Wollaston
As It Was
In 1870s

By D. Foster Taylor
(Written in 1946)

Wollaston Heights 76 years ago presented nothing but wide open spaces and a future, judging from a collection of old photographs in the possession of Walter S. Pinkham of 111 Warren Avenue, Boston and Quincy attorney, whose father, the late George F. Pinkham, played a prominent role in the development of this now populous residential district.

The old glass negatives from which these photographs were made were exposed within five years of the close of the American Civil War by an unknown Boston photographer in the employ of the group of men who promoted the subdivision and sale of house lots on Wollaston Heights. Mr. Pinkham generously loaned his negatives to the Quincy Ledger. Basil Q. Emanuel, staff photographer, made the excellent prints of considerable historic interest which accompany the article.

The first land development north of Mount Wollaston and Black’s Creek took place about 1860, when a land company called this area “Wollaston Park.” The Old Colony and Newport railroad established a station for the convenience of the new residents and named it “Wollaston.” It was, therefore, quite

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Wollaston Hill Land Assessed At $100 An Acre

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fitting that the name "Wollaston Heights" should be given to the later land development of the hilly areas west of the railroad.

Joseph H. Beale conceived the idea in 1869 of buying up the land in this area as a speculation. He was born on the farm at the corner of Beale and Adams Streets and though he lived in Dorchester his father still owned around 100 acres in this vicinity. Associated with Mr. Beale were Florentine W. Pelton of Boston and Colonel George Clark, Jr., of Dorchester.

On Oct. 12, 1869, the Wollaston Land Associates were organized and the following officers were elected: president and treasurer, Isaac S. Morse; secretary, Horatio N. Holbrook; and business manager, George F. Pinkham. Five trustees were also elected including Morse and Pinkham but adding the names of Moses Fairbanks, Norman W. Stearns, and George Clark, Jr.

Land here was then assessed for about $100 per acre. The original purchase was 12,269,122 square feet of land, but soon other land was acquired from George W. B. Taylor, John Faxon, and N. F. Safford. Some land may have been acquired from the railroad company but it was small and of little consequence. George F. Pinkham was then living in Cambridge with his family but decided to build a house and go upon the property to live.

It is interesting to learn that at this time (1869-1870) in all the area west of the railroad bounded by Adams Street and the Milton line there was but one house. This house was owned by George W. B. Taylor and is still standing on Newport Avenue adjacent to the stores near the easterly corner of Newport and Beale Street.

The first actual construction of a home in the new development began Jan. 24, 1870, when John Drew broke ground on his lot at the corner of Lincoln and Newport Avenues. Mr. Drew paid the sum of 12 cents per foot for his land.

The real work towards the advancement of the village began Wednesday, April 13, 1870, when the first gang of men started the grading of Lincoln Avenue, in order to gain access to the first hill by Grand View Avenue. Also in April Isaiah W. Thayer began Thayer's block, later known as the Wollaston hotel.

In quick succession houses for personal occupancy were begun by Quincy A. Faunce, Isaiah White, John T. White, George G. Souther, George F. Pinkham, Marcus W. Lovell, Mrs. Magoun, Farrington McIntire and others. On July 4, 1870, occurred the formal opening of Thayer's block. Josiah Quincy delivered an address from the piazza.

Incidentally, when Walter S. Pinkham first came to Wollaston as a boy of five or six with his parents, he lived at this hotel while his father was building their Warren Avenue home. The son still lives in the old house but now with his children and grandchildren.

To serve the growing community a post office and grocery store were established in the Thayer block shortly after it opened. Still later the dining room was used on Sunday for religious services.

Apparently the first religious gatherings were union Sunday school services held in the waiting room of the Wollaston station which was first located on the other side of the tracks almost opposite its present site.

The work of moving the building across the track was accomplished

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Taylor Article First Appeared October, 1946

This fragment of Quincy history, along with the accompanying photographs, first appeared in the October 22, 1946, issue of The Patriot Ledger and is reprinted by permission.

The author, the late D. Foster Taylor, owned the J. H. Taylor Foundry, North Quincy, producer of non-ferrous castings. A man of many interests, he was a historian, specializing in maritime and regional research.

As mentioned in the article, the photographs were reproduced from the original glass negatives by the late Basil Q. Emmanuel, Patriot Ledger staff photographer. Vertical lines in one of the pictures are cracks in the glass photographic plate.

