

Hazelwood Park

On Clark's Point is the 23-acre Hazelwood Park which takes its name from a private estate purchased in the late 1830s from local farmers, some of whom might have been Howlands. Cornelius Howland (1758-1835) was a master mariner who was captured by the British during the Revolutionary War. Sometime after the war, he retired to his farm on the end of the Point and later became the first lighthouse keeper for the Clark's Point Light in 1797. He lived in his own house and tended the adjacent navigational aid. His son, Edward Wing Howland, assumed responsibility for the light upon his father's death in 1835.

The adjacent map¹ of Clark's Point from 1834 shows salt works (dark rectangular structures) stretched across the mouth of the neck and a school further south on the east side of Middle Road near the parallel roads to the east. Much of the land is wooded (as indicated by little dimple marks), including the future site of Hazelwood (shown with a circle). There are only a handful of houses.



I was particularly interested in the area because it was the background against which family friend Llewellyn Howland described his teen years in the 1890s, mentored by a distant bachelor relative called "Skipper". **Llewellyn Howland** was born in 1877 in New Bedford. His father, William D. Howland, was descended from a highly influential Quaker family which was deeply involved in whaling, local government, and later textile mills. After graduating from Harvard in 1900, Llewellyn worked for the Boston firm of Waldo Brothers which sold building materials. The company did very well and Llewellyn with it. In 1901 he married the president's daughter and later he became vice-president.

Despite his new city life in Boston, Llewellyn maintained his love of boats, an attraction instilled in him during his years on the Point. When he was 18, he and Skipper designed his first boat, the *Fox*, and at age 21 Llewellyn designed a boat by himself for a friend. Llewellyn often crewed for Skipper, and in the *Fox* they cruised around Buzzards Bay and to Noman's Land. When Llewellyn was about 50 years old, in 1926, he founded Concordia Company² in Boston which primarily built small boats. Four years later he transferred the company to his son, Waldo, who relocated it to Fairhaven in 1938 with a commission to build a 28 foot boat. Unfortunately, the business suffered huge losses only months later during the September hurricane. Many crafts were smashed and shattered in Padanaram harbor where Concordia had kept a number of their boats. The destruction of Llewellyn's personal boat inspired the company to begin manufacturing yawls. It hired top designers and also partnered with companies in Europe. In 1964, the Howland family sold the boat business, but retained ownership of the wharf in Padanaram where the boat-building occurred. However, when they finally sold the wharf in 2006, Concordia lost the low bid and had to vacate. They moved the company to nearby Gulf Road in 2007, where it still resides.

¹ 1834 map of Clark's Point: <https://iif.lib.harvard.edu/manifests/view/ids:2569379>

² Concordia Company, Inc.: <https://www.concordiaboats.com/history.html>

Returning to the history of Clark's Point and Llewellyn's teen-years, his stories described Skipper's Point farm of 200 acres.³ The wagon-path led down the hill along the northern property line so as to not trample the "East Mowing", then veered slightly south through a stand of trees. Near the house was "peach alley", a strip of grass running north-south, bordered by peach trees protected by a 10-foot stone walls on east and west sides and a dense growth of conifers at the north end. The wagon path turned sharply left, then right into a paved courtyard in front of the house. Past the house, it continued down through the "West Mowing" to where the West Gate opened onto a public path along the cove, now called Rodney French Boulevard West. Included in the farm compound, Llewellyn described The Cottage, the well house, and the carriage house, in addition to a "long rank of farm buildings and sheds". Over the ridge of the Middle Road and a half mile away on the Point's east shore was Beetle's boat yard facing New Bedford's outer harbor. "Skipper" and Charles Beetle⁴ were great friends, and Llewellyn often helped in the boat-building process, especially during summer vacations from school. All of this, however, came 50 years after the land was first "domesticated" as an estate.

In 1839-40, when **Joseph Congdon** (1799-1857) was a 40-year old bachelor, he bought the wooded property on the west side of the Point, about in the north-south middle, and built his first house, a **fieldstone** Gothic revival cottage surrounded by English gardens.⁵ He named it Hazelwood. The side facing the cove had two gables (top photo), probably overlooking a porch which stretched across the front of the house including the wings. Residents would have relaxed and enjoyed the view as they caught the breezes. The inland side had only one large gable above the door. Small wings were at each end.



Congdon was a wealthy New Bedfordite from a prominent family. For many years, he was the head cashier of Mechanic's Bank operating in the Double Bank Building at the foot of William Street. His younger brother, James, held the same position next door at the Merchant's Bank. James became a friend of my great, great grandfather, Thomas Coggeshall, and is mentioned in the latter's letters. The brothers were sons of Capt. Caleb Congdon (1767-1832), the fourth generation of his family to live in Rhode Island. However, Caleb migrated to New Bedford prior to his marriage in 1789 to Susannah Taber of Dartmouth.



