

Marstons Mills Historical Society
Interview with Forest Hamblin
(by Tales of Cape Cod)
October 10, 1977



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Today is October 10, 1977. Today I'm speaking with Forest Hamblin of Princes Cove Avenue in Marstons Mills. Mr. Hamblin is 75 years of age (date of birth 2/23/1902). Mr. Hamblin, can you tell us about your ancestry on the Cape here? Yes, my ancestors came from England and the first Hamblin landed at Barnstable in Barnstable Harbor. That was about 1641. In fact, they came across from Barnstable to the area of the airport, and there they built the first residence of the Hamblins. That would be the airport in Marstons Mills? Yes, the airport in Marstons Mills, then there was a stone marking the approximate location of the first Hamblin house; that stone is as you go up the hill towards West Barnstable from the Marstons Mills airport on the left hand side. From your house here on Princes Ave? No, from the airport going towards West Barnstable, as you go up the hill from the airport, there is a stone of record there, I believe it is Micah Hamblin who first settled in that area. And that area is known as Hamblins Plains, or at least it was, and the three ponds were known as Hamblins Pond. And they settled there because it was a good place, a level place to farm, not many stones in the area, not like it was in Barnstable which has many, many stones and make difficult farming. But they settled there and it was a good place for farming because it was good soil and it was near the pond so that if anyone had cattle, they could drive them down to the pond to get their own water. They didn't have to carry water; no pumps were available at the time, or any water system, so the pond was an excellent available water system.

Do you remember there was a farm? Oh, yes, at one time the airport was owned by two men known as Bill and Daniels and they had the whole airport area, and they planted it to wheat, they were going to raise grain there. I don't know why they didn't continue but they didn't. Mr. Hord, who owned the place up where Mrs. Hord now lives, you know where Mrs. Hord lives, as you go down Race Lane, going towards Sandwich from the airport, it was the first house on the right and they had a big dairy farm. He supplied milk all over the town of Barnstable or anywhere else it was needed, I guess. Was that where you were born? Well, it was quite later than that when I was married, even, that he was in the milk business and he still made use of the pond. And as you drive down Race Lane, you'll notice there's a bridge on Race Lane. You can go under the road, and he used to drive his cows down to the pond to water them. Like a little bridge, that goes under the road. I used to play there when I was a boy and later on, it was known as Mystic Lake Farms? Yes, it was known as Mystic Lake Farms, it was run by Hilding P , I think he was Finnish.

How did you come to this section of the Marstons Mills area? Well, my father and grandfather had a small house on Grigson's Pond, that was the nearest pond to Route 149. The Hamblins owned property there, where now is called Camp Alpine, that was owned by my father and I don't know how many generations before that. Then my father, he first went with his uncle, they went kettling by suitcase from house to house, and the way they would do, is they would take the suitcases and go to Provincetown. And they would take out what they needed to go around the Provincetown area and then they would go as far as Wellfleet. And they could send their suitcases to Wellfleet and whatever they run out of, they'd pick up and replenish the

cases. What were they selling? Well, they sold all kinds of things, needles, threads, buttons, anything, small articles that a household would need. Yes, they went door to door. That's what my uncle did, and my father did it for a while. They covered the whole Cape, would go from one town to the next. And there was a train at that time, that ran from Boston to Provincetown, so he could carry a big suitcase, more than he could carry from door to door. Then he would ship the larger cases and pick them up at the different stations along the way as he worked up the Cape. I see, he walked? Yes, he walked from door to door. From village to village? Yes, from village to village. He tried to cover most of the different houses, I don't know how long this would take to do. Interesting thing, he used to sell buttons, I believe they were made of gold, and they sold them very cheap, they were on cards. My uncle had this saying "Buttons 6 dozen for 5 cents, cheap enough to feed to pigs if you can get them to eat them". So he sold other things? Yes, everything, towels, and I don't know, just there was a whole line that he carried, I don't remember, I was too young.

What year was that move to Prince Ave? Well, that would have been about 1900, probably before I was born 'cause I was born on Prince Avenue. But before they came here, they had?? They went from kettling door to door, they had this little store and they sold groceries and anything that people would need, a general store, we'd call it. I see, they built that from being salesmen to having their own store? Yes, then they started their own store. Where was that located? Right by where the Cash Market is. In the same building? No, the present building is concrete block; their store was originally wood. What other stores were in town then? Right across the street, my uncle on my mother's side had a store. You know up on the hill, on the right, you know where there was a house up on the hill, there was another store right down in that square. And then across, right on the left there was, there was the post office that was located there at the time.

