

## **THE WHARVES OF PLYMOUTH**

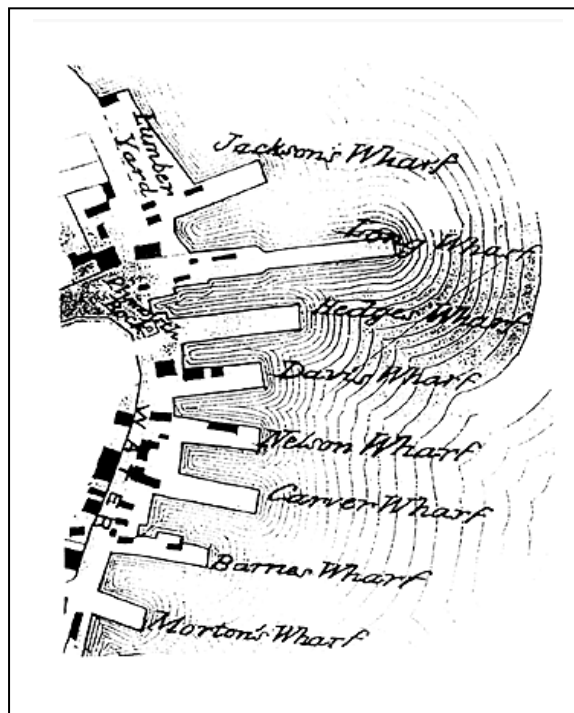
**Edited by Mr. Warren P. Strong**  
**from notes compiled by the late Fred A. Jenks**  
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**The wharves along Water Street** are listed as they appeared about 1870, beginning with the most northerly, Jackson's Wharf, which occupied about the same position as the present (1955) State Pier. At that time, there was no roadway along the shore north of this point.

Hedge's Wharf is the wharf built over and around Plymouth Rock. After it came into the possession of the Pilgrim Society it was renamed Pilgrim Wharf.

Mr. Jenks' sources appear to have been Davis's *Ancient Landmarks* and Thacher's *History of Plymouth* and his own recollections, which bring the story down to the demolition of the wharves and the re-landscaping of the waterfront by the Tercentenary Commission in 1920.

The map is taken from the *Atlas of Plymouth County*, published by Geo. H. Walker and Company, 1879.



## JACKSON'S WHARF

Jackson's Wharf was the first wharf north of the foot of North Street. William T. Davis says in his *Ancient Landmarks of Plymouth*:

Jackson's Wharf was built in about 1750 by Thomas Jackson and Thomas Foster. In 1765 Mr. Foster gave a deed to Thomas Hubbard, then treasurer of Harvard College. In 1774 it was sold by the College to Thomas Jackson. It remained in the Jackson Family and bore the name of Jackson's Wharf.

After 1870 it was little used. The lumber yard of George Jackson included this wharf, and its principal use was for the discharge of lumber cargoes from Maine. It was much used by the boys of that time as a swimming place, and occasionally a "Grand-Banker," a fishing vessel of that period, lay up there for the winter.

The coffer-dam in which the lower section of the Red Light (Bug Light) was assembled and floated to its present position, was built on Jackson's Wharf.

A dock of less importance stood next to Jackson's Wharf. Davis' *Ancient Landmarks* says: *The dock next south between Jackson's and Long wharf was called Tribble's dock. It derived its name from Joseph Tribble who married a daughter of Thomas Jackson and lived in a house near where the Jackson office stood.*

It is occupied now by a restaurant. The boys of 1870 often called the wharf Battle's Wharf. Mr. Battles had the care of the lumber yard.

All the property, wharf and lumber yard, was destroyed when the Plymouth and Brockton Street Railway power station and Craig's Wharf were built. These new buildings were made possible by the extension of Water Street. Both were destroyed in 1920 when Plymouth harbor front was abandoned. The State Wharf now marks the site of Craig's Wharf.

## LONG WHARF

*The upper part of Long Wharf was built by J. Murdock. He obtained permission from the town in 1732. In 1746 he sold it to Isaac Lothrop. It was afterwards owned by Thomas Davis, and finally by Thomas and William Jackson. They held it at the time the first steamship company was formed in 1829. The wharf was then purchased by the steamship company and extended one thousand feet. After running two years without success, it was abandoned.*

Davis's *Ancient Landmarks*, p. 292

The one thousand foot extension brought the end of the wharf to the North Guzzle.

In 1870 there was little water in Plymouth Harbor at low tide. Wearing short rubber boots, a boy could walk from Town Brook to Long Wharf without difficulty. The stream flowing by the ends of the other wharves was the water from Town Brook.

