



THE ANNISQUAM HISTORICAL SOCIETY

7 Walnut Street
Annisquam MA 01930

Visit the Firehouse

The Firehouse will open only by appointment for the winter. Please contact: avhistorical@gmail.com

Admission

Admission is free but donations are gratefully accepted.



Who was Wilder Smith?

By
David McAweeney

Annisquam folk have been passing the Wilder Smith bench on the way to Lighthouse Beach for years, yet few know who Wilder Smith was.

To find out I asked some of Wilder's close relatives to sit down with me last summer to talk about him. Wilder lived on Squam Rock Road within sight of Squam Rock. His home is now the home of Tom and Janell Andrews. We met in Wilder's dining room. Tom is Wilder's great-nephew and growing up he spent his summers here. As did his brother Kenneth. Both were present along with Sarah Hackett, a niece, and Rosamond Smith, a niece. Later I spoke to Martha Bentley, another niece.

As the discussion progressed it quickly became clear that Wilder was beloved by his family, his neighbors, and many others. Martha said he was loved by all the children, and that he was loving, kind and gentle.



From left to right: Tom Andrews, Sarah Hackett, Kenneth Andrews, and Rosamond Smith, all close relatives of Wilder.



The granite bench was placed beside the path to Lighthouse Beach by Wilder's family and friends.

Wilder was born in 1913, the youngest of five children. As a young man he was trained as a meteorologist and he worked at Logan Airport in Boston. He survived tuberculosis as an adolescent and had health problems all of his life that prevented him from full-time work. He called himself a walking medical history. He invented and maintained a weather advisory board at North Station in Boston where passengers could look at a big chart that showed the weather in any train destination they might choose. He also ran a ski report service where skiers could find out the ski conditions anywhere the Boston Ski Train served.

Wilder and his wife, Mildred, became year-round residents of Annisquam in 1947. He had spent summers here since he was very young. Mildred was the assistant librarian at the Sawyer Free Library for thirty years. Later she volunteered at the Annisquam Village Library. She also was active in Village activities.

In his time in Annisquam he contributed much to the village. For more than two decades he managed the

Squam Rock Pasture. He hired local kids (including Kenneth) to cut brush. Keeping the brush from crowding the low-bush blueberries was a priority. Tom Andrews explained that high-bush blueberry plants never yielded much. He said the area around the bench was the best producing area for low-bush.

Wilder and his good friend and neighbor, Henry Wiggin, were careful to safeguard the nesting spots for a wide variety of birds.

Wilder built a wooden wraparound bench under an oak tree where the current granite bench now sits. Each spring he launched a raft that he and his friend, Carroll Parsons, built. It was just off the beach. He placed the railroad ties in the paths to slow down erosion.

He was active in the management of the Annisquam Sea Fair. He invented and built many of the games that are still used. Ros Smith remembers the popguns and the fish tank where her magnetic fish pole would catch metallic fish for prizes. Further, he managed the Village Hall for many years.

Martha Bentley recalls that Wilder loved sailing. He often sailed with his close neighbor, Dorothea Harvey. He sailed a Bird Boat that Tom Andrews said was built around 1917. Dorothea sailed a Fish Boat. He was not a member of the Annisquam Yacht Club, but he loved Squam Day when he was allowed to race. His class included four Bird Boats. His opponents were Jack Cunningham, Carroll Parsons, and Bob Lufkin. Wilder won the races several times. Martha reported that Wilder had little sense of humor when he was racing, unlike his usual personality.