What did the other store sell? Sort of a general store, and my uncle was also the agency for the first automobile, the Stanley Steamer, he had the agency for it. What was his name? His name was Foster Crocker. They did not have any children, Foster and Esther did not have any children. Do you remember Frank Ewer? He worked for him as a mechanic. He came from South Sandwich. He came up to Marstons Mills to live? He went back and forth. I guess he had a bicycle and finally a car, I think. He must have used a bicycle, I guess, cause he was known as "Bikel" because he came back and forth on a bicycle. From South Sandwich? Yes, he worked as a mechanic for my uncle. It wouldn't have been possible for him to take the train from West Barnstable? Well, there was no reason to go to West Barnstable. He had to get back to South Sandwich. You know, that's between Marstons Mills and Sandwich. You know where South Sandwich is. Uh, take the back road up? Yup, take Race Lane right up. So they had a store down in the center? Yes, right in the center, by the Cash Market, the general store. They sold all kinds of things like? Yes, and my father had a horse and team, and he delivered orders around Marstons Mills mostly. And then he would take the order for the next week, because he went once a week or maybe twice a week, to deliver groceries. And he often traded, say if he had eggs and they wanted a can of bacon brought over, they'd want some sort of trade. He failed at the store because he trusted. He trusted? His clients, you mean? He trusted his clients. He allowed them to charge up? Yeah, he allowed them to charge and he didn't go and collect.

How did he get his merchandise? I don't know, I think it would come to West Barnstable and he sent up there, but I don't know. I was too young, see, I wasn't even born when the store was running, so I don't remember. That was around 1900? Yes, around 1900 or about. See, I was born 1902 down here. And he was living on

Prince Ave? Yes, from 1900 on. About 1900. I can't remember exactly but it must have been about that time that he came down because I was born over here in 1902. And he decided to move over here? Yeah, he decided instead of running a grocery business or going back to Hamblins Ponds, he thought it was more interesting, a better thing to do to come to the salt water and leave the fresh water pond. He liked the changes of the.....? Well, apparently, that's what he thought was the better thing to do.

What kind of work did he do here on the cove? He was in the oyster business. He ran the oyster business, selling around 2-3 thousand bushels a year. I think he had one vessel load and that would be about 2-3 thousand bushels, and they came from Long Island, New York. In order to seed? Well, they were more than seed, they were fairly good size, the oysters that came were big enough so they could keep them through the summer. They'd get them in the spring, keep them through the summer and in the summer is when oysters grow, put on, grow the shell, they grow larger. And then when the cold weather comes, the meat gets better because it's through the spawning season and they grow what we call "fatter and better" condition. And they always say that a month with an "R" in it is the month for oysters. Whereabouts on the cove did he have his operation? Well, he had it on Prince Cove, just as you enter Prince Cove, he had a building built on posts, the way that most of the oyster farmers did, they drove posts into the water so that the building extended out over the water and then they built the buildings on these posts. Why did they want it to extend out into the water? Well, so that they would go down to the oyster beds and they had what they called oyster tongs. The tongs were like a double saw, like two hands come together and this was like a basket at the top, and they had handles of various lengths whatever the depth of the water is, and the tongs would put them into the boats. We always called the boats they put them into as scows, they were flat bottomed boats. Then at high tide you could take the boat right up to the oyster house, you'd be just below the level of the oyster house. The oyster house would be built so they'd be just above high water. And then they could bring their boat right up to the oyster house, shovel them in on the floor, and then they had benches. They'd re-shovel them onto the benches and then they'd grade them and separate them and take out the shells or whatever.

What kind of boat would carry these out? Well, from Long Island they were brought up in 2 massive sailing schooners and later, the sailing schooners had engines put in them, too, so they wouldn't be entirely dependent on the wind. When you were a boy, did they have the two- masted sailors? Yes, they did. And did they have engines in them at that time? Yes, they did. The one I showed you a picture of, Wendell Nickerson, he was one of the owners of a two- masted schooner. It was called "The Three Sisters" and he would go down there in the spring and he would load his boat and like all sailing boats, they'd load quite a few, I'd say, several hundred bushels into the hold and the rest on the deck. Those in the hold had to be shoveled onto the deck and then shoveled back into the oyster boats or scows, and then they were distributed over the grants. Wendell Nickerson, he was the captain of the vessel? Yes, he lived in Cotuit. There was another man that did a lot, was "Talbot". I think he came from around Greenport, Long Island, or he lived in that area. He didn't live here but he was one of the other men who owned a two-masted schooner. When I remember, he had an engine in his boat. I can't remember whether Wendell Nickerson had a boat or not; I think he did. Eventually, the old sailing schooner was beached up in Cotuit, up on the beach way beyond where the main walk is now. And another thing these sailing vessels did, they brought coal also. There was a coal dock located right where the main walk is in Cotuit, you know, where the landing is, there was a big coal wharf and they had big bins and they unloaded these vessels into these bins. They were built high enough so that you could back a track under them and let coal run into a horse-drawn vehicle. This was when you were a boy? Yes, and the coal bins in Cotuit was operated by, I think it was, Bennett Gottrich, he was, I think, either father or grandfather of Ernest Starkey, you remember he was the clam warden at one time. Well, that was the same family who was the one