³ *The Middle Road*, published in 1961 by Concordia Co. of South Dartmouth, edited by Llewellyn Howland III. The chapter entitled "The Middle Road" is particularly helpful, but there are pieces of information throughout the book, as well as in *Sou'West and By West of Cape Cod*, 1948, Harvard University Press.

⁴ **Charles Darwin Beetle** (1860-1930) was the son of boat builder James Beetle who first worked in the city, but began living on Clark's Point in the 1850s. Son Charles was born after the move and joined his father's business, as did his two older brothers. As the whaling industry died, the company shifted into making other boats and in the early 1920s began marking their beetle cat. <https://beetlecat.com/history/>

⁵ Hazelwood Park: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hazelwood_Park_\(New_Bedford,_Massachusetts\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hazelwood_Park_(New_Bedford,_Massachusetts))

Caleb and Susannah Congdon had seven other children besides Joseph and James. Their oldest child was **Phebe**, born in 1790. In 1809 she married William Coffin and they had at least six children.⁶ William, with his older brothers David and Jethro, had come from Nantucket to New Bedford as young men. William and Jethro appear to have been boat builders. Born in 1784, Phebe's husband William died in 1843, about age 60.⁷ His wife Phebe was left with nine children, ranging in age from 31 to 10. Fortunately, none were infants and the oldest four sons were already working. She also had plenty of family nearby, both hers and her husband's.

Only three years after the death of Phebe's husband, her brother Joseph Congdon built a second house on his property at Clark's Point, in 1846, a **camel-colored stucco home** with gingerbread bilge boards similar to his own. It became known as the **Phebe Coffin House** or as the **Coffin-Howland House**, designating its later owners.

The Congdon siblings lived comfortably next door to each other for another three years. In 1849, Joseph (age 49) happily married Mercy T. Buffum (age 30) of Lynn, Massachusetts. The following year, an 1850 map⁸ shows Middle Road running top-to-bottom (north-south) and a track leading left (west) to a single house with a second house in an open area just to the north. Both houses are surrounded by woods.

Tragically, in March, 1851 Mercy Congdon died, only a month after giving birth to a daughter. By August, the baby had died as well, of "debility", in Lynn where she probably had been left by Joseph to be raised by Mercy's family. Heart-broken, Joseph abandoned his estate and moved back into New Bedford where he died in 1857.

It is unknown if his sister Phebe followed him immediately in 1851 or waited a few years to move to the city as well. Either way, the house remained in the Coffin family and she had left by 1860.



map showing Hazelwood in 1850

⁶ One of the children of William and Phebe (Congdon) Coffin was William D. Coffin (born 1816). Early in his career he began work at New Bedford Institute for Savings, but apparently he also began a habit of taking money. By the 1850s, he was Treasurer. Suddenly in 1870 he disappeared at which point the bank realized it had been robbed of \$40,000, a huge amount at that time. Rumors suggested friends gathered enough money to buy his passage to another country. <http://www.southcoasttoday.com/news/20160917/peggi-medeiros-william-coffin-man-who-walked-away-from-new-bedford-bank-scandal>

⁷ Information about William Coffin: <https://www.nantuckethistoricalassociation.net/bgr/bgr-o/p507.htm>

⁸ 1850 map: https://www.davidrumsey.com/luna/servlet/detail/RUMSEY~8~1~33340~1170760:New-Bedford-;JSESSIONID=2d3762bd-371f-453e-a956-10b0f029baa8?showTipAdvancedSearch=false&showShareIIIIFLink=true&showTip=false&helpUrl=https%3A%2F%2Fdoc.lunaimaging.com%2Fdisplay%2FV74D%2FLUNA%2BViewer%23LUNAVIEWER-LUNAVIEWER&title=Search+Results%3A+List_No+equal+to+%27272470.008%27&fullTextSearchChecked=&dateRangeSearchChecked=&advancedSearchUrl=https%3A%2F%2Fdoc.lunaimaging.com%2Fdisplay%2FV74D%2FSearching%23Searching-Searching&thumbnailViewUrlKey=link.view.search.url

The 1852 New Bedford Directory (prepared for publication in 1851) lists Phebe as living there with her two sons Charles H. and Frederick, both boat builders. A third son, Edmund B., lived on nearby Cove Street, also a boat builder. By 1856, Charles and Frederick had left Hazelwood and begun a paper box “manufactory”, but Edmund had moved in with his wife and children; a larger place at which to build boats. A map of that year confirms this (see the following page).⁹

Again, death stalked the house. After having three children, Edmund’s wife delivered a fourth in February, 1860. The baby died the following month. There is no record of the mother’s death, but the June, 1860 census does not list her. Nor does it list Phebe as part of that household, so she must have joined one of her other sons in town. In 1863, Edmund also died. Surely, if the house hadn’t already been sold before that, it was sold then. The new owners of the stucco house were Llewellyn’s grandparents, Matthew and **Rachel Howland**¹⁰, who had purchased it as a summer retreat, still maintaining their substantial home on Hawthorn Street in the city. The property was put in Rachel’s name, as indicated by an 1881 map¹¹, a common practice to protect assets and provide income for wives after their men died.