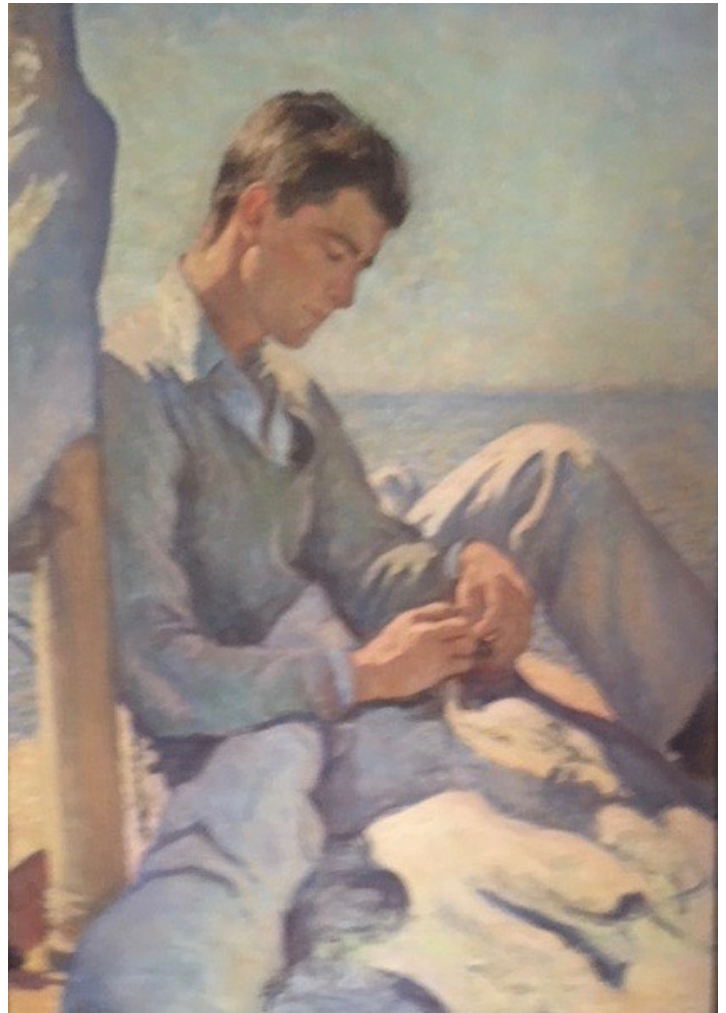
In spite of having limited funds Wilder and Mildred traveled in France. Wilder was fluent in French, thanks to his mother who was from Normandy, France. He once hosted here in Annisquam the son of French prime minister, Mendes France.

Wilder loved music and theatre. Sarah Hackett fondly remembers Wilder and Mildred taking her to the Boston Symphony and to a Chinese restaurant when she was seventeen. It was the first time she had done either. Martha reports that they took her to see *Pirates of Penzance* in Boston plus other shows.

Wilder also loved animals and usually had a dog and cat around. Late in his life (he had a stroke and Hodgkin's disease) he could not keep up his walks around Annisquam. His dog, Fronzi, took his place. Fronzi could often be seen running along Lighthouse Beach in spite of the dog ban. He was chasing minnows at the water's edge. He continued to walk Wilder's routes and was well known in the village.

When Wilder passed away in 1990 his neighbors, the Bornhoffs and Dorothea Harvey, as well as the immediate family and other neighbors provided the funds to construct the stone bench in his memory.

Wilder Smith (on the right) working at the Logan Airport weather station.



Wilder Smith painted by his aunt, Rosamond Smith Bouvé.



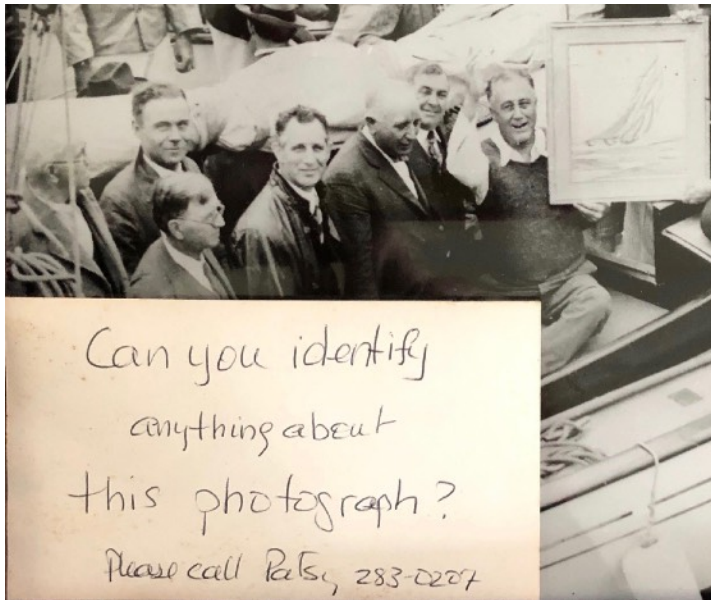
President Franklin D. Roosevelt Visits Annisquam

Adapted from the AHS presentation at the AVH on July 13, 2018

Rita Teele

At first glance, it was not obvious that the photograph of a yacht, hanging on the wall of the firehouse, included a youthful appearing President Roosevelt. He was sitting amidships, holding a painting. Alongside him were some well-dressed men, and a naval attaché. It was the card tucked in the bottom of the frame that caught my attention. It read as follows:

"Can you identify anything about this photograph?
Please call Patsy 283-0207"



Seven digit phone numbers were replaced by 10 digit dialing at the turn of the century, so this meant that the card had been placed years before. What person would be called Patsy, other than Patsy Whitlock who had been heavily involved in the affairs of the village at the time? Being a curious person, I pulled out the card and turned it over--and there was the answer to the question! Except it was in inked cursive writing that had faded dreadfully over the years. A little Photoshop magic and the words reappeared for transcription:

On his way down to Maine (Campobello)
(Son Eliot upper left)

President Franklin D. Roosevelt about 1934 [sic]

On his yacht came down the Annisquam River from Gloucester where he was presented with the painting of the Gertrude L. Thebaud--schooner in the Fisherman's Race w/ Canada. Capt. Ben Pine (bald head next left of Pres.) was skipper. He anchored off the Annisquam Yacht Club for lunch. Many people came to club-floats and in small boats to wave.

(Carol) I was 12 at the time. RC Davis, my dad, took us out in Zeehund his boat.

Carol (Carolyn Davis Pearce) was the lucky girl in her father's boat.

It was just before midnight, on June 20, 1933, when the *Amberjack II*, piloted by Franklin Delano Roosevelt, sailed into Gloucester from Washington D.C. Since the stock market crash, the Gloucester fishing fleet had been hit very hard by the Great Depression. Gloucester fishermen had sailed the *Gertrude L. Thebaud* up the Potomac River the previous April. They had presented boat records to the President and Congress to prove that income from fishing could not cover operating expenses. When the president sent word that he would visit Gloucester on his way to Campobello in June, Captain Ben Pine and other fishermen jumped at the chance to welcome him. They were hoping, of course, that he was bringing good news in terms of monetary support.

On the morning of June 21, Gloucester harbor was filled with excitement as the townspeople welcomed their president and his party. Emile Gruppé had been commissioned to paint *The Gertrude L. Thebaud* --the painting that the president is holding in the photograph. The artist was included in the welcoming party on board *Amberjack II* when his gift was presented.



June 21, 1933, Gloucester MA. Names of people from left to right: Man standing at edge unnamed. Captain Ed Proctor, Emile A. Gruppé, Captain Roscoe Prior, Captain Ben Pine, Captain Nate MacLoud (who presented the painting), President Franklin D. Roosevelt, Stephen Early (President's secretary) behind painting, A.H Kenyon of NE Council, holding the painting, Captain Walter N. Vernon, Naval Aide to president.

One young member of the yacht's crew was Amyas Ames who was a Harvard classmate of Jimmy Roosevelt. As the great-grandson of General Benjamin Franklin Butler of Bayview, he had local connections to Cape Ann. He recalled the situation as they left Gloucester Harbor, as related in the book, *Sailor in the Whitehouse: The Seafaring Life of FDR* by Robert Cross: Ames, will you take us through?" the president asked.

"Through what?" the young crew member replied
 "Through the canal," Roosevelt said.
 Ames hesitated "Well, I've done it," his voice trailing off nervously. It was the last thing in the world he wanted to do at that moment.
 "She's yours," President Roosevelt said, handing the wheel to Ames, who had navigated the canal only a few times previously while summering in the area.

Ames describes the trip as the most tense one he ever had taken through the canal, owing in no small part to the fact that he had the president of the United States on board. But he successfully navigated the sandbars and other obstacles and completed the six mile journey safely. "I know what he (the president) was doing. He wanted to play a joke on the destroyer captain and the Coast Guard boat, who were all ready to go with us around Cape Ann," Ames said. Of course, those large vessels could not navigate the narrow canal, and were forced to take the longer journey around the cape to Ipswich Bay...."

