

Planting Island Marion, Massachusetts

History, Development, and Architecture



Timothy Pickett. Planting Island, Marion MA, July 18, 2021 @ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=inNjcOU2vrY>.

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LOCUS MAPS



OVERVIEW

The entrance to Sippican Harbor is bounded by two peninsulas referred to as necks: Charles Neck on the west and Sippican Neck on the east. Planting Island is an approximately three-quarter-mile long island which lies close to the eastern shore of the harbor. It is connected to Sippican Neck by a tombolo—a narrow strip of sandy land. A rugged, approximately 42-acre parcel of land with a rocky beach facing Sippican Harbor, it remained largely undeveloped until the first third of the 20th century.



1855 map.



1879 map.

Local historians report that the indigenous peoples of the Sippican tribe used it as a protected site for planting and grazing. “By piling brush across the narrow neck by which it was reached, they could discourage predators from raiding their foodstuffs.”¹

English settlers from Plymouth began arriving in this area in the late 17th century, and by the mid-19th century Marion was a well-established community. However, as late as 1879, historic maps show Sippican Neck to be very sparsely settled and Planting Island totally undeveloped. The Briggs, Blankenship and Ellis families were first among the few pioneers who chose to settle on Sippican Neck. These early farmers and their descendants likely used this rugged island for growing salt marsh hay for silage.

Coinciding with the growth of Marion in the late 19th and early 20th centuries as a tourist destination and a seasonal resort, portions of Planting Island were acquired in the late 19th century by several real estate investors. Then in 1922 the Planting Island Association was formed. In contrast to other East Marion development projects where grand summer residences were built on large lots, the association’s plan was to subdivide the island into small to medium size lots occupied by more modest cottages. A loop road was built running the length of the island and a club house was planned. Today, Planting Island is populated primarily with summer homes built from the 1930s through the early 21st century.

EARLY LAND OWNERSHIP

The 1855 and 1879 maps of Marion show Planting Island as undeveloped with no specific land owners identified. Title research reveals that Planting Island was owned in the 18th into the early 20th centuries by the Briggs, Wing and Ruggles families.

The Briggs Family

The Briggs family owned the western portion of Plantation Island. John Briggs (1679-1728) and his wife Ruth Barrows (1676-1732) were among the early settlers to Sippican Neck. In 1753 their son Cornelius Briggs (1706-

¹ Digital photograph caption, Object #2008.001.093, Sippican Historical Society website.

1764) purchased for 150 pounds from Jeremiah and Mary Griffith their 50-acre homestead and “the Westerly end of the Island called Planting Islandthe Easterly end which Daniel Wing owns, being about fifteen acres of the upland and about six acres of salt marsh.”² The earliest extant house on Sippican Neck at 336 Point Street (ca.1795, Josiah Briggs-Caleb Macomber House, MRN.51) was likely built by Cornelius Briggs. It is the dwelling seen on the 1855 map almost directly east of Planting Island. It is probable that the Briggses, who were farmers, used their land on Planting Island for growing salt marsh hay for silage. In 1868 the descendants of Cornelius Briggs sold the family farm and their land on Planting Island to farmer Caleb W. Macomber.³

The Wing Family

As noted above, the easterly portion of the property was owned by blacksmith Daniel Wing, the son of Samuel and Dorothy Wing of Sandwich. He was married in 1749 to Mereba [var. Merebah] Gifford (1730-1777), the daughter of William Gifford and Mary Swift of Falmouth. In 1901 George Allen Wing (b.1823) and Robert Wing, great-grandsons and heirs-at-law of Daniel Wing and both of Albany, New York, sold the Wing portion of the island to John M. Allen and Harvey W. Everest.⁴

The Ruggles Family

While no references to Planting Island were found in the property descriptions of the 250 acres of land purchased by Charles H. [Henry] Ruggles from Michael Haskell in 1858, it appears likely that the Ruggles family had owned at least the southernmost portion of the island (see South End below). Charles Ruggles (1814-1889) owned a large farm on Sippican Neck that extended to Ruggles Point; that property is now the Kittansett Golf Course. Ruggle’s grandson Carl S. Ruggles, who was born on his grandfather’s farm, was a well-known American composer.

