

Walk Down Main Street
A Description of Houses and Stores
Virginia McGrath and Marjorie Hammond Brown
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Description: In this recording Virginia McGrath and Marjorie Hammond Brown take the listener on a “walking tour” of the Village in Chatham. They go house by house, describing who built the house, who lived there in the past, who lives there presently. They also discuss what former businesses were there. The later part of this recording includes Virginia’s recollections of her grandfather, Andrew Harding’s shop. She tells of what the shop sold, what local characters frequented the shop, and gives personal anecdotes about Andrew Harding.

Voice: We are in the home of Marjorie Hammond Brown. Virginia Harding McGrath will also add her stories. In the old days it was called the Village. Roughly, from each side of Mill Pond Lane, eastly down Main Street and around the corner to the light and around Bridge Street to Stage Harbor Road. Marjorie is to tell of the houses and people on Mill Pond Lane to School Street, on Main Street.

Marjorie Brown: This is Marjorie Brown speaking, and asking you to take a stroll with me down memory lane. We'll start with Willie Nickerson's house on the corner of Mill Pond Lane and Main Street and proceed east. As I remember that house, with Mr. and Mrs. William Nickerson living there. It looked much as it does today, except the west end housed the Western Union telegraph office. Mr. Nickerson could often be seen in the tower with a spyglass. At that time, many, many boats passed daily. Later, Mrs. Marjorie Haven opened the Hollyhock Inn and Tea Room and also rented a few rooms and one apartment, which was occupied by Mr. and Mrs.

Kermit Shallot. They moved with her to the present Wayside Inn when she purchased it in the fall of 1937. I happened to board there that fall and winter, and moved along with the others.

The next house was also a Nickerson's. Capt. Ziba Nickerson and his wife, Eunice Almena, lived there. The third house was occupied by a woman, Emmy Eldridge. Who rented a room to Isaac Cohen, who came into town periodically with a pack of sewing materials, salves, and so forth, and walked door to door selling his wares. My mother usually purchased something to help him out. Although, I wouldn't be surprised if his bank account was far larger than ours. Later, Virginia Harding lived there with her parents, Judd and Edith Harding. She will tell you more about this house later, also other earlier Chatham history along this route.

Frank Nickerson's house was occupied by himself, his wife, and three children. Beatrice, Francis, and Ziba. This house is presently lived in by the town Robinson (?). Next came the present Toby home. It was then used in the summer by the Sawyers, and closed in the winter. The Sawyers ran a photography and gift shop on Chatham Bars Inn Avenue during the summers in the 1920s, and possibly the 1930s.

The next house I remember best is the home of the Parrish's. He, William Dean Parrish, was a fine artist, specializing in watercolors and etchings, with an occasional oil painting for good measure. His wife, Mrs. Annie Parrish, taught first grade and was a very popular teacher both in the local school and the Sunday school. Upon their decease, the house was sold and made into apartments. The Greene Electronics Shop was previously Nelson Court's plumber shop, but I remember it as a grocery store when I was a child. It was run by Eugene Bearse, whose family lived in the Parrish house. Many a time my mother sent me there before closing time at six to get something special for our supper.

Then, in the next house was purchased by Dr. Hopkins, who rented to a woman named Ms. Luella Gallagher and her daughter, Sadie. This house has more recently purchased, of course, for the Bolinkles (sp?).

Now we have come to Homestead Lane. The next house belonged to my cousin, Walter Harding, who lived there with his wife, May. She was a Peters, and that's how the present family of Peters happen to live there.

The Eldridge Garage and Taxi Service and station, was a livery stable. After the days of horses and the advent of cars, Mr. Joseph C. Eldridge went along with the times, and it became what it is today. It was taken over by Mr. Thomas B. Eldridge when his father retired. I understand that Virginia McGrath will tell you about the Monomoy Inn which her grandfather, John Farmer, ran for many years.