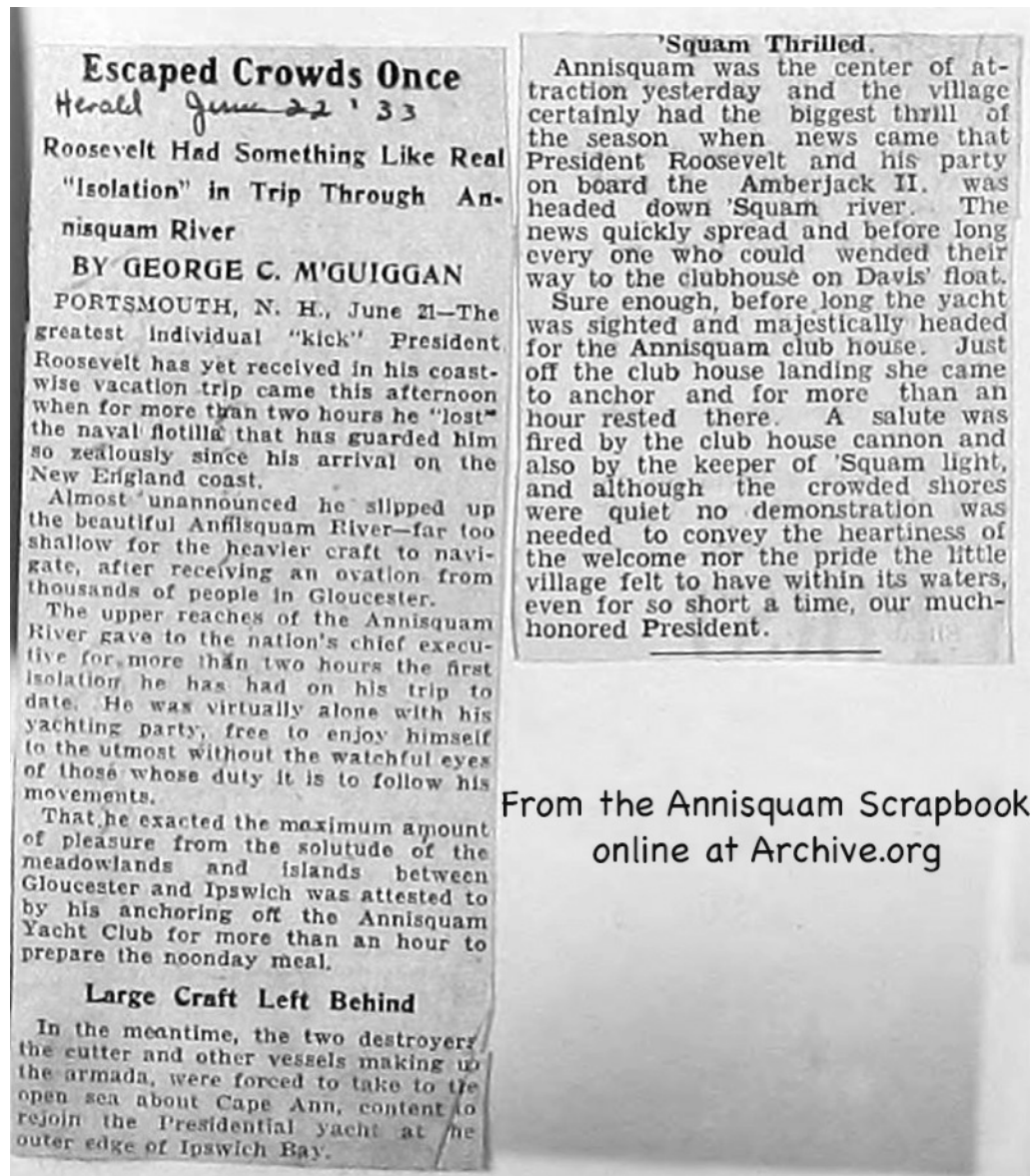
The *Amberjack II* arrived safely at the Annisquam Yacht Club at lunchtime with a very relieved Amyas Ames at the wheel.

Jim Groves has an interesting story about that stop:

"Regarding FDR and the Depression years, Paul Littlefield repeatedly told a story of FDR cruising up the Annisquam in a schooner (the only President to do so) and when the schooner reached the AYC, Paul and others fired a "21" gun salute for the President.....rounds expended consisted of a quick bang, bang of two, a pause, and then a one so the parsimonious AYC members were extremely proud that they gave the President of the United States a 21 gun salute with only 3 rounds expended."

Postscript:

The president continued on his trip to Campobello and did not visit Gloucester again. The original painting has disappeared; Emile Gruppé painted a copy about 30 years later.



From the Annisquam Scrapbook
online at [Archive.org](https://www.archive.org)

And, in spite of the good will publicly demonstrated by President Roosevelt, the fishermen did not get the hoped-for economic relief from the U.S. government.