In the **1856 map** on the left, the Hazelwood houses are owned by E. B. Coffin and Mrs. T.D. Lucas. The **1881 map** on the right shows the Coffin property was sold to Mrs. Rachel Howland, Llewellyn’s grandmother.

And die they did; Matthew passed away in 1884, leaving Rachel with three grown sons, the eldest of whom (Richard) was a married merchant in California, the next (Matthew Morris) was a bachelor trader in New York City, and the third (William D.) was married with a family in New Bedford. Although Rachel held the deed for the house until her death in 1902, she appears not to have lived there, but loaned or rented it to other members of the family, possibly the “Skipper” in Llewellyn’s stories if he existed as a single individual. Tracing Rachel’s residences through New Bedford’s directories, by 1889 she was

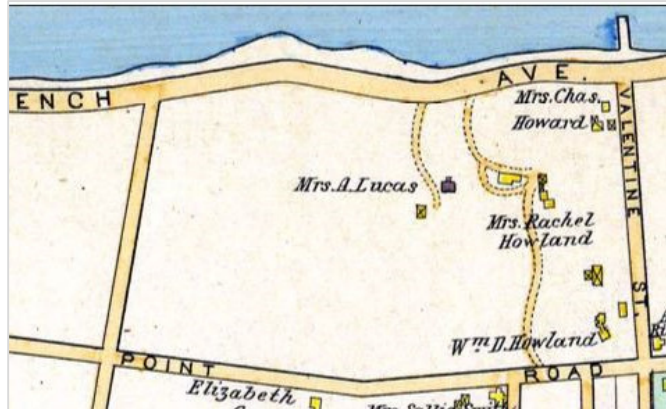
⁹ 1856 map of Clark’s Point shows “E[dmund].B. Coffin” and “Mrs. T[homas] D. Lucas” as owners of Hazelwood: https://www.dartmouthhas.org/uploads/1/0/0/2/100287044/nb-fhvn_1858_walling_map_bristol_county.jpg

¹⁰ Matthew Howland (1814-1884), besides being deeply involved with the family’s whaling business and serving as director of the National Bank of Commerce, was very civic minded and philanthropic. Rachel (1816-1902) was a respected minister of the Quaker meetings and also was generous within the community. <https://www.whalingmuseum.org/explore/library/finding-aids/mss135>

¹¹ An 1881 map of Clark’s Point shows Mrs. R. Howland as owner of the stucco house: <http://www.historicmapworks.com/Map/US/8877/New+Bedford+City+Map/New+Bedford+1881/Massachusetts/>

living with her middle son, “Matthew M.,” who had returned from New York¹². Ten years later, by 1898, they had moved together to Providence, Rhode Island, joining the eldest son Richard, where “M. Morris” served on the editorial staff of the local newspaper, the *Providence Journal*, edited and published by his brother. After Rachel’s death in 1902, the brothers stayed another five years before they moved to Florida, where they both died, in 1927 (M. Morris) and 1930 (Richard).

Returning to the history of the fieldstone house, after Joseph Congdon mournfully left in 1851 or ‘52, it soon was bought by Thomas D. Lucas, a master mariner who moved there with his wife and two infant sons, shortly to be blessed with a third child. However, misfortune stalked Hazelwood. Thomas’s wife died in 1855 at age 42. The following year he married her sister, Abby, but then *he* died in 1857, leaving her with her three toddlers, one of whom died within a few months. **Abby Lucas** struggled valiantly to keep her family afloat. In an 1870 agricultural census, she is listed as a farmer with one horse, one cow, and \$15,000 worth of property, four acres of which were “improved” land while 14 acres were woodlot. Shortly thereafter, her younger stepson/nephew moved away to become a merchant. The older son became a mariner and remained. Abby stayed at Hazelwood until his death in 1884. Afterward, she left the New Bedford region, possibly going to Melrose, MA to live with her sister. An 1896 directory places her there. However, maps from 1881 and 1895¹³ clearly label the southern Hazelwood house as still belonging to her.



Above, an **1895 map** is oriented with west at the top. It shows Mrs. Abby Lucas still owned the stone house at Hazelwood, while Mrs. Rachel Howland owned the stucco one. Below, Rachel’s son William D. Howland built a third, quite large, house in 1890.