Dr. James Thacher in his *History of Plymouth* writes of Long Wharf in 1829, that it extends nine hundred feet into the harbor – "Having a plank flooring it affords a beautiful promenade, which is much frequented in summer by social parties who wish to enjoy a pleasant view and refreshing sea breeze."

In 1870 the wharf was very different. The additional length built for the steamer had fallen into ruin. Nothing was left but the decaying piles, standing at different angles, unsightly, and a peril to harbor navigation.

About 1910 the piles were removed. The harbor had been excavated and the wharf put into good shape. It had become the property of the Litchfield Brothers, and the Boston and Nantasket Steam Ship Company boats made daily trips in the summer months.

Until the building of the large coal pockets and the establishment of steam hoisting engines, most of the coal and iron was landed at Long Wharf. There Mr. Joseph Townes was stevedore.

Afterward the so-called dug-out was dredged from the turn of the channel to Long Wharf, and sometimes a vessel-load of sisal fiber landed on Long Wharf and was carted to the Plymouth Cordage Company.

## **HEDGE'S WHARF**

Hedges Wharf was built by Isaac Lothrop in about 1749 and remained in the possession of the Lothrop family and of Barnabas Hedge, its representative by inheritance until 1853, when it was sold to George Simmons. In 1853 and 1859, by two deeds, it was sold to Andrew L. Russell. The same year it was sold to Hammatt Billings with the condition that Plymouth Rock should never be removed, and that the land above the dock should never be occupied by any structure not connected with a monument to the Pilgrims. In 1866 it was sold to the Pilgrim Society with all the land above the face of the bulkhead on each side of the wharf, reserving a way to the wharf on either side but not within fourteen feet of the monument.

Davis, *Ancient Landmarks*, p. 292

The monument, which was the canopy over the Rock, was destroyed in 1920. The wharf below the bulkheads was afterwards sold to William H. Nelson.

Mr. William T. Davis, in *Ancient Landmarks*, states that within his memory he has seen the wharf burdened with merchandise from all parts of the world. Oil from the Pacific Ocean discharges from the *Arbella*, *Triton*, and *Fortune*; molasses from the West Indies from the brig *Hannah*; cargoes of bar iron from Rotterdam and Antwerp, discharged from the *Cyclops* and *Ganges*. Also the packets *Splendid*, under Captain George Simmons, and the *Eagle*, under Captain Richard Pope, had their berths and flew their flags of arrival and departure.

In 1870 the canopy over the Plymouth Rock had long been built, and the business viewed by Mr. Davis had long since departed. There were two buildings left on the wharf, one owned by Mr. Franklin Cobb. Here the schooner *Annie B. Jacobs* unloaded cargoes of southern corn, and in cold weather brought a few oysters from the South and loaded pine box boards. The loft, or upper story, was the rigging loft of Mr. Peter Smith. The first floor of the second building was used for packing fish, and here the large fish caught in the spring were cleaned and cured. Herring and mackerel were also salted in barrels and shipped South.

The loft was little used. Sometimes the sails and dories of the fishing fleet were stored there, and an ambitious man would build a dory or a sprit-sail boat there during the winter. There was one builder who was always noted for his work because of its strength rather than its beauty. He proved it in a very careless way. In lowering the boat on completion, his fall parted and the boat struck directly on its stern. Nothing gave way; not even the paint started. His reputation as a careful builder was

permanent.

At the time of the ownership of Weston and Harlow, coal dealers, large bins were erected at the end of the wharf and a steam hoister was installed. Before that time, most of the coal was unloaded on Long Wharf. A horse furnished the power. The coal schooner *Modesty* under Captain Nickerson often arrived there and sometimes a fishing schooner lay up there during the winter. Later, after the Pilgrim Society secured complete control of the wharf, all this work ceased.

At this time there was a pavilion on the beach just north of the turn of the channel. To this point ran a little steamer built as a catamaran. A catamaran was a steam driven boat having two hulls, her propeller being between the hulls. It was built to run on a canal for the purpose of preventing the washing away of the canal banks. The boat was not a success at this work, but it made an ideal boat to run to Plymouth Beach. It had much deck room for its draft, and it did a good business. The boat and pavilion were both destroyed in the storm of 1898, when the steamer *Portland* was also lost. This queer craft was built by Mr. Porter Keen on North River.

Hedge's Wharf went the way of all Plymouth wharves when Plymouth Center ceased to be a sea port in 1920.

## DAVIS WHARF

Mr. William T. Davis states in his *Ancient Landmarks* that this wharf was built probably by David Turner and sold by Mr. Turner to Thomas and William Davis, and at the death of the latter in 1826, his heirs owned the whole property. In 1845 it was sold to Mr. Nathaniel Russell. At this wharf the *Polly*, a Boston packet with Joseph Cooper, master, and the *Argo* of Captain Sylvanus Churchill, had their berths. In 1870 there was a fish market at the head of this wharf and here they boiled the lobsters that Captain Ransome, Captain Burgess, and the Watsons from Clark's Island, brought in. This market was owned by Captain Jesse Atwood, who was also a large owner in the lobster smacks which carried the live lobsters from Plymouth to Boston and around the Cape to New York. The smacks were built with wells through which the salt water could circulate.