With thanks to Mimi Emmons, granddaughter of R.C. Davis, and Jim Groves.

Other information is publicly available on the internet.

A Lane and A Story

Adapted from the AHS presentation at the AVH on July 13, 2018
Rita Teele

Once upon a time, there was a lady in Annisquam who was very skilled in quilting. Perhaps there were many other expert quilters in the village more than a century ago, but one woman, Mrs Judith Lane, is identified as the maker on a signature quilt that resides in the Firehouse.



What better (if not easy) way to raise money for a church or other charitable cause than with a signature quilt? A quilt block could be "sold" and the donor's name written with permanent ink on white fabric. One or more people who had beautiful handwriting using pen and ink, were usually chosen to "sign" the fabric on behalf of the donor. The donations went to the worthy institution and the donor would be recognized, along with others, in a beautiful quilt that was constructed from all of the signed patches. The quilt might be auctioned off or hung in the church hall, or donated to a worthy citizen of the community. In some cases, a departing pastor was recognized with a signature quilt from all in his congregation.

A century-old signature quilt is currently on view in the Firehouse as part of the display that features the history of the Annisquam Village Church. The white patches have yellowed and the bright red color of the original fabric has faded to brown where it was exposed to light, but the signatures, written in cursive in indelible ink, are clearly legible. The quilt is worthy of further, scholarly examination; this article provides a brief description of the quilt and reveals more of its maker's story.

A traditional quilt is a fabric sandwich: flannel, batting or a blanket is enclosed within two layers of fabric by stitching or tying all three layers together. Typically, the top of the quilt is of pieced patches in a decorative pattern, and the backing is a single piece of fabric.

The quilt in the Firehouse is large: each composite block is approximately 16 inches square, and there are 25 such blocks sewn together in five rows of five blocks each. Each block is identical, consisting of 24 small red triangles, 24 small white triangles, 2 large white and 2 large red triangles. These composite blocks are arranged at 90 degrees to each other so that red triangles, small or large, always alternate with white. The signatures are on the small white triangular patches, but not all white patches have signatures. Many of the names are well known from the historical accounts of the village, for example Chard, Davis, Dennison, Wheeler, Dyer, Jewett, and many Lanes! The photograph below, of a portion of the quilt, shows the arrangement of the blocks. Notice how the red fabric has turned brown from exposure to sunlight. Only a few signatures are on this section.



The making of this quilt was quite a remarkable feat, although I suspect that the ladies involved would have laughed at that comment. Scissors were the only equipment available to cut the 1300 individual pieces of fabric. The blocks were sewn together by hand as can be seen in a few places where stitching has come undone.



The quilt is so large that the backing had to be pieced. Squares of shirting fabric were inserted between large sections of plain pink fabric in order to match, in size, the 80 x 80 inch pieced front.



The quilt was tied with thick thread at the corners of each small triangle and at the center of the longest side of each large triangle. You can see that above, in the second photograph. There is no binding. Rather, the edges of the pieced front and the back were folded back on themselves, wrong sides together, and a row of stitching through the folded edges was used to finish the border.

The name of Rev. A.A. Smith is in the same neighborhood of the quilt as the maker, Judith Story Lane. Her age of 89 years old is noted on her white signature patch. Both are possible clues to the length of time it took to complete the quilt.

Reverend A.A. Smith was preaching in Annisquam from 1895 to 1899. Therefore, the first blocks could have been signed as early as 1895. From the census records of 1900, Judith Lane was living with her son and daughter at Chester Square as head of household at 88 years of age. She was 89 years old in 1901 and depending on the month of her birth she finished the quilt in 1901 or 1902. I don't know if different women helped in sewing individual patches together or in tying the quilt, but no other person is given credit!

It is appropriate to finish this article with Judith Lane, née Story, and her forebears. She was descended from early Annisquam families, the Robinsons and the Harrandaines (often spelled Harradens or Haradens) who were living on Planters' Neck in the 1600s.

Her gravestone is remarkable in that it salutes her as a "real daughter." Her father, James Story, fought in the War of Independence. Judith and her sister, Martha, were in the first cohort of the daughters of the revolution, the DAR. The symbol of the DAR is displayed on Judith Lane's gravestone where the circle represents a spinning wheel, the spindle and flax represents the distaff side of the family and the 13 stars around the wheel represent the original thirteen colonies. Judith Story Lane may not have shown us work resulting from spinning, but she certainly left evidence of her skill at quilting.

