

100+ YEARS OF CUTTYHUNK'S MAIN DOCK

A sturdy dock along the shore once known as The Narrows in Cuttyhunk Island's channel has felt the feet of passengers and the weight of mail and freight arriving or departing for more than 100 years. It went into partial retirement in June 2017.

This dock, ringed with pilings, has been called the Main Dock, Town Dock, or the ferry (especially *Alert*) dock. A new dock alongside the adjacent decommissioned Coast Guard Boathouse will become the daily focal point for greeters and wavers at boat time, while the original pier maintains its function as the island fueling spot.

During the fishing days of the late 1800s, Cuttyhunk did not have a distinct channel into its harbor, much less a permanent pier. Makeshift platforms at "The Landing" at the approximate location of the eventual dock, allowed shallow draft catboats and skiffs to carry goods for islanders and the Cuttyhunk Fishing Club, as well as daytrippers from early excursion boats anchored in deeper waters. Horse or mule drawn carts were the mode of island transport.

Margaret Brewer described in her memoir her first setting of feet on island in 1903: Catboats transported passengers to "the landing stage, a float that was anchored to the shore ... positioned to where the Woods' Dock [still standing, adjacent] is now."



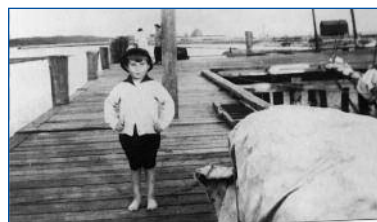
The present day channel came about with the combination of a dredging of eel-grassy shallows around 1905 and the building of the first jetty (1908–11). The 1906 Chart 297 of Cuttyhunk shows a dredged channel and the Main Dock. The dock's L-shape and dimensions have remained the same during its lifespan.

The dock lost some planking and stringers first during the Hurricane of 1938 (185 mph gusts), and again during Hurricane Carol, on August 31, 1954. All necessary repairs were made.

An overhaul in 2009 included constructing a new fuel shed and laying new fuel lines to the dock pump where both vehicles and boats have long filled up.



Before the construction of the Town Dock, freight was off-loaded into mule-drawn carts at the Narrows, 1891.



An unidentified boy poses on the Ferry Dock, c. 1935.



The Alert I (behind the catboat) arrives at the Main Dock, c. 1941.

The *Gosnold* was the first excursion boat that allowed easy debarking on the new dock. The wooden tug-boat *Alert I* connected the mainland to Cuttyhunk from 1917–1987. This vessel that William Wood had built to carry the materials for construction of Winter House in 1917 was originally dark green and then repainted orange and white.

Successive ferries also delivered mail to the island. The *Alert II*, the blue and white steel vessel owned by the Ray and Linda Hopps, provided service until 2006. The current *MV Cuttyhunk* has been operated by Jono and Sue Billings since 2007.

'Boat time,' the old-timers' lingo for the ferry's arrival or departure, punctuated the island's summer days. For most of the last century the *Alert I* announced its arrival with a whistle blast at 11:45 that you could set a watch by, and again at its 3 PM departure. Today's ferry schedule has the *MV* docking at 10 AM. Additional ferry runs have added and altered long-standing 'boat times' to meet growing demand.

Greeters today arrive on foot or in golf carts. The drivers of an array of delivery trucks await increasing amount of freight, often packed in plastic totes, while heavy items are unloaded by crane. On busy weekends, the dock scene approaches chaos.

Ferry departures can ramp up excitement at the dock, with rituals of gifts of goody bags of candy from the Island Market and bouquets of island

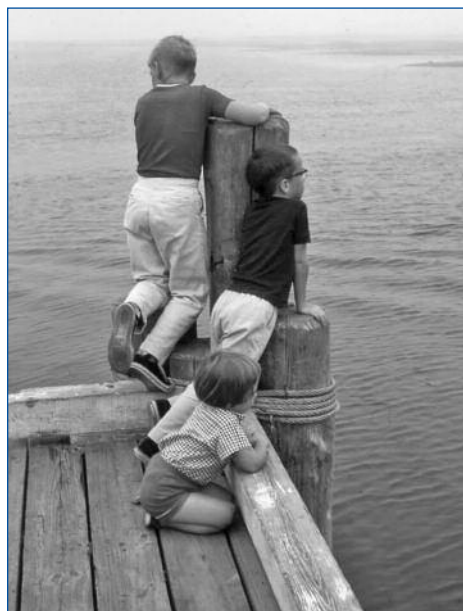
flowers. A passenger's toss of a bouquet overboard at Bell 6 guarantees a return visit to Cuttyhunk. Multi-colored paper streamers, clenched by the fortunate people on the dock and their departing friends, add a festive touch.