No factual changes have been made in the 38-year-old article, so some of the references are outdated. The Wollaston Station has vanished and been replaced by the MBTA station. The Taylor house on Newport Avenue is gone, as are the Nickerson, Faunce and Pinkham houses. For that matter, so are the empty fields.

Quincy History

Published by the Quincy Historical Society at Adams Academy, 8 Adams Street, Quincy, Massachusetts 02169.

The Quincy Historical Society, incorporated November 16, 1893, maintains the Adams Academy Building as a museum, library, visitor information center and place of meeting. The purposes of the Society are: to represent historical interests in the community, to preserve materials and information related to Quincy history through exhibits, programs and educational activities, and to publish materials of historical significance.

A portion of the Quincy Historical Society's operating funds for fiscal year 1984-1985 has been made possible with support from the Massachusetts Council on the Arts and Humanities, a state agency, and through a grant from the Institute of Museum Services, a Federal agency.
Tracks of the Old Colony and Newport railroad cross this photograph taken looking westerly from halfway up Wollaston Hill. At upper right may faintly be seen the cupola of Quincy Square’s First Parish Church. Just below it and to the right is the barn of the Adams estate. Spindly bare saplings mark the newly laid-out Warren Avenue.

First Wollaston School Was Twelve Feet Square

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on a Sunday. The First Church congregation assembled in the Thayer dining room the second Sunday in September 1870, to hear Rev. Mr. Davis of Hyde Park preach the sermon. For a year thereafter the Union Chapel was the center of religious life for representatives of many denominations.

The first Baptist Church which is now celebrating its 75th anniversary was organized July 13, 1871 in Mr. Walter Pinkham’s Warren Avenue home. Rev. Stephen B. Abbott became the first minister. In the 1875 Quincy Almanac it is recorded that on July 11, 1874 the Baptist Sunday school celebrated its first anniversary.

The educational requirements of the fast growing community were promptly met. In January 1871 a small building only 12 by 12 just off the railroad right-of-way which had been built as a land office was opened as a private school and Miss Fannie M. Stone of Belmont was employed as teacher. However, in November of that year the first public school was started in a building opposite the present Wollaston school. The building was erected by the Land Associates but was rented and furnished by the town.

The next two or three years were notable for the number of community developments which have served this part of Quincy so well all down the years. The cornerstone of the Baptist church was laid in July 1872, and the church dedicated in January 1873. In this same year the town accepted all the streets on Wollaston Hill. In 1873 the Wollaston Methodist church was formed, the Wollaston Laundry built its plant and Newport Avenue was ordered cut through.

The year 1874 marked the first Methodist public worship in the school house and the church also held services each Sunday at the National Sailor’s home. But it was not until January 1, 1875 that the

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Free Rail Passes Helped Sell Wollaston Land

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The cornerstone of the Methodist chapel was laid at the corner of Beale Street and Central Avenue. Dedication services for the chapel were held April 8, 1875 and the first Sunday services took place on the eleventh of the same month.

In June or July Daird Whittemore began the construction of the shoe machinery factory known now as the Tubular Rivet & Stud Co.

George F. Pinkham, who died in 1918 in his 88th year, was the one man most responsible for the development of Wollaston Heights. Of his many shrewd accomplishments in the promotion of this area the one which probably produced the most far reaching results was his success in getting the Old Colony and Newport railroad to issue free passes good for three years to any one purchasing a house lot from the Wollaston Land Associates. This move was of great value in attracting residents here and doubtless set the pattern for Wollaston as a residential and not a manufacturing center.

In looking over the photographs from the Pinkham collection one of the most striking things which will be noticed is the lack of trees. The small bush-like evergreens which dotted the landscape are known as savin trees. Savin Hill was named for the large number of them in that section. All the trees now found on Wollaston hill were set out and planted by the residents, or the town and city government.

In one photo the photographer has his camera placed near the intersection of Standish Avenue and Warren Avenue extension looking over the present location of the iron footbridge which spans the New Haven tracks. To the right of Quincy A. Faunce's home, which is almost framed up, can be seen the cellar excavation for the house now occupied by N. Gorham Nickerson. The excavation and piles of lumber below and to the left marks the construction of the Pinkham home on Warren Avenue.