The *J. R. Atwood* was a schooner-rigged vessel, and a smart one. Captain Anthony Atwood sailed her and made the run to New York. The stories told of her speed were many, and besides, she was a good boat in bad weather. There were also the *Climax*, sailed by Captain Ellis, and the *Grace Darling*.

These smack captains probably knew their way over the shoals better than most mariners. Captain Ellis was very efficient. There was little of the Sound (Long Island) and few ports he could not make in bad weather. One man who had sailed with him on many trips once said that on nights when he was at the wheel, the captain used to come on deck and say, "How does such a light bear?" – and again,

"How does that light bear? Now throw your 1 lead. Got twelve fathoms water, have you not?"

"Yes, Sir."

"Sandy bottom?"

"Yes, Sir."

"See that you remember it some night when it is so thick that you can see nothing," and he would go below.

Back of Atwood's fish market was the cooper shop of Gideon Holbrook. He made water casks, oil casks, all tight work, and the large fish drums (a cask large in diameter but not very high) into which salt fish were packed for southern shipments. The upper floor was a sail loft once belonging to Daniel

Goddard, but it was carried on by a Richmond, an uncle of John Richmond, whom many in 1940 remembered. You could see the bright floor, made so by the dragging of the canvas, the white overalls of the sailmakers, the smell of wax and tar.

There is little more to say about this wharf, except that the Boston packet made her berth there. It was the schooner *Eliza Jane*, sailed by Captain Nightingale, who knew the harbor – yes, every flat -- for he had been aground on them all. He had a crew of three men, two men and a cook. Two of them did not dare to go aloft. The third man dared to go, but he did not know what to do when he got there. This was told many times by the captain himself.

After the Pilgrim Society secured complete control of Hedge's Wharf, the coal packets were moved to this wharf, and all was ended in 1920.

## **NELSON'S WHARF**

From Davis's *Landmarks* :

Nelson's Wharf, probably the oldest of the Plymouth wharves, was built in 1760, by Mr. Nathaniel Warren and, according to tradition, was erected of timber cut on Plymouth Beach.

In 1706 (the year it was built), one-half interest was sold to John Watson, and in 1716, Mr. Watson and James Warren, son of Nathaniel, sold to John Cushman. In 1724, it was transferred to Robert Brown, who sold it in 1756 to Edward Gray. In 1762, Mr. Gray sold it to George Watson and Nathaniel Goodwin, who sold one-quarter to William and three-quarters to Joseph Bartlett.

There were various changes, but at a later date the Nelson share was owned by William H. Nelson and Jesse Harlow, who married his sister.

In 1870 it was known as Nelson's Wharf. William N. Nelson was a director and for a time, president of the Old Colony Bank. For many years he was also chairman of the Board of Selectmen, and also served as Moderator of Town meetings. Jesse Harlow (Deacon Jesse he was usually called) was an able business man, genial, kind, loved by all that knew him. He was Deacon of the Church of the Pilgrimage from April 27, 1859, to his death.

The firm of Nelson and Harlow were engaged in the fishing trade, and *Manomet* and *Sunbeam* (Grand-Bankers) were fitted out, washed out, and laid up for the winter at this wharf. There was but one store-house on the wharf. Here were stored sails, running-rigging, and cables, and all other equipment removed from the vessels for the winter lay-up.

They were interested in other shipping and there were two other schooners which came in at times to be overhauled. These vessels did their part in the development of a great business organization. The *Hattie Western* and the *Hannah Coomer*, built originally for the cod and mackerel fisheries, were power seaboats and fast sailers. Their two captains, Dexter Craig and John Parsons, both able seamen and great drivers, helped in the beginning of the development of that corporation, the United Fruit Company. South America, Puerto Rico, and Cuba were their ports, and from these ports they carried bananas and coconuts. They went generally to Philadelphia, and sometimes to New York. As can be seen from the logs of Captain Craig's vessel, the time made was remarkable. Only close attention to weather conditions (and they had not the information of the present), skill in seamanship, combined with high courage made it possible.

