

Touring Historic York by Charlotte Blaisdell Proctor

Between 1630 – 1642 some called York ‘Agamenticus,’ others Bristol, as they came from Bristol, England. In 1639 Sir **Ferdinando Gorges** obtained from **King Charles I** a charter for territory along the shore of the Piscatagua River to the Kennebec River and 120 miles inland.

In 1642 Gorges had the name changed to Gorgeana and received a city charter from King Charles I, thus the first city in America. In 1652 Gorgeana became the town of York and under the legislation of Massachusetts. Maine became a state in 1820.

Edward B. Blaisdell – architect, contractor

York Street Baptist Church was completed in 1891. **Edward B. Blaisdell** of York Harbor was the architect and building contractor. Cost was \$10,000, paid in full. First addition was built by **Carroll Blaisdell** and **James H. ‘Sonny’ Blaisdell**, my brother.

Edward B. Blaisdell built many houses, hotels and bridges. He was born in 1845 and died in 1924. He is buried in the cemetery behind the First Parish Church. Among those structures he built were Youngholm, a large home on Cider Hill, built around 1900; St. Peter’s Episcopal Church on Shore Road in 1898, made of native stone and wood, and Passaconaway Inn, a huge hotel, built in 1892 and demolished in 1937.

Edward was the architect for the electric plant in 1895 to provide power to the Marshall House. It is a coal-fired generating plant for the summer. In 1910 it became a year-round operation under the ownership of the Agamenticus Electric Light Co.. He built the Country Club overlooking the York River and Sewall’s Bridge.

Edward said, “When I view York Harbor with its beautiful river, lovely islands and matchless bathing beaches, it makes me feel proud to call it my birth place.”

1692 Indian massacre

Scituate Men’s Row was named for those who came from Scituate, MA. Today it is York Street. On your left is a large white house and barn, the Davis House, which survived the Indian massacre in 1692. The Grover house was owned by the first woman shopkeeper in 1703.

As we approach the center of York Village, we will stop to visit the “Old Gaol” and the Emerson-Wilcox House. The Old York Historical Society offices and research building is in this area. In 1893 the building was designed and built by E. B. Blaisdell for the York County National Bank.

The building is made of Roman-shaped Philadelphia hydraulic-pressed bricks in four shades and of granite. The roof is slate, and the windows are plate glass. The chrome steel safe weighs 3,800 pounds and is three inches thick.

Switching from Ford to Chevrolet

Down the street is a brick building that was **Raymond Blaisdell's** garage until 1960. Originally he sold Ford Motor products. When **Henry Ford** said he had to sell two Fordson tractors for each Motel T, he gave up the dealership. It was impossible in a town the size of York.

Ford had a huge inventory of Fordson tractors that they had expected Russia to buy, but didn't, so Ford dealers were expected to sell them. In 1927 he went with the Chevrolet dealership until he sold the business in 1960.

On the left is the Powder House, used to store ammunition for the War of 1812. **Dr. Cook's** house, the green one on the left, was built by **Frank Marshall**, owner of the Marshall House. He was my doctor as a child, and he had an open window where the chickadees used to fly in and get seeds from a log on the table.

Ralph Blaisdell historic marker

On the right just before the Catholic Church on the Barrell Lane triangle is the Bleasedale granite stone marker where **Ralph Blaisdell** owned land down to Meetinghouse Creek for a short time before moving to Salisbury, MA, in 1640.

In 1723, the Creek was dammed up and called Barrell Mill Pond. Ralph was employed by **Henry Simpson**. Ralph's son, **Henry**, tended goats for **William Hooke** on the Nubble Point. His only companions were wolves and Indians. Ralph's wife's family was from Salisbury.

A Blaisdell returns to York in 1713

Ralph's great grandson, **Ebenezer Blaisdell**, came to York in 1713. He bought land on the south side of the town from Kittery line to the York River. Ebenezer founded the York branch of the Blaisdells. The Blaisdell Brothers Family Farm was purchased from **Ralph Farnham** by **Elijah Blaisdell** in 1772 on South Side Road.

We are crossing over the old railroad bridge used by the Boston & Maine steam railroad. Down Moulton Lane is the house used as a railroad station. Years ago the train went through here from Kittery, ME, and Portsmouth, NH. On your left is Foster's Clambake.

Wiggly Bridge

Wiggly Bridge is on your right. It is a short suspension bridge. Wiggly Bridge was built in 1931 by the Hussey Mfg. in South Berwick, ME. They currently make bleachers for gyms. The scenic footbridge was built for summer harbor hotel guests to have easy access to the golf links on Organug Road. There's a sway or wiggle to the footbridge, thus the name.

