Summer 2026

The Marston's Grist

The newsletter of the Marstons Mills Historical Society

President's Message

As we reflect on the events of the first half of the year 2026, we in MMHS see a continuing revelation of fascinating side stories and unknown or little-known features about our local history, not only about our Marstons Mills, but also about our entire region of Cape Cod. The summaries provided in this semi-annual Newsletter certainly support that clear trend. Continuing into the upcoming second half of the year are more such events and programs, some provided by knowledgeable members and others provided by outside experts. The Society also salutes the outstanding work of our Vice President, Freddy Kraics, who will sadly be leaving us as he moves to Ohio at this time; Freddy inspired many of the program ideas, working together with our Program Committee, whose fruits were noticed this year but will continue into the Fall as well.
Best wishes for 2026 to all! — David S. Martin

UPCOMING EVENTS: *THIS MONTH AT BURGESS HOUSE*

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 8, 2026— "TREASURE HIGHLAND": THE STORY OF A COTUIT "DISNEYLAND"

A TRIBUTE TO FREDDY KRAICS

The Marstons Mills Historical Society salutes the hard and productive work of our Vice-President, Freddy Kraics, who for more than two years has consistently uncovered little-known aspects of local history and converted many of those into different forms of programs for our monthly meetings. His own sense of curiosity led in turn to inspiring the entire Program Committee to move forward in adopting or adapting many of his ideas into actual programmatic events. As Freddy begins a new chapter in his life with his move to be with family in Ohio, we express our deep appreciation to him for his major contributions to the Society.

The Mission of the Marstons Mills Historical Society is to foster an interest in the story of our village. We preserve historical images, documents and artifacts, research historic resources and support educational opportunities for all ages for villagers and other interested persons, in order to better understand and appreciate the past, present and future of Marstons Mills.

The MMHS meets on the second Tuesday of every month at 2:00 p.m. at Marstons Mills Public Library.

2026 MMHS OFFICERS

President: David Martin

Vice-President: Freddy Kraics

Secretary: Marguerite Adams

Treasurer: Bebe Brock

Archivists: Jeannie Oakley & Marguerite Adams

Website Mgr. & Grist Editor: Wendy Bierwirth

Past Presidents:

David Martin, Bob Frazee, Rick Presbrey, Sandra Bolton

BOOK STORE

"Images of America: Marstons Mills." An Arcadia Publication written by local historians James Gould and Vivian Cushing that presents the village's history through rich and fascinating images and gives readers and residents a view into the past.

"***Women of Barnstable."*** By James W. Gould and Nancy Viall Shoemaker. "Women have been exploring the world and delighting in their discoveries for all of history. When one looks a little closer, as close as one's own hometown, their tales can be surprising and delightful."

"*Explore! Contemporary Marstons Mills, Cape Cod."* A limited edition, full-color book by Sandra Bolton. Mail a check payable to MMHS for $32 plus $5 shipping and handling to P.O. Box 1375, Marstons Mills MA 02648. Also available by emailing boltonslanding@comcast.net, subject line: order book.

"*The Revolutionary War on Cape Cod and the Islands."* Published in observance of the 250th anniversary of American independence. Available for purchase at $25 in person or $30 by mail order. Written by 27 contributors, the book covers the period 1761-1783 and the events and individuals on Cape and Islands which played important roles in the Revolution. The book was developed by the Cape and Islands Historians Committee, two of whose members (Nancy Shoemaker and David Martin) are also Society members. Contact davidmartindr@aol.com to arrange a purchase.

MARSTONS MILLS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

MEMBERSHIP FORM

☐ I / we wish to ***join*** the Society and enclose payment for my / our Individual Membership(s) at $20 each.

☐ I / we wish to ***renew*** my/our membership for 2026 at $20 each.

☐ I / we wish to make a charitable contribution to the Society to support the development of its Village Archives and the Preservation of its Collection.

$250 $150 $75 $25 $10 Other _____

Name: _____

Street / POB: _____

City: _____ State: _____

Zip: _____ E-mail: _____

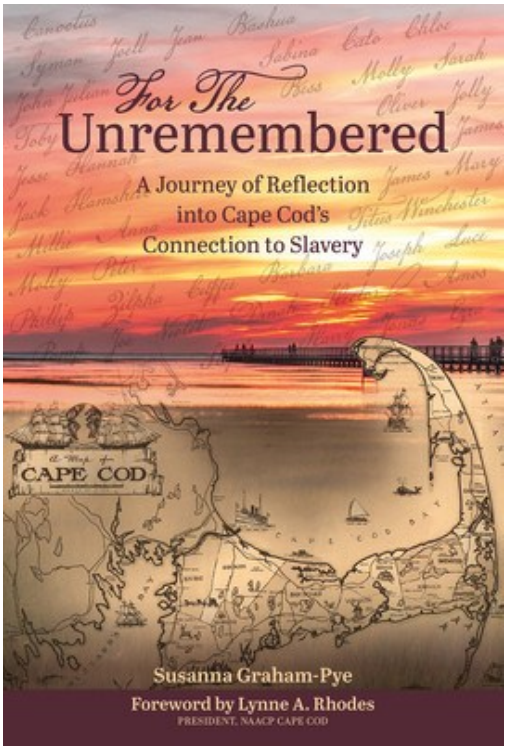
☐ I / we wish to be notified about MMHS Meetings.