So I'll skip along to Mr. Hubbard's home. He, with his wife, Donna Moore, and their two children, Alfred and Hunter Foster, and always a hound dog, lived there pleasantly. Harley Moore lived there alone. And when she became Mrs. John Kayden, he joined her and is the present owner. He made extensive repairs and the house looks like a modern one. Although it is actually an old one underneath.

The present upholstery shop run by Mr. Silver was the home of Mr. Rogers, his wife Maddie and his daughter Annie, who was one of the first telephone operators in town and who held that position until her marriage to a Coast Guard fellow. Her brother Harold also lived there, until manhood. The house now occupied by Edna and Grace Harding was there girlhood home, where they lived with their brother Josiah and parents. Their father was a painter and paper hanger, and Edna was the local librarian for many years.

The Loveland house came next. It housed Mr. and Mrs. Loveland, their sons Clinton and Benjamin, and daughter Ella, who lived there by herself many years. It is presently lived in by Mrs. Mildred Hawes.

My own home was owned by my father and mother, Mr. and Mrs. Isaac L. Hammond. When they passed on it became mine. As Marjorie Hammond, I lived there alone for 13 and a half years until I became Mrs. Charles Brown, and my husband joined me there. I was told by Erastus Barse, that it is the seventh oldest home in town. I never proved this statement, but I felt he was one to know. Before it was located on Main Street, it was in a group of houses off Chatham Light. Which had to be moved when the ocean took over that area. And the Atlantic Ocean is now where it once stood. The house next-door has changed hands more frequently than any of which I know. Once it had four owners in one year. When I was a child, Mr. and Mrs. Frank Brown lived there and owned a cobbler's shop on the corner, where now is a rose garden.

I'm going to cross the street and go up westward. The house owned by Freeman Hawes was built by Mr. and Mrs. Zenas Hawes during my childhood. The large house, owned by the Davison's of Ohio, is used by them some summers and belonged to Dr. and Mrs. Alan Stewart when I was young, and was much more of a showplace than it is now. The Moorings, now a hotel, was owned by Rear Admiral Rockwell and his three daughters, one of whom was a Mrs. Alan Stewart, just mentioned.

To the west of that, where Mrs. Martin Brown lives, is a house occupied by Mr. Brown and his first wife and son, Harold Brown, at the time of which I speak.

House #22 of my story is presently vacant. But, Dr. Vincent, a dentist, his wife, Grace, lived there. As a widow for many years, Grace rented rooms to summer visitors. She was the daughter of the Browns, who lived next to me. And the sister of Mr. Martin Brown, whose property adjoins.

The motel, The Dolphin, was a private home owned by people named Bevins. Their daughter Anne was in my second grade class many years ago. Joseph C. Eldridge's home was across the street from his livery stable. Next was a home whose occupants I do not remember at all. But Grace Hardy tells me that it was owned by Albert Hammond, father of Capt. Walter Hammond and Angie Bearse.

The home of Mr. and Mrs. Albert Snow was between that house and Mrs. Mariah Edwards, where she lived with her two daughters, Mariah and Lucy. Hunter Foster has joined the two houses and is now a store.

The house and store next has recently been sold. It has been both a paint shop and a butcher's shop. Bob Long had the paint shop, but earlier it was Walden Harding's meat shop. The old house at the top of the hill belonged to the Higher family, whose grandson, Joseph, was in my mother's high school class. And that was in the 1870s. You can see I'm speaking of a long time ago.

And now we come to the local post office, where I first went for my mail. Why not go in? See if Uncle Sam has left anything for you and find out the gossip from the local people.

Voice: Now Virginia may add her information of the earlier houses.

Virginia McGrath: I'll add a few bits of pieces of information, some that I have known from actual experience and some that were told me.