that lives out near my house, Harmon Starkey. He was the son of Ernest Starkey. And then he had another son, I think both went to high school at the same time I did, in Cotuit. Kenneth was the other. So they delivered these oysters? Yes. This would be about April? Usually April, yes. And then they'd let them grow through the summer? Yes, grow through the summer. And they usually started to take them up in September. And that was the business for them all winter long, take these up and ship them, try to sell whatever they had that year and the next year, get another load.

How did they sell them, by the barrel? Most of them were shipped by the barrel and they were shipped to either Boston or New York. Where would they get their barrels? There was a man in Santuit that made barrels, he had a big shop and he supplied most all of the oyster dealers in this area with barrels. He had a big cart that was built especially to carry barrels. He could carry 50 barrels, empty barrels. And different oyster dealers would have a load of barrels in a shed near their oyster house. How large a barrel would it be? Would hold 3 bushels. He would take them over to West Barnstable. They were shipped by freight and to New York or Boston, or anywhere there was a demand. Did your work with your father? Oh, yes, I did some work when I was going to school, it was my job to deliver the oysters over to West Barnstable by horse and team. He'd have the cart already loaded and I'd drive it over there, and they'd load them in that afternoon, and that night they'd go out wherever they were going to be delivered. You would drive the wagon over in the afternoon? Yeah, I'd drive it over as soon as I got home from school. How long would it take to drive over? About 3/4 hour probably. I'd get out at 3:00 and be over there at 4:00 and be back, a little sooner coming back because they were empty, of course. Did they also have the Cotuit Oyster Association? Yeah, the Cotuit Oyster Growers Association. One time at its height, there were 35 members from Cotuit, Marstons Mills and Osterville. Were the other towns growing oysters at that time? Well, Wellfleet was always growing oysters and Chatham was always growing oysters. I think those were the three main areas, maybe there were a few others some places. Cotuit oysters always had a very good name for good quality. Why did the business stop? From a lack of the people producing the seed that we needed. There was a man in Cotuit who got some; I don't know how he gets his seed. I haven't followed that up.

Mr. Hamblin, what were your activities as a boy here on Princes Island? Well, there was a one room schoolhouse located where the restaurant now is. Down in the center of the town? Down in the center of town where the restaurant is. A one room schoolhouse, the teacher had 9 grades; one teacher. One teacher, one room and 9 grades? 9 grades. How many students did she have in that one room? I'd say, I guess about 40, couldn't be sure, around 40. She handled that many students at one time, that's amazing? Well, sometimes they combine classes, like 5th and 6th grades, they'd combine classes.

I was born on Prince Avenue, the house next door, two doors over. The house next to it and the house next to that was joined together. That's where my grandfather came to live. My father first lived in the small house. I don't know all of the reason, but my grandfather and grandmother came to live with him, and they built on the side of the small house. Then my brother separated the houses after my mother died. My father had the oyster business for a winter business and then he had the market garden and the chicken business.

What is a market garden? Oh, you raise all kinds of vegetables. What kind would he raise? Oh, onions, radishes, beets, carrots, peas, beans, all kinds of vegetables that you'd find in any market today. What would he do with it? He sold them mostly to Cotuit. My brother and I (my brother is 12 years older than I) would go around to various houses mainly in Cotuit and just sell them. Sometimes the people would come out and buy

them, or they'd go in the house and take an order.

What kind of vehicle did you have? We had a horse and team. Until probably 1915 or 1918 when they had cars, we had a car instead of a horse and team. After that my brother went into shellfishing and he left the market gardening. Then my mother and father did a little business. We had a motorboat and my mother would call up the different customers to get the orders. So, on Oyster Harbors, most everyone had a little pier. We would land there and take the orders over there.