Please mail your check or bring it to the Library, marked for MMHS. Regular meetings are the 2nd Tuesday of the month, 2:00pm. Thank you!

Cut out and return to the address on the bottom of the form.

Comments and articles for submission should be sent to **davidmartindr@aol.com**

A JOURNEY OF REFLECTION INTO CAPE COD'S CONNECTIONS TO SLAVERY

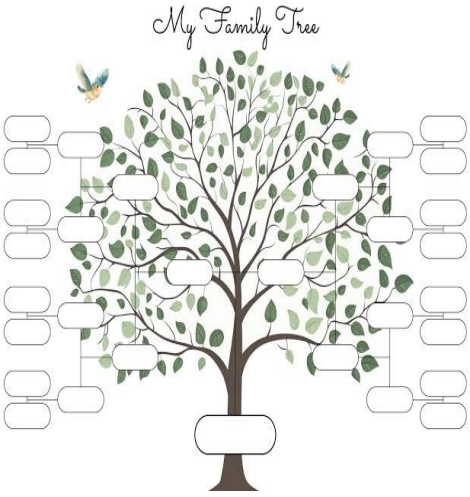


For its January 2026 program, the Society benefitted greatly from a presentation by Susannah Graham-Pyle, a Cape Cod native, and author of For The Unremembered, A Journey of Reflection into Cape Cod's Connection to Slavery. Graham-Pyle explained considerably little-known information on the presence and practice of slavery in the history of the Cape. Part of a continuing current trend of far greater awareness of slavery in the North the book, The Unremembered, A Journey of Reflection into Cape Cod's Connection to Slavery, includes contributions to history by enslaved persons who have been omitted until now from the history books. Her published work selected one person from each Cape Cod town, whom she had researched in depth. Not only African Americans were used as slaves, but Native Americans as well. Caribbean and African peoples were brought to our shores with the belief by owners that they would be more docile if the enslaved peoples lacked a support system. A number of Massachusetts ship owners, including some on Cape Cod, were involved in the slave trade. For further information, the presenter suggested consulting "Atlantic Black Box" among other sources.

THE LOCAL SHELLFISH INDUSTRY

The February program featured an in-depth presentation on the shellfish industry located in our region— specifically the Cotuit Oyster Company. Owner Chris Gargiulo explained that the company dates back to 1857 when it was founded by Captain William Childs. Cotuit oysters were shipped by rail to Boston, New York, and other cities. The firm has been in continuous operation since that time, having been purchased by Mr. Gargiulo in 2004. The oyster product comes from five different shellfish grants in Cotuit Bay in an area of 33 acres. The oyster seeds are received in April and May and then when they are of sufficient size, they are planted in the sand in cages to mature. Fall is the time that oysters are ready for harvesting; it was recommended that they are best enjoyed in November and December, but are eaten all year round. The company deals with restaurants in Boston and New York, but oysters are available for individuals to purchase on Friday afternoons at 2pm in the Spring, summer, and fall months, located at 26 Little River Road in Cotuit. The website is cotuitoystercompany.com.

SOLVING A GENEALOGICAL MYSTERY



For its March meeting, David Martin presented a full case study of a genealogical mystery which involved a complex set of steps to solve. His second great-grandfather's parents were the topic of the research; the mystery was created by many contemporary individuals with the same name—in this example, a John C. Fowler of Connecticut. The only available information was a marriage date with wife's name and date but no parents listed, and an 1860 Federal Census showing his age and supposed birthplace and current residence at age 26. He had found many different John C. Fowlers who were born close to the right time period (1834) in a variety of states, including Connecticut. One possibility was a Mohegan Indian couple who had adopted the English surname of Fowler and were of the right age and place to have had a son John; but DNA tests revealed absolutely no Native-American DNA for David, and thus the search continued. Investigation of Connecticut wills which might have named John as an heir led to nothing. Finally a Civil War Pension Record was found at the National Archives which led to rich information, including the birth of a son (David's great- grandfather), a divorce, and a record of service aboard several Union ships after enlisting in the Union Navy. In his seeking of a pension, much correspondence was in the Archives file, especially from doctors and from two siblings. Finally found was a letter from an older sister to the government saying that her broth John deserved to receive a pension, and telling about her own marriage and the identify of her father--- thus, the father she shared with John Fowler. Follow-up research indicated further proof of that parenthood, even though the father's will did not mention John as an heir, while indeed mentioning the sister. Thus, the pension record became the key; John Fowler's son (David's great grandfather) is buried on Cape Cod in the cemetery at the Church of the Messiah in Woods Hole.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF CAPE COD TRANSPORTATION