Let's start with the William L. Nickerson house on the corner of Mill Pond Lane and Main Street. As Marjorie said, he was the marine reporter for the Boston Globe. I used to spend many hours with Mr. Nickerson. Often times we would trudge up two flights of stairs, him shadowed by a small chatterbox, across the attic, and up another flight of stairs to the cupola. After noting any passing vessels, he would address the spyglass for me to look. But I did better with binoculars because I was nearsighted. He was also telegrapher on the offices of Mill Pond Lane. He had a key in the dining room on the small desk. I was absolutely fascinated by it, to think words came out of that little thing that went tick, tick, tick. I only wish that I had been old enough to learn telegraphy, but I was too small. Also here, I used to see Grandpa Crowell, Mrs. Nickerson's father, sitting out on the porch. And he would always say hello as I went by. Dr. Henry Hopkins had his first office in this building.

Next in Capt. Ziba Nickerson's house, lived Capt. Ziba and Almena. Capt. Ziba took my uncle, Capt. John Pond Farmer III, as his second mate on the bark *Seven* (?) in 1902. And he promised Grandma Farmer that he would make Uncle John sick of the sea, but he never could succeed. One of the stories that I remember, was that Uncle Ziba and Aunt Mena gave a whist party. Aunt Mena vowed there would be nothing alcoholic in the punch. But Uncle Ziba outfoxed her and when she was changing her clothes, he really spiked it. After the refreshments had been served and had a chance to get to work, whist playing went to park. All the men getting up to kiss all the women. Everyone was very happy except Aunt Mena, who couldn't understand what happened because she vowed she would put no liquor in it.

During World War I, Edward and Margaret McCain lived there. Lieut. McCain was in the Naval Air Station. And when he used to fly the dirigible overhead, Margaret would come out and come up and to our yard, and she and mother would run with dishtowels or anything they could get their hands on, and wave to the boys as they flew over. Also here lived Mr. and Mrs. Gubian. He was the manager of the grocery store, which was the predecessor to the first national store and was located where the Puritan Clothing Store is now.

Next came my old home, where I lived from 1914 – 1950. Capt. Isaiah Lewis had it at one time. It was a Cape Cod house. His daughter, Addie Lewis, built the old house up to a second-story from the first story. At some time she had a private school with a big room across the back of the house, that later became our living room, kitchen, stairs, pantry, and chimney. Also it was a boarding house called the Prospect House. In 1880, when mother was five, Grandfather Farmer rented the house for the summer. He was then the steward of Memorial Hall, the dining hall at Harvard, so he could take the summer off. In 1913, my father Heman A. Harding bought the place, remodeled it, tearing off the old Cape Cod house, which was the second story. We moved in March 1914 and lived there until the new house was ready on Mill Pond Lane in January of 1950. This was the first house in town to be electrically lighted by public utility. Father, an attorney, former representative, senator, harbor and land commissioner, had many political friends. And my mother was an ardent club woman, and had been president of the Massachusetts Federation of Women's Clubs, had many friends amongst the club woman. Between them, they had a wide acquaintance. The house has seen many, many prominent people, including Mr. Justice Brandeis and Mr. Justice Frankfurter, both of the US Supreme Court. Lt. Governors, Atty. Generals, other high state officials, members of the

legal profession. Adm. Donald MacMillan has been entertained there. Sinclair Lewis, Mary Boyle O'Reilly, WWI correspondent, lecturer and daughter of John Boyle O'Reilly, Irish patriot and poet. A president of the General Federation of Women's Clubs, several presidents of the Massachusetts State Federation of Women's Clubs, and other well-known club women.

During World War I, Father was on the legal advisory board and the place was filled at times with draftees, to have their questionnaires made out. Father was the only one that was here on the Cape. Charles Paine was in Washington, Judge Fitz Randolph was over on the Vineyard. So then Father got placed with the full lot of questionnaires and draftees. He had them at the Barnstable office and when he came home they met him at home. In fact, they were all over the house. And some nights mother and I had to go to bed early because there was no place for us. And finally, Father had to hire desk space at the Mayflower Shop so we could have some peace.