It was known as Grand Island before it was developed. When it was developed, it was changed over to Oyster Harbor. As you go on Oyster Harbor, you cross a little marsh, you know where the gatehouse is, the first island you go onto was known as Little Island and the larger, where most of the larger houses are today, was known as Grand Island. What was it like before the houses? Just an island with a lot of wood growing on it. One of my ancestors had an occupation of cutting wood on Grand island. They went over there and they cut wood. And then they would probably boat it off, or float it off, because there was no bridge there. They'd have to take it off that way. They used it as a big wood lot? Yes. My father and some of his relatives used to go there and the whole family would go there and would cut wood, that was an occupation, it was the only fuel they had, they didn't have coal back then.

So your mother and father would take the vegetables from the market garden and go from pier to pier? Yes. As it became a tourist, summer home area, they'd land at each pier and deliver the....? The vegetables, eggs and chickens, that's what. Who did you sell to in Cotuit? Well, there were a couple of hotels then and we sold to the private people who lived on the water, mainly. I can't remember the names, but there were a lot of them. What were the hotel names? There was The Pines. There was one called The Driftwood. You know where the grocery store is, then you go down into Cotuit and around to the left, there was a hotel there, I don't recall the name. There were 2 hotels there.

Has Cotuit changed much since you were born? Every place has changed. Those hotels no longer exist. I think they were taken down. Every place changed, for sure.

How did they heat the one room schoolhouse? They had a big wood shed beside the schoolhouse. What kind of stove did you use? They had big cast iron stove about 4 or 5 feet length and 4 or 5 feet high and then a stovepipe that went the whole length of the room. It was about 20 or 30, I guess it was. The stovepipe put out a lot of heat. 20 or 30 foot stovepipe would give out a lot of heat. Where did they get the wood from? Was someone hired to? Yeah, someone was hired, I don't know who, the town would buy the wood. Each village had its own school. And how did you get to school? I walked. Where did these children come from, were they all from Marstons Mills? Yeah, most were from Marstons Mills, some came from down from the airport, those 2 houses down there, and then from Newtown, which is River Road. Some of the children were brought by a horse-drawn barge and eventually, that changed over to an automobile. You said a horse-drawn barge? Yes, a barge is a long wagon, maybe 15 feet long. They had curtains on the side of it, so in winter weather you could close it up and roll the curtains up when the weather was good. They probably carried 20-40 people in there. Did they have any heat in it? No, no heat in it. The barge was big enough so they had 2 horses. What would happen on snowy days when they had a bad storm? Would you still go to school? Well, if the roads were open, we would, yes, we'd walk to school if we could. Unless it was an extra bad one, I'd seen times when it was no school, but not too often. Did they do any plowing in those days? Yeah, they plowed sidewalks; the main roads were not plowed, they were just broken out by teams going shoulder one after another, making a

path. What type of equipment did they use to plow the sidewalks? There was a wooden wedge, they made something like that. Like a _____? Yes, like a _____, and this part would stick out and go through it on one side. So they plowed a place for the children and for people to walk to the village? Yes. And this was pulled by a horse? Yes.

Then from the little grammar school, where did you go? From the grammar school we went to the Elizabeth Lowell High School in Cotuit. Did you still walk to school there? No, we were taken there by the same barge, the barge that went around and brought them to the one room schoolhouse. And then when we were of age to go to the high school, it would take them up to Cotuit. Did the barge come to your house? No, we'd meet it at the square around the schoolhouse. And how large a school was that, the Elizabeth Lowell? It was a 2 room schoolhouse. Is it still standing? No. Where was it located? Near where the ball field is in Cotuit. You go into Cotuit and you turn right and go back the same way, it's where the Kettlers play. You know the story of how they called the Kettlers. No, I don't? Well, the white men bought from the Indians for a kettle and a hold — Cotuit. Is that right? Yes, so they named the team Kettlers? Yes, the Kettlers. Cotuit was bought for a kettle and a hold. That was a good buy? Well, this is a matter of supply and demand. All the world over, the same story. I guess the kettle and hold were valuable to the Indians? Yes, a good kettle to cook in and a good hold to keep the corn in. What were the school activities like at Elizabeth Lowell school; how many teachers? Two. To teach how many students? I would guess that would vary, around 40, I can't remember. Also at that time for a certain time, Mashpee brought their students down there. Several Mashpee children came there to the high school. They walked from Mashpee down there. They didn't have any...? No, they didn't have any transportation. You'd get used to it.