ACQUISITION & CONSOLIDATION

Between 1879 and the time of the 1903 map, Planting Island remained undeveloped and devoid of any buildings. It was, however, the object of acquisition by several parties with the likely intent of developing the island into another summer colony in East Marion. The 1903 map shows the island owned by three parties: the estates of “Nixon” [a map error, as the co-owner was the estate of Albert W. Nickerson] and [George] Myrick at the north end; Mgt. [Margaret] W. Richardson and H. [Harvey] W. Ernest in the center portion; and Benjamin Worcester at the south end of the island. The acquisition and eventual consolidation of the Planting Island properties took place over a 50+ year period in a series of complicated and interrelated transactions.



1903 map detail.

North End (“Nixon” [Nickerson] and Myrick Estates)

In 1872 and 1873 George Myrick and William Reed acquired the interest in the property which Caleb Macomber had purchased from the Briggses in 1868.⁵ Born in Yarmouth on Cape Cod, George Myrick (1834-1887) was a Boston wholesale grocer. William Reed (1819-1898), also a grocer, lived in Raynham. It is unclear what their interest was in the acquisition of land on Planting Island.

² Plymouth County Registry of Deeds, Book 42, Page 216 Feb. 16, 1753.

³ Plymouth County Registry of Deeds Book 349 Page 91 April 17, 1868.

⁴ Plymouth County Registry of Deeds, Book 825, Page 32, Jan. 28, 1901.

⁵ Plymouth County Registry of Deeds, Book 393, Page 127, June 14, 1872.

William Reed sold his half-interest in the property described as the “upper part” of Planting Island to William P. Ellison, who then sold it to Albert W. Nickerson.^{6,7} Born in Boston, Albert Winslow Nickerson (1840-1893) was the son of sea captain, businessman, and merchant Joseph Nickerson (1804-1880) and Louisa Winslow. His father was reputed to be among the wealthiest men in Boston, and Albert Nickerson himself was a wealthy mill owner and merchant. In 1882 he purchased the Great Hill Hotel (Great Hill – Stone Estate, MRN.G) a short distance away. Nickerson died in 1893, and in 1902 the property was conveyed to his widow Amelia F. Nickerson.⁸ In 1921, Amelia Nickerson conveyed a number of properties to her son Albert L. Nickerson.⁹

The 1903 map notes ownership of this property as Nixon [Nickerson] and Myrick’s Estates. It is unclear how the Nickerson interest in the property was resolved. The estate of Carrie Myrick, the widow of George Myrick, sold her one-half interest in the property in 1922 to Margaret W. Richardson and Harvey Everest.¹⁰

Margaret W. Richardson (1858-1937) and her husband, Boston physician Maurice Howe Richardson (1851-1912), were active in the Marion real estate market. Maurice H. Richardson is described in his obituary in the *Boston Globe* as “one of the world’s great surgeons.” Surgeon-in-chief at the Massachusetts General Hospital, Richardson was a pioneer in the surgical treatment of appendicitis and the inventor of the Richardson surgical retractor.¹¹ He and his family lived on Beacon Street in Boston’s Back Bay neighborhood, where the 1910 census showed them residing with six servants.

Harvey W. Everest (1830-1920) was married to Phebe Bates Allen (1837-1922) of Marion. The 1870 census recorded the couple living in Ann Arbor, Michigan with Harvey’s occupation recorded as bookkeeper. The 1880 census listed them living in Marion with Harvey Everest’s occupation recorded as farmer, and 20 years later in 1900 they were still in Marion. The Marion business section of the 1907 and 1910 Wareham city directories list Harvey Everest as a real estate agent. He also served as town assessor.

Center Portion (Margaret Richardson & H. W. Everest)

Local architect and real estate investor John M. Allen (1842-1912) was involved in a number of early transactions involving land in the center portion of Planting Island. Allen, who graduated from Harvard and trained with the Boston architectural firm Ware & Van Brunt, was noted for designing commercial buildings in Boston where he maintained an office after establishing his own architectural firm. He also designed private residences in Marion, including the house at 1 Allen Street (1882, Rev. John C. Brooks House, MRN.304). He and his wife Lizzie W.R. Allen were active in the Marion real estate market as developers, taking advantage of the wave of interest in Marion as a summer vacation location. Allen was also involved in the development of a 1903 syndicate and high-end subdivision on Allen’s Point (MRN.C), also in East Marion.