This house has also known much Red Cross, as mother and I were on the Executive Board of the Cape chapter. During the Depression time, we gave out clothing, during early World War II, we gave out knitting and sewing. We've had board meetings galore there. The Visiting Nurses Association held monthly board meetings from 1919 to 1950. The Women's Club board meetings, through mother's five years as president, and my one year as president. One woman who asked her young son if he would drive her to a board meeting was surprised when they drove up in front of our house. She said "This wasn't where I intended to go." He said "You said you're going to attend a board meeting, and aren't all board meetings held at Mrs. Harding's house?"

Next comes the Robertson's house, the Bar's View. This was the Customs House at one time and Capt. Isaiah Lewis was the Deputy Collector. The building is now where Mirages Studio, Gallery and Home, opposite the Chatham Theater. The mansard roof house was the home of my great uncle, Capt. Nathaniel Reynolds.

Next, the Sawyers place was built by my great uncle, Capt. Andrew Reynolds. He died and is buried at Port Stanley in the Falkland Islands, after rounding Cape Horn on his way home from a whaling voyage. He said he had been all around the world and the most beautiful view in the world was from his back door on a moonlit night looking out over Mill Pond. This too was the home of Capt. Adolphus Ryder. The Sawyers, who lived there, Mrs. Sawyer, who was very musical and a beautiful piano player. And the boys were musical. In particular played banjo, trumpet, saxophone, and trombone. On moonlight nights, they used to sit out on their back porch and play and sing and it did sound so good.

In the house that we know as Dr. Hopkins, Capt. Elijah Small lived. Then came, of course, Joe Eldridge's stable and then the Monomoyick Inn. Capt. Elijah Small lived here and Capt. Sylvester K. Small, who started the Inn. This was the Traveler's Home, later the Monomoyick Inn, when Grandfather John Pond Farmer bought it in 1898, and renamed it. My uncle, John Pond Farmer, called this home until his marriage in 1909.

Down on the corner of Main and School Street, there lived Capt. Frank Brown. Across the street, Zenas Hawes with the Congressional Medal winner for rescue efforts during the wreck of the *Grecian*.

In the Stewart-Rockwell house, Dr. Alan Stewart of the U.S. Navy was a southern gentleman from Beaufort, South Carolina, who married Mary, daughter of Dr. Rockwell.

In The Moorings lived Rear Adm. Charles H. Rockwell and Capt. Otis H. Rockwell.

In Martin Brown's house, Capt. David Harding. What is now The Dolphin Motorcourt and was then the home of Ralph Bevins, was built by Thomas Hardy and ancestor Ralph Bevins, who came here from Virginia and spoke of it as my manor house. Here also lived the Crowell boys, five sea captains in one family. Benaja, Herbert, Herman, Lorenzo, and Marshall Cleever, who is named for Marshall Cleever of Napoleonic fame. One was captain of the Harvard, another of the sister ship, the Yale. Joseph Eldridge's house, this was the home of Capt. Gustavus Ryder. Here also lived Capt. Elmer F. Mayo, the hero of Monomoy. After the Monomoy disaster, a fund was raised of which this house was purchased this house and was presented to Capt. Mayo. Also the vessel, the *Gleena* (sp?), of which he went anchor dragging, that is salvaging ships anchors when they got lost and the cable parted, or when there wasn't time to haul in the anchor and the cable had to be cut. I remember him as an old man, of whom the old folks used to call Buzzy Mayo.

In Susan's house, next to that, lived Capt. Albert S. Hammond, Capt. Walter I. Hammond and Capt. Marcus A. Hammond.

Next in the Snow's house, was Albert Snow, Civil War veteran.

In Long's was Capt. Walden Harding and William I. Harding. In the Higher house, this was the home of Capt. Thomas Dodge. Miss Mary Emma Dodge, his daughter, was a schoolteacher and she lived there. I used to go calling there with mother and sat on the slipperiest horsehair sofa that ever existed. You had to sit down carefully and brace your feet so that you could stay there.

