

*History of*

## **South Hamilton's Business Center**

### **Part 2: The Brick Block Building**

# Brick Brock Building



**Brick block building** first businesses were, left to right: 16 Main St. - London Harness Store; 20 Main St. - Robertson Plumbing; 24 Main St. - Hamilton Hardware; and 28 Main St. - Brown Pharmacy (1902). Photo, Benjamin Conant, 1900.

"Brick block" building? Where, you may ask, is it?

It is the large brick building on the left side of Bay Rd., as you come into Hamilton from Wenham. It's where the Black Cow restaurant is located.

Built in 1900, locals called it the "brick block"... block was a common name for a large building having a number of stores. Around the corner, on Railroad Avenue, there was the Smith block, a 2-story, wood building, with several stores. It was erected only a few years earlier, in 1897.

At the time, not many brick buildings were in the area. Expensive to construct, they were more long lasting and requiring less maintenance than wood structures.

This was not the first brick building on Main Street. About eighty years earlier, around 1820 in Wenham, Ezra Lummas built, on the corner of Larch and Main, a large, federal-style brick house.<sup>13</sup> (*Property deeds during the early 1900s referred to the main road as being the "County Road."*)

The brick block's large windows were very rare, at the time. Made by the Pittsburgh Plate Glass, they were 8-feet wide and 9-feet high. There also were large panes on both sides of each shop's entry. Merchants believed they could attract more customers if those passing by could see what the store offered.

At about the center of the flat-roofed building, there was a passageway (*alley*) to the back of the property, where there was a parking area for carriages. With streetcars regularly passing in the front of the building, street parking was not possible.

The single-story brick-block had four stores, each with its own entrance. The sidewalk was concrete, also unusual for the time.<sup>1</sup> (*Hamilton sidewalks were gravel paths. It was not until 1908, that the town built a concrete sidewalk on Railroad Avenue.*<sup>22</sup>)

Joseph F. Appleton of Beverly and Oliver F. Kilham of Hamilton, realtors, erected their new building on a lot previously owned by Charles E. Dodge of Topsfield.<sup>9</sup> Apparently, the two men foresaw the area eventually becoming a prosperous business center.





**South Hamilton Post Office** was at the brick block, the two stores, 16 and 20 Main St., at the south end, until 1985, when it moved to Railroad Avenue. Photo, Hamilton Historical Society, 1984.

Prior to building the "brick block," a residential house was on the lot.<sup>44</sup> Next door, on the Wenham side, was the George Dodge/Norman J. Conrad house, which later was moved to Linden Street.<sup>1</sup> Conrad had a fish market on Railroad Avenue.

The brick block's location was good. It was on the town's central road, Main Street (*in 1953, the street was renamed Bay Road*). Next door on the north side, Hannah B. Sullivan had a dry goods store. Across the street, there were a railroad station house; an American Express office; post office; grocery store; bicycle repair shop; and a lunchroom.<sup>†</sup> There was the recently (1895) introduced electric streetcar service running on Main Street.

Erecting such a large building must have dismayed many people. Hamilton's population was only 1,614. Just around the corner on Railroad Avenue, there already was the Smith block, built only nine years earlier. In this general area, including Railroad Avenue, there were eighteen stores.<sup>14</sup>

In January 1915, Appleton became the sole owner of the property, when Kilham's widow, Bessie, sold Appleton her husband's share of the property.<sup>33</sup>

Frequent turnover of the property occurred in the 1920s. Appleton sold the property, in 1921, to Benjamin W. Currier and George F. B. Johnson, both of Wenham.<sup>28</sup> Three years later, 1924, Currier, then sole owner of the property, sold it to Malcolm R. Dyer

of Watertown.<sup>34</sup> Five months later, Dyer sold the property to Frank F. Sandler and Bernard Segall, Jr., both of Revere.<sup>35</sup> Then, on Mar. 26, 1929, Sandler and Segall sold the property to Soteris Apostolakos of Hamilton.<sup>32</sup> The sale occurred before the stock market crash later that year.

Apostolakos, born (1893) in Greece,<sup>43</sup> immigrated to this country. He moved to Hamilton, in 1920, where he rented a room at 95 Railroad Ave.<sup>51</sup> In 1971, when Apostolakos died,<sup>37</sup> Anna Pappas Landers, his niece, inherited the property. In 1984, Anna (*Pappas Landers*) Larson indentured the property to Bay Road Realty Trust.<sup>24</sup> However, she was unable to find a buyer.

In 1993, a time when the country was in an economic recession, Ipswich Savings Bank foreclosed on the property. The bank, while it held the building, built a new septic system.<sup>25</sup> In October 1993, Joseph Leone of Wenham bought the property and building from the bank.<sup>25</sup>

Leone quickly made major and much-needed improvements to the nearly hundred-year old building. In 1994, he added a second floor to provide more rentable space. Exterior stairs, built at the back, became a second egress for offices. A peaked roof with dormers replaced the building's original flat roof. The peaked roof solved the recurrent water leakage problems there were when the roof was flat.<sup>46</sup>



**Black Cow Tap and Grill**, in 2016, occupies the four units, left to right. Capefish Clothing is in the fifth unit, on the far right. Photo, Jack Hauck, 2015.

