

Alfred C. Harding's Ice Cream Saloon

AT THE ATWOOD HOUSE

by spencer grey

During the last few decades of the 19th century, it was the practice of many Chatham people to spend Sunday afternoon rowing on the calm water between Lighthouse Beach and North Beach, usually in rowing dories for two people with a man in shirtsleeves at the oars and a lady with her parasol sitting serenely in the stern. As the boats passed each other, they would pause for brief conversations about the weather, mutual friends, or town activities. When they felt the need of a rest and of refreshment, they would head for "Alfred C. Harding's Ice Cream Saloon" located in a red and white saltbox shed with a window in a dormer on the front of the roof and a sun shade extending above the front door. Calvin Hammond was his partner, and their Cincinnati Ice Cream was famous even beyond Cape Cod.

Alfred had opened his saloon in 1881 on the outer beach, and customers had to reach it by boat, but visitors to Chatham did not hesitate to join the locals to take a saucer of their famous ice cream. One of those visitors was heard saying that she had eaten ice cream in all parts of the world, but never had she tasted any as delicious as that produced by Mr. Harding and Mr. Hammond. These enterprising gentlemen also sold their ice cream from a wagon on Main Street on Friday mornings, and they would give clam bakes to those who wanted them. In 1896 they moved their establishment to the mainland in a building at the north end of the lighthouse parking lot (once known as James' Head) next to the Pennypacker house. A while later they moved it to land owned by Solomon Atwood on Silver Leaf Avenue.

A poster advertising in 1896 "The 16th Annual Opening of Harding's Seaside Pavilion" indicates that they also sold "confectionery, nuts, dates, figs, cigars, tobacco, and sum'r drinks." On opening day a 15 cent plate of ice cream cost only 10 cents. This same poster included the following verses: For 15 years I've turned the crank For the making of ice-cream Do I like it? No sir, not a bit I would rather freeze by steam But we cannot do as we always would In this busy, busy world So I keep along the best I can And keep the freezer cold.

On James' Head I used to be, But I am there no longer Just south of the lights you will find me now Down on Solomon's Corner. I am there to stay, And for business as well Just give me a call, And see what I have to sell.

Fair dealing is my motto, And I consider it the best; For down weight and good measure Is the Scriptural text. A man who grew up on Silver Leaf Avenue across the street from the icecream saloon once wrote: "One day when I was about 5, I got into my big brother's money box and took some money and went on a spending spree, treating all the kids. But honest Hannah, Calvin's wife, came up the hill to mother and told her." In 1920 Calvin was in poor health, and realizing that he could not recover, he took his own life by shooting himself. Hannah was so neat that when he shot himself, he held a basin so that the blood would not get on the kitchen floor. After Calvin's death, Hannah sold the business and the new owner moved it to Depot Street.

It generally has been agreed over the years that no ice cream ever equaled that available at Alfred C. Harding's Ice Cream Saloon.