In 1895, on behalf of Boston businessman and sugar magnate Henry R. Reed, John M. Allen purchased a 2-acre parcel of land on Planting Island from Lucy and James Clifford and George Clifford.^{12, 13} Allen conveyed the property to Reed, whose executors sold it to Margaret W. Richardson.^{14,15}

On October 6, 1900, Harvey W. Everest purchased “all of the interest in and to the upland of Planting Island” from Sarah M. Allen, the daughter Chandler R. Briggs of Woodstock, New York and the only surviving heir-at-law of Nathaniel Briggs.¹⁶ Four days later on October 10th, Everest sold one-half of his interest to John M. Allen.¹⁷ In

⁶ Plymouth County Registry of Deeds, Book 478, Page 28, Jan, 16, 1882.

⁷ Plymouth County Registry of Deeds, Book 481, Page 249, May 3, 1882.

⁸ Plymouth County Registry of Deeds, Book 853, Page 354, Sept. 29, 1902.

⁹ Plymouth County Registry of Deeds, Book 1370, Page 406, Feb. 11, 1913.

¹⁰ Plymouth County Registry of Deeds, Book 1408, Page 4, Feb. 28, 1922

¹¹ “Dr. Maurice H. Richardson Dead,” *The Boston Globe*, Boston, MA, August 1, 1912.

¹² Plymouth County Registry of Deeds, Book 689, Page 254, Feb. 21, 1895.

¹³ Plymouth County Registry of Deeds, Book 692, Page 146, Jan. 29, 1895.

¹⁴ Plymouth County Registry of Deeds, Book 971, Page 324, Oct. 30, 1906

¹⁵ Plymouth County Registry of Deeds, Book 971, Page 325, Oct. 30, 1906.

¹⁶ Plymouth County Registry of Deeds, Book 813, Page 275, Oct. 6, 1900.

¹⁷ Plymouth County Registry of Deeds, Book 813, Page 356, Oct. 18, 1900.

1901, through a series of transactions, Harvey Everest purchased the interest of several more Briggs descendants.^{18,19,20,21} Everest then conveyed half interest in these properties to Allen as well. Separately, Allen had acquired the interest in the Planting Island land of other Briggs descendants.^{22,23,24}

Because both Harvey Everest and John Allen were active in the local real estate market it may have been their intent to develop part of the island for seasonal residences. However, in 1902 Allen conveyed his interest in the properties which he had jointly owned with Everest to Margaret W. Richardson.^{25,26} He simultaneously conveyed his interest in some of the properties he had separately acquired from the Briggs descendants to Everest.²⁷

South End (Benjamin Worcester)

In 1907, Benjamin Worcester sold “the southeasterly part of Planting Island and the strip of land connecting said Island and the Great Neck” to William J. Stober of Boston.²⁸ Benjamin Worcester (1824-1911) was married to Mary Clapp Ruggles (1826-1892) and his title for the property came from the will of his late wife. In 1858, Charles Henry Ruggles, the son Michah Ruggles, had conveyed a messuage (farmstead) to his stepmother Lydia in trust for the benefit of her daughter and his half-sister Mary, the wife of Benjamin Worcester.²⁹ Benjamin and Mary Worcester lived in Waltham, where Benjamin was a clergyman who later turned to teaching. The 1910 census reported him as a private school principal at age 85.

William J. Stober was a Boston real estate investor specializing in residential properties in the city’s Back Bay neighborhood. In 1910 Stober requested and received a decree from the Massachusetts land court establishing the boundaries of his ownership on the island.³⁰ In April of that year, he sold the property to Margaret W. and Maurice H. Richardson of Boston.

¹⁸ Plymouth County Registry of Deeds, Book 818, Page 268, April 4, 1901.