Did you have any extracurricular activities? We tried to form Scouts. But there again it was hard, no transportation, to get back after dark, but there was a baseball team. Were there other schools that came to play? Same old trouble — transportation. Before the cars. How did you drive the wagon on a dark night, did you use lanterns? Yes. Could you see with the lanterns? You could see where the road is. We didn't have streetlights. You could probably find your way home or see the road. It was a dirt road. The horse would follow it. Well, what other activities were going on in the community here? What types of entertainment? We had Whist parties. Where were they held? They'd be held in the village hall. Every year they'd put on 3-act plays. Who would put on the 3-act plays? I remember when we were in high school, we'd put on a play, I think we wanted to earn a little money or something and we put on a play in the little village hall. Do you remember the name of the play? No, I can't remember any of that now. And you'd have them in the village hall? Yes. The older people, they went from village to village and they put on these plays and they had scenery that the doctor's wife, she was an artist, and she would paint scenery. She would make a living room scene or an outdoor scene. We'd have hangings that looked like grapevines or something hanging down. Maybe there'd be a tree, and she'd paint it to look like a tree. Mrs. Higgins? Mrs. Higgins. How would you take these shows around, you have the scenery and...? Yes, you would have to take it by horse and team. We had wagons, that you called truck wagons, and 2 horse truck wagons, they would carry a load of scenery. You might change scenery three times between each act. We'd have an indoor scene, and then an outdoor scene and then maybe a dining room scene or something like that, and we'd change. All the scenery could be taken up and stored.

Which villages would they go to? We went to all the villages of the town of Barnstable — Hyannis, Centerville, Barnstable. There was no hall in this town. How many people would be in a cast? Oh, 15-20. This would be something you'd be working on what part of year? Well, they'd start in the early fall and then

through the winter, put the plays on and take it around. That's how they got some money to build a hall. Freedom Hall in Cotuit, I think. Uh, Liberty Hall. They had a celebration down there to burn the mortgage, didn't they? Yeah, after a number of years they earned enough money to pay off the mortgage and they had a celebration to burn the mortgage. What year was that? I think probably 1915 to 1920, but can't remember exactly. After you graduated from high school, what did you do? I went to Normal School for 2 years; I graduated from Normal School and then I taught for a year in Eastham. Where was the Normal School located? Normal school was located on South Street; it has that big campus in front of it, the back of it was on South Street. Let me see, that was about 1920? Yes, I graduated in '21; my wife graduated in '20. Did you live there? Yes, there was a dormitory. The brick building that is right next to the parking space back of the town office—that was the dormitory. And the school was the other building backing on South Street. I believe they're going to take that over and make it into the town offices. They need more room and are going to fix it up. Both buildings are all brick. I would think it a reasonable thing to do. Then they have a campus in front of the building which must be a 100 feet square or more. It would make nice parking or they could keep it as parking. Has it changed since you were going to school there, the general area? Oh, yes, the whole area has changed. Lot of businesses moving out to the malls. Was it a two year school? Yes, two years. Yes, that trained you to be a grade teacher. But you couldn't be a high school teacher, but through 8th or 9th grade. But aside from that there was a so-called training school that went with the Normal School. It was a normal school, but also, the pupils of Hyannis went to it and you got some training, some actual practice in the training school, training to teach. Student teaching? Yes, that's right. There was a teacher there but you would go in along with her and watch along with her and help actually do the teaching. That way you would know how to prepare to teach.

What type of activities did you have at the Normal School? They had sports. They'd have some musical programs. Do you remember anybody who performed there? Well, no we didn't put on any plays or anything like that. Mainly, we'd go to school and come home at night and when it got dark, we had to study at night. We had to study every day and every night. You must have got out and had some fun once in a while? We'd go to a movie. What was the theater? On Ocean Street? No, right on Main Street. Was there what you'd call a college hangout at that time? Well, these were mainly girls, teachers were mainly girls, they had a gymnasium, I guess they did play basketball. Did you have a cafeteria? At the bottom of the school, in the basement of the dormitory, there was a cafeteria. Then you went down to Eastham? Yes, I went down there and taught one year. How'd you get down there? I went by train and I boarded with one of the residents of the town. The man I boarded with, he raised asparagus and he had a fish weir out in Cape Cod Bay. He grew asparagus for sale? Yes, he used to go down to the shore in the fall for seaweed, lots of it comes ashore in the fall of the year. That was part of the fertilization of the asparagus. Lots of it.