It was called the Mill Pond Bridge, but the Girl Scouts renamed it in 1940. Families like to tide pool here at low tide. Indians used to spend their summers near here digging for clams and fishing with a weir, a fence in the stream to catch fish.

A contested building contract

On the left is the cement block in front of the Sayward-Wheeler house that was part of the bridge built by E. B. Blaisdell across the York River to connect York to Kittery Point and points south. Because of the cost there was a lot of opposition among the selectman, bridge committee and the townspeople. In 1906 it was passed to build the drawbridge.

The contract was awarded to E. B. Blaisdell for \$39,500. It was completed in 1908 for \$49,756.63, which the selectman refused to pay. E. B. Blaisdell took the case to the Maine Supreme Court, which ruled for the town to pay. The final bill was \$51,066.71 and was paid in 1913. This 1908 bridge was one of the “three bridges.” The other two parts to the left were built to connect the islands to the mainland, Route 103.

The pilings of the third bridge are to your left. We are traveling on the Old Boston & Maine steam railroad bed. At the junction of Route 103 and Seabury Road there was a bridge that crossed over the railroad for the trolley. It went to the left and to the right up Seabury Road, crossed Sewall’s Bridge and up Organug Road to a turn around by the junction of Route 1A, known as York Street today.

First pile-driven bridge

Sewall’s Bridge was the first pile-driven drawbridge built in America. **Samuel Sewall** invented a new type of bridge. It was constructed of multiple piles, bound in a cluster at the top with iron bands, in place of single piles. Because of varying depths of mud, the piers in each cluster would be of different lengths. It took years before he rigged up a crude pile driver with a trip hammer to loose a heavy oak log endways upon the caps. Sewall built the bridge with 13 spans for the pile driver to go into the river.

Today it is a replica of the original chain-haul drawbridge. Ships went upstream to clay pits to load up cargoes of bricks. The brickyard furnished bricks to build the second Marshall House in York Harbor about 1916.

In 1972, the hotel was demolished and replaced with the Stage Neck Inn. Major Samuel Sewall designed the bridge in 1757. He used strong oak piles to support the heavy timbers over the fast-moving currents and tides. The bridge was opened to traffic in 1761. Draw tenders were paid 30 cents per opening.

York's squad of Minutemen marched over the bridge in the spring of 1776 en route to join the Patriot forces at Lexington. Samuel Sewall's design was used to build a bridge over the Charles River in Boston and over the Thames River in England.

Pleasure boats going under Sewall's Bridge need to keep track of the tides in order to fit under the bridge. We have watched people push their way under the bridge, because they waited too long.

On South Side Road on your right see Sewall's Bridge and the Country Club up on the hill. The Country Club was built by E. B. Blaisdell. Back to your right is the **John Hancock** Warehouse, which is the **George Marshall** store.

Beech Hill Cemetery

The Beech Hill Cemetery by Bartlett Road was deeded to the neighborhood by Elder **Joseph Holt** in 1735. One of the trustees was **Ralph Farnum**, who built the Blaisdell Homestead on South Side Road.

Up on the hill is Ram's Head farm on the left and a beautiful view of York River on your right. My grandfather, **John Cooke** – related to **Francis Cooke** of the Mayflower – was caretaker of four properties owned by his cousin, **Rob Sayles**. During World War II we came here for air raid practices and watched sand bags being dropped by planes.

South Side School

In 1739 twenty pounds was granted for a schoolhouse on South Side Road. This is the school my dad and his brothers went to for grammar school. Their teacher was **Theodosia Barrell**, their mother's sister. Dad said if you got in trouble at school, it was only a short time before you were answering to his dad. All in the family! All that is left are a few large stones.

A Blaisdell Farm since 1772

In 1723 **Daniel Farnham** bought 120 acres from **William Moody** and then sold 50 acres to his brother, **Ralph**. In 1734 Ralph bought all the remaining Moody property. In 1727 Ralph built the house which **Elijah Blaisdell** bought in 1772. Elijah also bought Young's Neck, and it was called Elijah's Neck, where many Sunday School picnics were held. We refer to it as Blaisdell's Neck.

Blaisdell land is on both sides of the road. It was divided between two brothers in the 1700's. Our land starts by the small Blaisdell cemetery and goes past the old ice house. Some of the old farm equipment is still used today. During the month of June the family does the haying of this farm and several other farms, hoping to be finished by July 4. Some of this is mulch and sold to local landscaping businesses.

Slaughtering is done in the spring and fall when people plan to fill their freezers. They also process deer and moose for customers.