Next came Tom McGrath's, my husband's. It was the old post office. First it was Quilty's First Store. Then it became the McCarey and Shepherd's plumber shop, then the J.H. Shepherd Company and Plumber. Then Tom McGrath, the printer, my husband. The other building was Chester Eldridge's plumbing shop, which Tom converted into a home. And where the lawn was, Daisy Gill had a little store. And Cowan-Gibson Loft was the home of Capt. Levi Dean Smith. The bake shop, as it is now, was John Howland's fish market. Where the block is now was Frank Kelly's variety store stood on the corner, Jack McKay's barbershop, and the post office.

Virginia McGrath: This is Virginia again. I wanted to tell you about my Grandfather Harding's store down in the Village. Out on the front said, "Andrew Harding's," but he was commonly called Uncle Andrew. Andrew Harding, storekeeper, painter, wrecker, the 14th child of Capt. Barzilla and Patty Bangs Harding. Born 125 years ago on November 20, 1836, died November 23, 1911, age 75 years. Father of Heman Andrew Harding and grandfather of Virginia Avis Harding McGrath. It is difficult to separate the store from the man. While the man shaped the store, in a more subtle way, the store shaped the man. Among his brothers and sisters were Isaiah and Simeon. *Deyo's History of Barnstable County* on page 597 says, "Isaiah and Simeon Harding had a store over by the shore, which business they sold to Andrew Harding in 1865. Mr. Harding had started a store in Water Street in 1864, but bought and combined the two. In 1871, in connection with his stock of paint and oils, he started his painting business with H.M. Smith."

Father had penciled in the margin beside this paragraph, "Southwest corner of A.H. homestead, later ahead of Mill Pond, north of Mary A. Young Boathouse. For a time I wondered why it was that grandfather started the store on Water Street. And then I realized that his first

wife, Aunt Abby, was sick and that he had the store in the house probably to be near her. She died in January of 1865 and that was probably why he was at liberty to buy out his brothers and combine the two stores. I also wondered why the store was down by the Mill Pond. Then I realized that probably everything came in by packet, doubtless the New Bedford packet. And because Isaiah was a captain, and because the father, Barzilla, had been a packet captain, I have an idea that Isaiah was probably the captain of the packet that went to New Bedford.

This material, I have drawn from memories from Father's stories and Grandfather's account books. Grandfather's account books cover the entire period from October 5, 1864, to time of his death, November 23, 1911, a period of 47 years. These books show only items charged, not cash sales. Sometime in the 1870s, he tired of keeping his ledger but kept up his daybook. How could you know who owed what? The accounts can sometimes be difficult to decipher because Grandfather's scrawl and go-as-you-please spelling. For instance, an entry of LEAPAHRAGE, is his version of litharge, a drying constituent of paint.

He was Uncle Andrew to everyone and was beloved. He was most accommodating. Grandmother would see him coming home, would take up dinner, put it on the table, and wait. Someone hailed him, and he'd gone back to sell them what they wanted, rather than make them come back. When Grandfather died, father sent receipting bills to all old men and women and those who couldn't afford to pay.

And now let's go inside the store, but before we do, let's stop and look at the anxious seat, as Grandfather called it, out on the porch.

Here on this seat, the men waited anxiously for Grandfather to come home from dinner, or to come back to the store from dinner. Inside, on a warm sunny day, it was like stepping into

a cool, cool dark place. In wintertime, there was a stove in the center, around which the men sat. The other men of the Village sat around the stove and swapped yarns of their experiences at sea, the wrecks of which they'd have gone, sailed their voyages to distant ports, and retold the sea stories told to them by their fathers and grandfathers. And as they talked, they whittled lobster pegs, thole-pins, buoy-markers, and all the other impedimenta needed by seamen about their boats.

Arguments sometimes arose concerning the location of various harbors. For that reason, chalk was always kept over the door. Benches were pushed aside by a boot, and the flow of a waterway was set in chalk on the floor. Arguments further ensued and with various scrubbing's the chart was drawn and redrawn until finally they were satisfied. Finally leaving the argument as a dog leaves a well chewed bone, peace would be restored and they would move on to the next topic. Here too Grandfather cast up the accounts of the Village Weir Company, for which he was agent and part owner. Only he would not have called it "weer," but given it the old pronunciation of "wire."