¹⁹ Plymouth County Registry of Deeds, Book 825, Page 345, April 8, 1901.

²⁰ Plymouth County Registry of Deeds, Book 827, Page 28, April 5, 1901.

²¹ Plymouth County Registry of Deeds, Book 826, Page 270, July 19, 1901.

²² Plymouth County Registry of Deeds, Book 847, Page 17, April 16, 1902.

²³ Plymouth County Registry of Deeds, Book 825, Page 446, May 3, 1901.

²⁴ Plymouth County Registry of Deeds, Book 825, Page 348, April 3, 1901.

²³ Plymouth County Registry of Deeds, Book 826 Page 270, July 29, 1901.

²⁴ Plymouth County Registry of Deeds, Book 847 Page 17, April 16, 1902.

²⁵ Plymouth County Registry of Deeds, Book 846, Page 1, May 8, 1902.

²⁶ Plymouth County Registry of Deeds, Book 846, Page 2, May 8, 1902.

²⁷ Plymouth County Registry of Deeds, Book 847, Page 154, May 7, 1902.

²⁸ Plymouth County Registry of Deeds, Book 969, Page 548, Jan. 19, 1907.

²⁹ Plymouth County Registry of Deeds, Book 539, Page 335, March 1, 1887.

³⁰ Plymouth County Registry of Deeds Certificate of Title 156, April 8, 1910.



Planting Island shoreline, ca. 1907. Image courtesy of the Sippican Historical Society.

DEVELOPMENT

By 1910, Margaret Richardson and Harvey Everest owned the entire island either jointly or separately. Harvey Everest died in 1920, and his interest in the properties on Planting Island were inherited by Thomas Allen Oglesby, the great nephew of his wife Phebe B. Allen. In 1924 Oglesby sold the property described as the northwesterly portion of the island to the Planting Island Association.³¹ That same year, Margaret Richardson sold her holdings to the Planting Island Association, a development entity that had been established in 1922. The transaction included the “northwesterly portion of Planting Island including all upland, marsh, shore, and beach,” along with all right, title, and interest in the approach to Planting Island and on the neck connecting Planting Island with the main land.”³² At the same time, the land which she had purchased from William J. Stober in 1910 was conveyed to the Planting Island Association in a separate transaction.³³

The Planting Island Association was established in 1922 by Walter S. Delano and Joseph W. Whitcomb. Delano, the president, lived on Cottage Street in Marion and was listed as a grain merchant in the 1920 census and a bank president in the 1930 census. Whitcomb, who served as the treasurer, lived in Wareham and was the cashier at the National Bank. In September 1924 the Planting Island Association granted an easement to the Town of Marion for “the purpose of laying, repairing and maintaining water pipes in the ways and avenues of Planting Island... and on the Neck or approach to Planting Island.”³⁴

By 1926, the area was under development by the Planting Island Association. Two parallel avenues, East Avenue and West Avenue, had been laid out along the length of the narrow “island” and connected by several short cross streets. A local history resource states that a clubhouse was built, but no documentation was found to confirm this. One of the earliest recorded land sales took place on April 12, 1926, when three lots (Lots #11, 12 and 13) were sold by the association to Malcolm G. and Alice M. Wight of Wellesley.

³¹ Plymouth County Registry of Deeds, Book 1465 Page 52, June 17, 1924.

³² Plymouth County Registry of Deeds, Book 1463, Page 347, June 16, 1924.

³³ Plymouth County Registry of Deeds Certificate of Title 158, June 16, 1924.

³⁴ Plymouth County Registry of Deeds, Book 1469, Page 230, September 5, 1924.



Land Court Plan 2318A (1924).

House lots were sold by the Association between 1924 and 1973. A price list published in 1927 shows that lots with frontage on Buzzards Bay and Planting Island Cove commanded roughly twice as much as those on the interior. (See image on following page.) The construction of houses did not appear to begin until the mid-1930s, probably driven by the nation’s economic recovery after the Depression. Sales dropped off in the 1940s, but resumed in the 1950s and then slowed in the 1960s.

