank you, Elvira Goodwin.



The Falmouth Heights-Maravista Improvement Association installed this bench in Central Park in memory of the neighborhood's early benefactor.

(Photograph by Teri Stanley)

(Ms. Marzano, Pennsylvania Court, is a member of the Falmouth Heights-Maravista Improvement Association.)