Farming with a milk, meat and ice business

When I was growing up, the family farm had a milk business – from the cow to the doorstep; the meat business – the whole process, including smoked hams and bacon; the ice business – harvesting and delivering to businesses and homes, and farming the land to feed the animals.

When we were too young to drive or run the equipment, men were hired to help. I started working in the meat room when I was nine years old, boning out meat and grinding hamburger. When I was tall enough to read the price on the scales, I waited on customers, cutting and wrapping meat and adding columns of numbers without a calculator.

My brothers worked in the barn and milk room. Sonny was driving tractors on the back roads to Kittery when he was nine years old. He was always a great driver, but boy did he like to go fast. The more I screamed the happier he was. **Henry** was nine when I left for college, so he took on jobs with Dad and Sonny.

Bicentennial Farm Award

In 1966 I moved back home with my family, and we moved into the old homestead in 1968. There was a lot to do, plus put in a furnace. Goodbye woodstoves! We all lived next door to each other, and the cousins grew up together. They all live on Blaisdell land except two. One is in Saco, ME, and the other in Concord, NH. “The Kennedy Compound without money.” We always enjoy family gatherings.

In 1989 the Blaisdell farm received the Bicentennial Farm Award from the United States Department of Agriculture. The award was given to nine farms in the York County area in recognition for being an ongoing working family farm prior to the adoption of the Constitution of the United States.

Weathervane

There was a cow weathervane on top of the cupola of the barn...until a small airplane dropped a hook and snatched it away. The Greeks invented the first weathervanes. A vane needs to catch the wind equally on both sides. Seafaring Vikings used them over 1,000 years ago.

New England vanes usually are creatures: cod, swordfish, whales or dolphins. There are many ship weathervanes around York. Sometimes you could tell the type of business by the weathervane: fire station, railroad station, newspaper, public building with the eagle.

Rice's Bridge

The river was crossed by Trafton's Ferry until Rice's Bridge was built in 1805. This is Route 1. On the right is the River House formerly owned by **Mrs. Breckinbridge**, the daughter of **B. F. Goodrich** of the tire company.

When riding in a car you would hear the clunk, clunk sound of the old cement block road under the macadam road. It was three lanes wide; now it is two lanes wide.

The gray house on the left was built in 1812 and belonged to **Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's** great grandfather. We had mail-order houses from Sears and Roebuck purchased in the 1920's. There's one on Lindsey Road and the other in York Harbor near the Lancaster Block built by E. B. Blaisdell in 1895.

In the 1930's and 40's the Harbor Theatre was upstairs. Balcony seats were 25 cents, orchestra seats 40 cents. This building has been converted into shops and condos.

On the right is the York Village War Statue with the inscription, "Erected in 1906 to sons of York who served their country in Army and Navy for Preservation of the Union."

The Emerson Homestead is on the right. A small part of the house is believed to have been a garrison in 1794. When a section of a house is considered historic, this is called "enveloping."

Lost jewelry

When I was young the Emerson family went on vacation. She had some expensive jewelry. She thought the safest place would be the waste basket. The cleaning lady came and emptied "the trash." When they returned, they had people searching the town dump.

On the left is Coventry Hall, built by Judge **David Sewall** in 1794. It was one of the finest and grandest homes. Many distinguished people were entertained here, including President **James Monroe** in 1817.

In 1778 the people of the Isles of Shoals were ordered by the General Court to leave, because of the possible invasion of the British fleet. They made their homes into rafts and floated them to the mainland from Rye, NH, to York. About 25 families came into York Harbor and were supported by the Massachusetts government the rest of their lives.

We'll soon be riding along Long Sands beach. Enjoy the ride and the beautiful view. Last Friday the water was up to the rocks, very little sand, and there were about 25 surfers riding the waves.

Nubble Light

The Coast Guard name to Nubble Light is Cape Neddick Light Station. It was built on a “nub” of land in 1879, thus the name Nubble Light. It was built during President **Rutherford Hayes**’ term. It was occupied until August 1987 when the light was automated. In 1961 the bell was replaced by an electric fog horn.

Barbara Finnemore lives in York and was born at the lighthouse. A German U-boat surfaced near the Nubble. The Portsmouth Naval Shipyard was notified and sank the ship near Boon Island Light.

On a clear day you can see the Isles of Shoals to the right. In 1989 the Parks and Recreation Department took over, restoring it to its original condition. The two windows upstairs were replaced with one; gingerbread trim was repaired; the famous red building was repainted.

Charlotte Anna Blaisdell Proctor *From: James Blaisdell, George E. Blaisdell, Elijah Blaisdell, III, Elijah Blaisdell, II, Elijah Blaisdell – (6.24)*