## **CARVER'S WHARF**

Carver's Wharf was built by Thomas Davis, who was granted permission by the town of 1756. It was held in the Davis family until 1820, when William Davis, son of Thomas, sold three-quarters to Joseph Bartlett and Nathaniel Carver. At this wharf Mr. Davis and Mr. Carver carried on an extensive trade until 1881, when it was sold to Nathaniel Harlow. Here the packets *Atlanta*, commanded at times by Truman Holmes and Samuel H. Doten, and the *Hector*, commanded by Samuel Briggs, Bradford Barnes, Edward Winslow Bradford, and John Darling Churchill, made their berths. Here the first steam boat ever in Plymouth waters made a trip in 1818.

Davis's *Ancient Landmarks*, p. 193

In the memory of the writer there was little activity at this wharf. A few fishing vessels laid up there during the winter, but the structure was in a state of decay, foreign commerce had ended, and fishing was in a state of decline.

## **BARNES WHARF**

Barnes Wharf is believed to have been built by Benjamin Barnes and was always owned by the Barnes family. The packet *Harriet*, Samuel D. Holmes, master, sailed from this wharf, clean and always attractive to passengers.

Davis's *Ancient Landmarks*, p. 294

During the last sixty years of its existence little was done at Barnes' Wharf. It finally went to destruction together with the other wharves along the Plymouth water front. In the early seventies the fishing schooner *George*, the property of Mr. Elkanah Finney, lay at this wharf during the winter. She was a pinki, the only one that hailed from Plymouth in later years, although old fishermen at the wharves told of another of an early date. They used to tell of her wonderful sailing qualities, of her all round worth, and that she was a very able sea boat.

The pinki had a square stern, full bow, and the midship section was round as a barrel, "pushing the whole Atlantic Ocean ahead of her," as one of the Captain Watsons of Clark's Island expressed it. And one more description by a Plymouth captain was "Going to windward she would hit a wave three times and go around it." But pinkis had their place in their day. The owners made a good living, and the crews could get along if shoemaking was good in the winter.

Well, we have written a good deal of Barnes' Wharf, which even in the best days of commerce and fishing was of little importance. But there is still one more story. From this wharf was started and finished the last whaling voyage from Plymouth. It did not go to the Pacific Ocean. The whale came ashore on Plymouth Beach, and some of the men along the water front who had followed the sea as fishermen, began to visualize a profit in this whale that was wasting on the beach. Two of the men had been somewhat wild until past middle age, but had now reformed. One was running a little shop, and also making spruce beer, the kind they used to put up in heavy stone bottles and tie in the stoppers with a mackerel line. The other was a junk dealer, but both had become sober and industrious, with a little money in the bank, and their credit good.

Together they started to strip the blubber from the whale and transport it to Barnes' Wharf. In the upper story of an old building on the wharf lived a family, the head an old derelict who claimed he was once a whaler out of New Bedford. A big kettle was secured and the try pot started. How the downfall of the two partners started is not known, but trouble did start, and for a week there was fun on the dock. It was a show for the boys, and as a result, two reformed men had lapsed, two small stores closed, two small savings accounts were depleted, and ninety-six gallons of oil were obtained.

## ROBBINS' WHARF

Robbins' Wharf was probably built by Thomas Davis in about 1760, and sold by his heirs in 1809 to Samuel and Josiah Robbins. There were several packets which sailed from this wharf.

Davis's *Ancient Landmarks*, p. 294

Around 1870 the wharf was known to the youths of the day as Morton's Wharf. Captain James Morton seemed to control a bulkhead which ran from the south side to Town Brook. For some years a fishing vessel used to tie up for the winter on the north side, and the old sloop *Boston*, sailed by Captain Solomon Webquish, an Indian from the west side of the Cape, also tied up there. The *Boston* carried cord wood to Boston. The owner and captain would ground her on the beach south of Plymouth, load at low water and, when the cargo was complete, sail for the port of delivery.

Mr. James Norton was for many years a character, well-known and loved in Plymouth. He was a sailor man, a fisherman, a vessel owner, a volunteer fireman, and a captain. He was so deaf that it was difficult to make him hear and understand. He was an orator of note at firemen's musters. On the twenty-second of December (the twenty-first after the date was changed), no man could wave the flag and honor the Pilgrims with greater pleasure than Captain Jim Morton. He was not a great citizen, but a good one. He lived his life, and was always kind to the boys of his day.

The wharf may be called Robbins' or Morton's Wharf. Either is correct, it being just a question of age – not of the wharf, but of the age of the men who used it or the boys who fished off it. A bulkhead ran to the Town Brook and a road ran way back of the buildings fronting on Water Street. Sometimes the packet schooner *Anna T. Story*, sailed by Captain Bartlett lay there, but a more frequent visitor was a small schooner that made frequent trips from Plymouth to Provincetown and Gloucester. Her name we do not know, but she was painted pink. She carried a cargo of mackerel barrels and kits, a light cargo even with a deck load.

This is the story of the last wharf on Water Street, and of an industry departed.