Another photograph was taken from the vicinity of Grandview Avenue south of Lincoln Avenue. A small bridge which carried Hancock Street over Sachem Brook may be

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The Old Colony railroad cut dominates this view from Wollaston Hill, looking northerly. Beyond is the estate owned by John Faxon, uncle of Henry Faxon. In the distance is an arm of Quincy Bay and Squantum. At this time, 1870, Newport Avenue had not been cut through.

Adams Family Loses Barn To Need For Avenue

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seen in the upper left near a little building at the corner of Hancock Street and Willett. The Faxon house in the upper center was very near the present location of the Wollaston branch of the Quincy Trust Company. Beale Street can be located but apparently Beach Street either was not laid out or is not visible.

Beach Street was accepted by the town from Hancock Street to Willow Street in 1886, and later from Willow Street to the boulevard in 1894. Across the center portion of the picture is the remains of a stone wall, most of which has been carted away. Rail fences were widely used to mark boundaries as the photographs show but many of the farms hereabouts used the fieldstone walls so commonly employed throughout New England. It will be easily noticed that Newport Avenue has not been cut through.

Another view was taken from a spot where the home of John H. Taylor at 108 Warren Avenue now stands and looks out over the Old Colony and Newport railroad in an easterly direction. The cupola of the First Parish church is near the upper right corner of the photograph. Close inspection reveals a horse and cart dumping gravel in some of the low spots where Newport Avenue now passes.

Piles of field stones indicate the removal of stone walls from areas on the higher ground. In the distance just below the First Parish church cupola is the barn on the Adams estate. As the story goes, the laying out of Newport Avenue required the removal of this barn to which Charles Francis Adams, then in England for negotiations in settlement of the Alabama claims, strongly objected. When informed of the town’s proposal he immediately returned to this country to lead an unsuccessful fight against it. A small pond will be found at left center where the Old Colony rail fence detours around it.

Another photograph, also taken from Grandview Avenue in a northeasterly direction, shows the “Old Sailor’s Home” located at the foot of Fenno Street. Near the top of the photograph are three houses fronting on Clay Street. In them lived the drivers of the horse cars. In the upper right corner of this picture we get a glimpse of a branch of Black’s Creek and Merrymount Park.

The use of photographic evidence in recording historical events was probably first used on any considerable scale by Matthew Brady and his associates during the period of the American Civil War. But time and accident destroyed many of the old negatives made in those days.

It is therefore very seldom we find today good negatives or prints going beyond 1900. How rare indeed are these old glass negatives owned by Mr. Pinkham! Doubtless others around here have old photographs or negatives which could be preserved if the effort was made.
Traveling? Bring Back History

When you travel take a bit of Quincy history with you, and be sure to bring some back. Finding bits of Quincy history in other places, here or abroad, is exciting, and you may be able to bring back pictures and information to add to our library. Include this in the planning for your trip so that you may know what to look for and open the possibilities for pleasant surprises and maybe a real contribution to the Society.

The pictures shown are 1984 vacation trip snapshots of two important bits of Quincy's 19th century history — two fine examples of structures of Quincy granite that made Quincy known the world over.

The greatest fame was as a building stone. Few if any other places could have produced stonework of this quality. The stone was carried on schooners that provided economical transportation. Custom houses up and down the coast, and even in San Francisco, were among the monumental buildings of Quincy granite.

At distant places also, Quincy people gained fame. At York, Pennsylvania, visit the restored court house for an appreciation of Quincy's John Hancock. Here is given a presentation of the session there of the Continental Congress of which John Hancock was President.

While the members of the Congress had a common purpose, they represented widely diverse interests. On many issues the South was against the North, the small states against the large, etc., etc. Holding the Continental Congress together for two years may well have been John Hancock's greatest contribution to history. It is doubtful if any other man could have done it.

by H. Hobart Holly
Society Historian

United States Custom House, Charleston, South Carolina. Built 1853. Architects were Ammi Barnham Young and E. White. Mr. Young was the architect for the Boston Custom House, also of Quincy Granite. There is also Quincy granite in nearby Fort Sumter.

United States Custom House, Savannah, Georgia. Built 1848-1852. The contractor was O. T. Rogers of West Quincy (Rogers Street). The historical marker states that it was "built of granite from Quincy, Massachusetts" — of which they are justly proud.