The grand finale is JUMPING. Charles Hulley claims that dock jumping replaced a more daring practice of leaping off the stern of the departing *Alert I* with friends Leslie Lewis, "Crash" Ketcham, and Doug Garfield in the late 1960s. Needless to say, *that* was banned.

As the dock lines are unloosed and the ferry pulls away from the dock and turns to head out the channel, 21st century jumpers of all ages line up and leap off the dock in unison, bobbing up in time to wave a final farewell.



Daniel Thomson, son of longtime island market owner Muggsy Thomson, posted a query on Facebook's Cuttyhunk Memories about the 'hide the match' game at the Main Dock in the 1960s. The initial jumper—Bruce Lovell was a star—stuck a matchstick between his toes and jumped off the tallest piling and splashed wildly. From the adjacent Woods' Float, the first onlooker to see the matchstick float free got to jump next. Bev Snow read the post and commented that she and her gang in the mid-1950s played the game, perhaps invented earlier by Johnny Bancroft and his gang.



Peter and Alan Middleton, and Peggy Lovell awaiting the ferry's arrival at a tall corner piling, 1964. (Flora Lovell)



Captain Clarence Flores on Alert I, c. 1964. (Flora Lovell)



Dave Jenkins (with boxes) and Allen Potter (standing) loading delivery trucks, 1970.

(Flora Lovell)

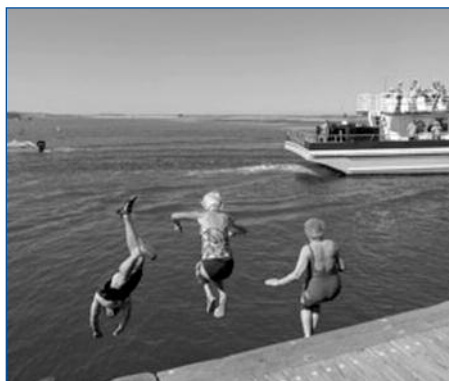


Unloading 21st century freight with crane.

(Weezie Garfield)



Ferry Dock jumpers and the last wave from the waters below, 2012–2016. (Weezie Garfield)



Mildred Allen's elaborate bouquet was composed of island flowers, a can, a sneaker, a wine bottle and a horseshoe crab! 1937.



Nancy Baldwin (back to camera) sending off guests and their luggage long before totes became the norm, 1950. (Flora Lovell)



The pull of streamers at Alert II departure, c. 1993. (Weezie Garfield)

A tale from the 1940s features Bruce “Newt” Newton, owner of a Model T Ford with the sign “Newt’s Fresh Air Taxi.” He took a sports fisherman’s \$100 bet to drive his taxi off the dock. As Wye Garfield recounted the story, “Right at three, Newt, dressed in a striped bathing suit and tooting his horn” drove the taxi down the road to the dock...not stopping, “and off the end of the dock it went in a graceful arc, with a waving Newt at the wheel.” Pulling himself up the dockside, he claimed the prize plus a big cigar. Coast Guardsmen helped him pull the taxi up by a stout rope that Newt had thought to attach to the rear axle. And Newt was back in business.

Finally, who has not enjoyed a nighttime summer dock party, with music and games—be it a Firemen’s Ball, or a visiting yacht club celebration, or something more spontaneous. The dock has also seen the surprise of an occasional small cruise ship tied up for a night.

That is just a taste of summertime life on the Ferry Dock. Passenger, freight, and mail service slows to twice weekly in the winter, when ice occasionally freezes the channel and waters all around the dock and its pilings and in olde photo bottom left.

Going forward, the Main Dock, with more than a century of use, has lost a familiar and primary role. While the *MV Cuttyhunk* breaks in the new pier—funded by the Massachusetts Seaport Council—Gosnold Fuel Service will continue to utilize the structure. Without a doubt, the dock will always be a quiet memory-laden destination, offering breezes and a view of the islands.

LOUISE GARFIELD



Bruce “Newt” Newton (right) and his Fresh Air Taxi, 1937. (Flora Lovell)



Alan Wilder, longtime operator of the fuel service, 2016. (Weezie Garfield)



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Many of the past CHS Monographs are accessible on line.

www.cuttyhunkhistorical.society.org

Sources:

Correspondence with Alan Wilder, David Twichell, Matt Lovell, Bev Snow, Charles Hulley, and Gail Blout.

Cuttyhunk as I Remember It (in 1904), by Margaret Brewer. Cuttyhunk Historical Center, June 1979.

Tales of Cuttyhunk, Wye Garfield, privately published, 2000.

With special thanks to Matt Lovell for sharing the vast collection of his mother Flora Lovell’s photos on the Cuttyhunk Memories Facebook site.

All photos are in the CHS collection and credited when the photographer is known.



Farewell at the Ferry Dock, September 1922. (F.A. Barrows)



The same dock, 90 years later, with a contemporary crowd and the jump tradition, 2012.