By the time of the later map, 1895, a third house had been built on the property; that of **William D. Howland**, Rachel’s youngest son. It was a large affair, with a gambrel roof and sided with cedar shingles. It was located at the crest of the hill near Middle Road (labeled on the map as Middle Point Road). Erected in 1890, while his mother Rachel was still in town, and unlike the summer home of his parents, William used his house as a year-round residence, conveniently located near his mills at the base of the Cove. His dwelling was accompanied by a large carriage house and a stable, as was suitable for the treasurer of a prosperous mill and the descendant of whaling wealth.



¹² Matthew Morris Howland (1850 - 1927) spent time in California before acting as a trader in New York City from about 1883 to 1888 when he returned to New Bedford. Having graduated from Brown University, he felt an affinity for Providence, R.I. and worked on the editorial staff of the *Providence Journal* where his older brother Richard was editor and publisher. <https://www.whalingmuseum.org/explore/library/finding-aids/mss135>

¹³ 1895 map:

<http://www.historicmapworks.com/Map/US/8024/New+Bedford+City+4/Bristol+County+1895/Massachusetts/>

However, William was not ostentatious. Instead, his beliefs were firmly rooted in Quaker philanthropy and concern for his fellow men. Besides building the mill, he also built (1888-1889) Howland Mill Village as a peaceful, modern place for his workers to live, the planning for which was years ahead of its time. Wide winding, tree-lined paved streets curved among three styles of two-story homes equipped with flush toilets, bathtubs, and hot and cold water. Back yards were large enough for laundry lines, and front yards had gardens. Street cars connected the south end of town with the main city, and sewer pipes handled waste.¹⁴ Today, only two of the streets escaped urban renewal, Gosnold and Circuit.

William D. Howland's son, Llewellyn, was about 13 at the time the family moved from the city to the fresh air on the Point. His brother, Edward M., was seven years younger; only age six. So the puzzle is: If Llewellyn lived on the Point during his teen years, why do the stories in his books suggest he lived in town and only visited "Skipper" occasionally? And, who was living in his grandmother Rachel's stucco house just down the driveway?

Neither of the two earlier Hazelwood houses was large in terms of "grand homes"; both really just very comfortable cottages. However, what the houses may have lacked in size was compensated for by sweeping views of Clark's Cove. Looking to the right was New Bedford, straight across (looking west, image below) was Dartmouth, and to the left was Buzzard's Bay. In former days, the grass would have been either woods or farmer's fields. Joseph Congdon didn't clear all the trees surrounding his gardens, as evidenced by the 1850 map. Later, however, Abby Lucas was able to farm. And Llewellyn Howland mentioned the East and West Mowing fields in the 1890s.



Unfortunately, as the city expanded southward during the 1890s, the location of the three houses became less remote and idyllic. Much of the transition was driven by the influx of textile mills along Cove Road and onto the Point. Mills needed workers and workers needed housing. Visible in the 1895 map, just across Middle Road from William Howland's large house and stretching east to the shore where it encroached on Charles Beetle's boat works, was one of several housing developments and the requisite school for the children. By the time of Rachel Howland's death in 1902, the city was looking for land on which to build a community park, and they secured 23 acres of Hazelwood. A former member of Frederick



¹⁴ Information about Howland Village: https://hne-rs.s3.amazonaws.com/filestore/1/3/0/5/8_c63511a71cf5565/13058_888c250bde96b2c.pdf

Law Olmstead's landscape architectural firm was hired to create the layout.

Originally, the two older houses were put to good use in the new facility. The stone house became a bath house and refreshment stand, while the **stucco home** (see image) was the residence for the park's caretaker.¹⁵ However, more recently they have both fallen into disrepair and have been closed to the public for decades. At some point the stucco house was damaged by fire. Subsequently, that wing was removed and the entire house fenced off. Concerned citizens managed to have the park listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2010 in an effort to attract grants, but the attempt failed. Furthermore, a sticking point in all the plans has been a new use for the buildings. Should they be opened as museums? game rooms? art centers? or something else?

The most recent efforts at restoration were in 2016¹⁶ when upgrades were made to the park's playgrounds, but the homes were not addressed. In the meantime, holes in the roofs are letting in rain and snow and causing continued deterioration. Fortunately, William Howland's home has been repurposed as a community-senior center with a busy calendar of yoga, jewelry making, bingo, and knitting. I didn't recognize its age or importance when I was there; the cedar shakes looked too new to have been an "old" house.

¹⁵ Uses of Hazelwood Park buildings: <http://www.southcoasttoday.com/article/20091119/news/911190353>

¹⁶Hazelwood renovation plans: <http://www.southcoasttoday.com/news/20160622/residents-excited-about-plans-to-improve-hazelwood-park>