Decade of Recording Date	Number of Sales
1924-1929	19
1930-1939	23
1940-1949	9
1950-1959	26
1960-1969	10
1977-1973	3

The deed transactions for these parcels included a number of restrictions, including the following partial list:

- Only one dwelling house designed for the use and occupancy of a single family, the plans for which to be approved by the Association
- Minimum cost set at \$4,000 for houses on the Bay, \$3,500 on the Cove, and \$3,000 on inside lots
- Garage for no more than two cars
- Minimum set-back from street of 20 feet
- Indoor plumbing only, no privies or outhouses
- No commercial or other non-residential purposes
- Only dogs and cats as pets
- Piers allowed on land bordering the water
- Assessment for road maintenance
- Subsequent owners must be approved by Association as “congenial to other owners”³⁵

By the 1970s deed restrictions appeared to have been eased by the Association and sizeable dwellings were built, some on large, consolidated parcels. Construction of new houses has continued into the 21st century, with

³⁵ Plymouth County Registry of Deeds, Book 1504, Page 186, April 12, 1926.

some dwellings likely replacing earlier ones. The Association maintains the private beach and a dock, which are available to all home owners.

Marion, Mass., November 15, 1927
**PRICE LIST OF LOT UNITS ON
 PLANTING ISLAND**
 AS PER PLAN DATED APRIL 28, 1926
 Subject to change without notice

FRONTING ON BUZZARDS BAY							
Units	No.	21	to	23	inclusive	(3 units)	\$3000
"		27	"	29	"	per unit	1100
"		30	"	35	"	"	1000
"		273	"	281	"	"	1000
"		282	"	284	"	(3 units)	4000
"		285	"	288	"	(4 units)	5000
"		289	"	292	"	(4 units)	5000
"		293	"	295	"	per unit	1000
"		296	"	301	"	"	1000
"		302	"	304	"	"	1000
"		305	"	308	"	"	1000
"		309	"	311	"	"	1000
FRONTING ON PLANTING ISLAND COVE							
Units	No.	107			inclusive	per unit	3000
"		108	"	120	"	"	1000
"		134	"	136	"	"	1100
"		143	"	162	"	"	1000
"		163	"	195	"	"	1000
FRONTING ON WEST AVENUE							
Units	No.	40	to	255	inclusive	per unit	600
"		251	"	248	"	"	600
"		247	"	244	"	"	650
"		243	"	229	"	"	850
"		228			fronting Island Court		3000
FRONTING ON EAST AVENUE							
Units	No.	104	to	204	inclusive	per unit	500
"		205	"	208	"	"	500
"		209	"	212	"	"	600
"		213	"	227	"	"	750

Property of the Sippican Historical Society

Unreferenced advertisement dated November 15, 1927. Image courtesy of the Sippican Historical Society.

SELECTED BUILDING OWNERS

Partial title histories and owner profiles for several building owners are included below. These provide insights into the individuals who acquired land and built summer dwellings on Planting Island during the early years of its development.

15 West Avenue (Lots 62, 63, & 64) Assessor # 3-38

In October 1925, Sarah Deane and her husband Abial Deane purchased a total of nine house lots from the Planting Island Association numbered 62, 63, 64; 80,81,82; and 83, 84, 85.³⁶ The Deanes were from Middleborough, where Abial was a plumber working at the T.W. Pierce Hardware Store. In 1935, the couple sold lots 62, 63 and 64 to Lester E. Stowell of Marion and his wife Ivah C. Stowell.³⁷ Lester Stowell (1889-1965) was also a plumber, so perhaps there was a business connection with Abial Deane. Stowell took out a mortgage with George P. Dean, the son of Abial Deane, which may have been a building loan. It is likely that the house was built by or for Lester and Ivah Stowell. In 1945, the Stowells sold the property to Mary and Arthur P. Connelly of Brookline.