Counters were around the inside of the store. Shelves, how grandfather found anything, I don't know. Grandfather was as kindly and inefficient as a businessman that ever lived. He kept his books nonchalantly and his money in a sock in his desk. His banking he did in Harwich, at the nearest bank. On those days when he went to Harwich with his horse and wagon –from the Harwich railroad station, his pork barrel out on the porch of the store, and his faith in the trustworthiness of his fellow men. Looking over his account books, his store must have been a glorious hodgepodge. A mad scramble. A jumble of paints, hardware, wood stuffs, everything imaginable, except meats, household goods and women's gear. For the latter, he would've sent

you down to Phoebe Hellmann's, down the street. Women customers must have felt they were running the gauntlet. They waded through goods, shavings, and men on the way to the counter. How Grandfather located what they wanted for goods is miraculous and he did it unerringly.

One of Father's favorite stories, was the story of Uncle Silas and the sweet potato barrel. Grandfather started to close up one noon and he found that Uncle Silas was still asleep, He'd sat down on a sweet potato barrel, as was his usual custom. And he had gone to sleep. Grandfather had done good and sold more of the sweet potatoes in the barrel. Uncle Silas slid down farther than he expected to. So Grandfather went over and shook him gently and said, "Come Uncle Silas, it's time for us to come home for dinner." And as Father told it, Uncle Silas fetched a heave and nothing happened. He fetched another heave and nothing happened. So finally Grandfather said to him, "Well Uncle Silas I guess I'll have to cut the hooks, won't I?" He said, "Yes, Andrew, I guess you'll have to cut the hooks."

The men had pilot boats that they went wrecking with. And one of them they named the *Castor and Pollux* after the stars with which the sailors would sail. And someone, not being up in his classical mythology, called it *Cast Iron Polyp*. It was shortened to *Polyp*. So when they bought their next boat they figured they've got the other boat called the *Polyp* so why not call this one the *Haddock*. So the next boat was called the *Haddock*.

The men who are around the store were called Frank Tinkham, Seth Hammond, Sheridan Robbins, Good Walter Eldredge, and Wicked Walter Eldredge, and others I can't quite remember. Grandfather's first sale was to Mr. Nathaniel Freeman on October 5, 1864. One paintbrush: \$0.92, four gallons of raw oil \$1.56, 50 pounds of New York lead at \$0.15, a total of \$14.42. His last sale was to Captain B.L. Jones, April 24, 1911. One box of cigars, net \$2.

Some of the things that he sold were paints, varnish, putty, raw and boiled oils, window glass, window locks, lamp black, picture knobs, hardware, fruits, cheese, tobacco, nails, screws, flour, beans, molasses, sugar, doorbells, tea and coffee, hard bread, or as we know it now, pilot cracker, soap, candy, Arabian Balsam, painkiller, carriage top dressing, shovels, corn cakes, fire kindlers, which he made himself. He held a patent on this for fire kindlers, which were made out of resin and sawdust. Then he also sold boot blackening, spices, pork, sweet potatoes, white potatoes, onion, turnip, net twine, rope, east powder, which came in paper to my surprise. Matches, which came in bunches. Hatchets, axes, fishhooks, sharp caps, pipes, at \$0.01 each. Which were the clay PV pipes, lamp chimneys, padlocks, cell breakers, walnuts, knives, candy, canned goods, clam barrels, herrings, cigars, powdered medicines, oars and roll-offs, and many, many other things.

May has asked me to add that the Crowell boys would signal their mother as they went by, by turning their searchlights on the house so that she would know they were going by. She's also asked me to add the story that my Father used to tell. When he was a young boy, he used to play with Sam Hardy, son of the keeper of the lighthouse, Capt. Hardy. One day Capt. Hardy said to them, "Now boys, you ought to remember this day, the longest day you live that there have been as many ships by here that there are days in the year."

Voice: Continued on the other half of the tape.