

THE CAPE COD STORY OF
THORNTON W. BURGESS

by
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Sandwich Town Archivist

With an extensive bibliography of Burgess' books
prepared by Ralph M. Titcomb



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CHAPTER 2 Sandwich Events From "Now I Remember"

In 1960 when TWB was 86 he published his Autobiography, "Now I Remember". This book is filled with an affectionate recall of certain events, places, people and influences in Sandwich which clung to him all his life. Here are a few he referred to, and something more about each one:

P. 5-8. *Going to see the "striped whale" on Town Beach which was being cut up by a whaler from Provincetown. He went with an older cousin and the cousin's grandfather, crossing the marshes over the boardwalk.*

Here is an early picture of the boardwalk, which had been built for \$500 in 1875 by Gus Howland, the lumberman and house-móver. This was the time the beach apparently began first to be used by the public. The only other access to this beach (see map of Sandwich in Chapter I) was by way of Town Neck, an area owned privately by a Proprietors' Company and fenced off for the grazing of cattle. The Town in 1875 built not only the boardwalk for foot traffic from the Glass Factory area, but also built a road from the railway crossing down to the beach for carriages and carts, with a fence on one side for the cattle area. This shows that the beach then became open to the public. On this beach in early colonial days there were occasional groundings of whale, black-fish and porpoises, and the rights to the income from these was specifically vested in the minister as a supplement to his living. This beach also had a heavy clay bank in one section which was good enough for bricks, and twice in the 19th Century an oven had been built here to bake bricks for use in the town. Much of the Cape Cod Glass Co. bricks had been made here and also the bricks for Mrs. French's house on Tupper Road. These brickworks were too exposed to northeast storms and high tides and were abandoned. The boardwalk was also exposed to damage even in the protected marsh. In heavy icing periods the floes of sea ice were borne in on high tides and would smash up the pilings. Also a section would get burned on Hallowe'en occasionally. But the Town always repaired it again and it stands today in the same place.

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The cousin with whom young TWB ventured out on the beach that windy March morning in 1879 was Willie Tobey (William Hayward Tobey, born June 27, 1872, just a year and a half older than TWB). Willie was a first cousin, son of Lucy Hayward Tobey, the only sister of Thornton's mother Caroline. By a strange coincidence the fathers of both these boys had died not long after their births, leaving their mothers little choice but to fall back on relations in Sandwich. Caroline and TWB stayed with her uncle, the Watermans, while Lucy and Willie went to her husband's parents, the Tobeys.

Willie's grandfather was Robert Tobey (1801-1892) of the old Sandwich family, who joined the Boston and Sandwich Glass Co. when it started in 1825, and retired after 61 years in 1886. It says something for the paternalistic B. & S. that it kept him on the payroll until he was 85!



The Boardwalk over the Town Marsh, Sandwich

Credit: Sandwich Historical Society

Built in 1875 to connect the Glass Factory area with the beach, which is beyond the dunes in the distance. At high tide the marsh is fully flooded. In high winds one is conscious that there is no handrail. TWB crossed here at age five to see a stranded whale.

P. 12 The herring run up to spawning grounds every Spring.

The Cape Cod peninsula and most of Plymouth and Wareham is a big gravel pile pushed up by the glacier. It is extremely permeable to rainfall, which maintains ground water at the level found in ponds throughout the area. Most ponds are landlocked, but some big aquifers supply enough water through springs and seepage so that there is a regular runoff stream flowing from the pond to the marshes and thence to the sea. These streams allow alewives to come up to the ponds to spawn every April, a fact the Pilgrims learned from the Indians. The fish were corned, salted or smoked for food, also used for bait and fertilizer. When the colonists built a grist mill and dammed a stream, they provided a fish ladder or lost the herring run.

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Sandwich Historical Commission
145 Main St., P. O. Box 490
Sandwich, Mass. 02563

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January 5, 1983

Mr. V. M. Cassese, P. E.
District Highway Engineer
Department of Public Works
151 Pierce Street Box 111
Middleboro, Ma. 02346

Dear Mr. Cassese:

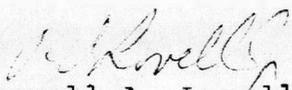
In response to your letter of December 30, the Sandwich Boardwalk was built in 1875 following Town Meeting approval. See extract of Town Meeting Vol 7 P 161 attached. The contractor was Gustavus Howland of Sandwich. The town in 1950 widened the road from the upland at Harbor Street along the old causeway leading to the bit of upland from which the Boardwalk was run across the marsh to the Town Beach. A copy of this drawing is also attached. Since this access road was improved, the Boardwalk has been a popular feature.

The Boardwalk is #137 in our inventory of Historic Assets in Sandwich. A recent photo is attached. It is 1000 feet long.

Attached is also a reference to the boardwalk in March 1879 when (confirmed by newspaper accounts) a whale beached near here and was cut up. The naturalist Thornton W. Burgess (1874-1965) crossed the boardwalk with a cousin and their grandfather to see the whale.

In the 19th Century there was a 2 story bathhouse on the dunes at the beach end of the boardwalk. This was destroyed in the 1898 storm and not replaced.

Yours sincerely,


Russell A. Lovell Jr.
Secretary

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