16 West Avenue (Lots 11, 12, & 13) Assessor # 3-4

This property, consisting of lots numbered 11,12, and 13, was conveyed by the Planting Island Association to Malcolm G. and Alice M. Wright of Wellesley on April 12, 1926.³⁸ Malcolm Wright was a graduate of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and was an insurance executive. At the time of this purchase he was a special agent with the Hartford Fire Insurance Company.³⁹ The likely builder of this house, Wright owned it until 1951 when it was sold to John E. and Georgia M. Spenlinhauer.⁴⁰

26 West Avenue (Lots 21,22, & 23) Assessor #3-6A

G. Clifton Watts of West Roxbury and his wife Inez Lucille Watts purchased lots numbered 21, 22 and 23 from the Planting Island Association in 1929.⁴¹ G. Clifton Watts was the head of the Watts Detective Agency in Boston. The agency he managed was started by his uncle, Ex-chief Inspector William B. Watts of the Boston Police Department.⁴² The property was owned by the Watts family until 1980.

43 West Avenue (Lots 258, 259, & 260) Assessor # 3-30 (See photo below.)

This property consists of lots numbered 258, 259, and 260 which were conveyed by the Planting Island Association to Frank E. and Marion C. Drake of Wollaston in 1934.⁴³ Census records show Drake as a restaurant manager. In 1971 Marion Drake, now a widow, conveyed the property to her daughter and son-in-law Barbara D. and Henry Weinberg.

52 East Avenue (Lots 205,206,207, & 2008) Assessor # 3-51 (See photo below.)

In 1930 Birdie Campbell Morse and her husband Willard Ives Morse purchased three lots — 206, 207, and 208 — from the Planting Island Association, and three years later bought a fourth, lot number 205.^{44,45} Born in Leominster, Willard Morse attended Harvard and received a law degree from Boston University Law School. He was for 40 years an attorney for the Massachusetts Title Insurance Company.⁴⁶

³⁶ Plymouth County Registry of Deeds Certificate of Title 4234, Oct. 16, 1925.

³⁷ Plymouth County Registry of Deeds Certificate of Title 5421, April 18, 1935.

³⁸ Plymouth County Registry of Deeds Certificate of Title 2446, Oct. 12, 1926.

³⁹ "Insurance Exchange Elects M.G. Wright," *The Boston Globe*, Boston, Jan. 14, 1928.

⁴⁰ Plymouth County Registry of Deeds Certificate of Title 16511, August 16, 1951.

⁴¹ Plymouth County Registry of Deeds Certificate of Title 1731, Oct. 8, 1929.

⁴² *The Boston Globe*, Boston, MA Oct. 26, 1928.

⁴³ Plymouth County Registry of Deeds Certificate of Title 3870, Aug. 6, 1934.

⁴⁴ Plymouth County Registry of Deeds Certificate of Title 3870, July 1, 1930.

⁴⁵ Plymouth County Registry of Deeds Certificate of Title 4050, June 23, 1934.

⁴⁶ "Williard I. Morse," *The Boston Globe*, Boston, MA, Aug. 17, 1952.

ARCHITECTURE

The houses on Planting Island include a variety of forms and styles typical of the first three quarters of the 20th century. Mostly small to moderate in size, they are built on uniformly small lots with consistent setbacks. With the exception of a handful of shore-facing dwellings at the northern tip of the island, the houses face the street. The properties with frontage on Sippican Harbor to the west have shallow back yards and sandy beaches, typically retained by stone seawalls and separated by stone jetties. The properties on the calmer Planting Island Cove side of the island have more extensive back yards that transition to marsh land; many of these have docks. The earliest houses, which date to the mid-1930s, are predominately Colonial Revival Capes and Ranch houses. They were followed by Dutch and Garrison Colonials, Contemporaries, and lastly revival styles such as the Neo-Shingle style. The streets are lined with trees and most properties are generously landscaped.



Planting Island Road, view north.



Planting Island Road, view southeast on causeway towards Sippican Neck.



West Avenue streetscape.



West Avenue beachfront.



52 East Avenue, built 1935. Colonial Revival.



43 West Avenue, built 1936. Colonial Revival.



48 East Avenue, built 1953. Contemporary.



42 East Avenue, built 1958. Split Level.



21 Island Court, built 1968. Shed Contemporary.



1 Island Court, built 1975. Contemporary.



34 East Avenue, built 1995. Contemporary.



11 Richardson Road, built 2021. Neo-Shingle Style.

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