At the April meeting of the Society, Bob Frazee and David Martin presented an illustrated history of all modes of transportation on Cape Cod, including Marstons Mills, dating from Colonial times. The program was based partially on preliminary research on the topic which had been carried out by the late Rick Presbrey, former MMHS President, prior to his passing in the spring of 2025. The presentation included a series of historical maps of Cape Cod, including roads, railroads, shipping routes, and various kinds of pathways including those used by Native Americans in pre-colonial times. The locations of Marstons Mills factories and mills, powered by the river, were summarized as part of the nation's burgeoning Industrial Revolution. Specific examples of packet boats, school buses, and stage coaches were also shown. Cape hotels at the beginning of the Cape tourist era also figured in this transportation history. And of the course the opening and development of the Cape Cod canal permanently changed Cape Cod's transportation history. Later in the presentation …/...

A BRIEF HISTORY OF CAPE COD TRANSPORTATION CONT'D…

the coming of aircraft was featured including the role of the Marstons Mills Airfield. The program also made extensive use of the prior work of the late Jim Gould's numerous serialized articles in the Barnstable Patriot newspaper. The entire program was done in memory of Rick Presbrey and is available at the MMHS Archives by appointment.

THE SHIVERICK BOATYARD AND CAPE MARITIME HISTORY

Two docents from the Dennis Historical Society—Mary Kuhrtz and Barbara Durst—provided a history of the Shiverick Boatyard of Dennis on the Cape Cod Bay side, which produced significant numbers of schooners and later clipper ships for the maritime trade across the globe during the nineteenth century. Two of the ships raced from Calcutta, India to Boston—17,000 miles—and remained in sight of each other for most of the long journey before arriving at nearly the same time. They illustrated the presentation with photographs and drawings covering the active period until the railroads became the replacement means for much of the ships' cargo transportation. The surnames of Crowell, Sears, and Howes were predominant among the ship captains and ship owners. Included also was a collection of artifacts preserved from many of the ships.

A LOOK AT ARCHEOLOGY ON CAPE COD

The National Seashore Park Archeologist, Dan Zoto, was the featured presenter at the June 2026 meeting of the Society. He traced archeological history on Cape Cod back 13,000 years to the time of the earliest settlements of Native Americans on this continent. A thousand sites have recorded finds of arrowheads, shell middens, and village sites. The arrival of non-Native Americans in our region begins with the 1605 arrival of Champlain. Dan has worked on several sites, including Taylor-Bray Farm in Yarmouth and the Captain Penniman Farm in Eastham; he also explores shipwrecks when they are uncovered by ocean-storm wave action. The Wampanoag tribe is contacted whenever a find is made of archeological human remains. The process of investigation begins with the digging of sample holes and then …/...

A LOOK AT ARCHEOLOGY ON CAPE COD CONT'D...

a written report. Offshore sites which once were on-shore are monitored to record changes and possible places to do further investigation. Members are encouraged to visit the National Seashore headquarters in Eastham to see the exhibits and collections of artifacts.

SANDY'S SNEAKERS WALKS THE BEACH

Summer time and the living is easy…..so the song goes. My favorite two words are "summer breeze"; there is nothing that compares to a summer breeze. It is so calming, feels so good, and it is free.

At the ocean beach the summer breeze is the tangy salty refresher, especially when you get the salty taste on your lips.

Being all cooled down and relaxed allows the mind to wander, reflect, and think randomly. For example, oysters and pearls! I never heard of anyone choking on a pearl. Why? Because the oysters that produce pearls are not edible. Oysters come in a variety of categories from the Pacific to the Atlantic and beyond. Pinctada oysters are pearl- producing oysters. Pearls are one of the most beautiful gems. Actually, there are cultured pearl-oyster-producing farms, mostly in Japan. Finding a natural pearl in a wild oyster is extremely rare -- occurring in 1 in 10,000. A genuine gem.

Speaking of "gems", how about the MARSTONS MILLS HISTORICAL SOCIETY hosting a live presentation by the historical Cotuit Oyster Company that dates back to the 1800's along with the historical presentation last February? Samples of their sweet briny raw oysters were available to go. Raw oyster eaters are coined "slurpers." I optioned for samples to-go to prepare a home-cooked oyster stew.

The Marstons Mills Historical Society is one-of-a-kind. It meets monthly. Everyone is welcome. Programs range from lectures, presentations, book signings, videos, live plays, and fundraisers. It is educational, interesting, and fun.

The Board, the Program Committee, Archivists, Newsletter staff. and Volunteers are awesome! Membership is $20 bucks annually. You are not required to be a member to attend meetings. You will be glad you attended a meeting--second Tuesday of the month (September through June) at the Marstons Mills Library on Main Street 2:00 pm, and sometimes at Burgess House, Route 149.

See ya' there!