There no longer is an alley, in the center of the building, leading to the back.

A further indication, in 1993, of business improvements in the brick block area was the sale of the old Hamilton Hardware building, across the street in 1862. It too was substantially improved and became a fashionable women's clothing store, Talbots.

In 2012, Leone significantly changed and improved the appearance of the front of the building.

The entrance to the two stores on the south end of the building was removed. Where there had been two stores on the south end of the building, there now is only one. With this shift, there are five windows (*four before*) spanning the front of the building. The central ✓entrance to the second floor, narrower than it was before, also is an entrance to the single store at the south end of the building.

In 2016, Leone made another change to the brick block. The former store (*26 Bay Rd.*) on the north side of the front entrance became part of the stores (*16 and 20 Bay Rd.*) on the south side of the entrance that he combined in 2012. .

The building's remodeled brick exterior is very congruous. All the awnings and windows are the same, as are the planters below the windows, the light fixtures above the windows, the brick pillars and the horizontal fascia board across the full length of the building.

## 16 Bay Road

In 1900, Hamilton was home to the prestigious Myopia Polo Club, one of five charter members of the United States Polo Association formed in 1891.<sup>18</sup> The polo field was a short way back on Main Street, in Wenham, at what is now Pingree Field.<sup>13</sup>

With a polo field close by, it should not have been surprising that an original renter at the brick block was the **London Harness** store. Run by Osgood J. Kimball of Hamilton, the unique store offered a full line of horse equipment, stable furnishings, polo requisites (*saddles, mallets, balls*) and complete polo outfits (*shirts, pants, boots and helmets*).<sup>1, 10</sup>

A full-size, wood horse stood behind the shop's large front window. Despite its good location, the harness store struggled financially and it closed about 1910.<sup>8</sup> A factor is the stores demise may have been that it was a branch of London Harness in Boston, at 200 Devonshire St. and which opened in 1895.<sup>4</sup> Customers may have preferred the convenience of purchasing through the Boston store. The principal residence of many of the polo players was Boston and towns near Boston.

The company, which still exists, claims to be the oldest luggage retailer in the country. It has stores in Natick, Wellesley and Hingham. However, today, it sells luggage, handbags, and leather accessories.





**Beverly Interiors** occupied the corner store, 16 Bay Rd.; Bay Road Bikes was at 20 Bay Rd.; Myopia Café at 26 Bay Rd.; and McRae's variety store at 28 Bay Rd. Photo Hamilton Historical Society, 1991.

Several years later, the **Cozy Corner** ice cream parlor was here. It sold ice cream from the Haines-CeBrook Ice Cream Co., whose plant was at the Floating Bridge in Lynn. The parlor's painted sign, in the shape of a shield still exists, though faded, on the south wall of the building.

Douglas Knowlton and Dr. John Corcoran, both of Hamilton, owned the Cozy Corner. Popular was the Priscilla College Ice,<sup>53</sup> an ice cream soda. Ironically, considering the effect of sugar on teeth, Dr. Corcoran was a popular local dentist and the school physician for many years.

About 1914, the **South Hamilton Post Office** moved into the Cozy Corner. For the previous 30 years, the post office was across the street, in John M. Merrill's grocery store: Merrill was the Postmaster. Originally, it was the Wenham Depot Post Office. In 1907, the store, owned by Lester Libby, became the South Hamilton Post Office.<sup>1</sup> In 1975, Roger L. Talbot of Hingham bought the property and opened Talbot's.<sup>36</sup> (For more about this building and the surrounding area, see the *History of South Hamilton's Business Center, Part 1: The Depot.*)

The move to the brick block became necessary when the large number of patrons at Merrill's store required more space. The Postmaster, at the time, was Douglas Knowlton, the former co-owner of the Cozy Corner.<sup>53</sup>

**Beverly Interiors** - In 1987, Dick and Cindy Conrad of Topsfield opened an interior decorating business (see picture pg. 4). Six years later, in 1993, the business moved to 56 Railroad Ave., when monthly rent for their store was greatly increased.<sup>18</sup>

When Joseph Leone purchased the property, in 1993, he had plans for eventually opening a "family-style pub," along the lines of other town restaurants, Hunter's Inn of Main Street and the Weathervane Tavern on Railroad Avenue.<sup>18</sup>

Leone, who had never owned a restaurant,<sup>19</sup> enlisted the help of friends with restaurant experience and remodeled the space at 16 and 20 Bay Rd. to be a café. In 1994, the **Black Cow** restaurant opened.<sup>18</sup> Once again, 16 and 20 Bay Rd. were combined. (*The restaurant is not named after the "black cow" drink.*)

It soon became very popular. Minor changes were made in 1996. In 2001, there were more changes and the seating capacity increased. In 2012, the restaurant entrance was moved from the center to north side, creating a broader front.

The popularity of the Black Cow, in the late 1990s, raised a parking problem on Bay Road. A parking lot, behind the building only had 13 parking spaces. Vehicles were parked on both sides of the road going back into Wenham. Other merchants and businesses complained their customers had no place to park.<sup>17</sup>

## 20 Bay Road

Beginning in the late 1800s, residential plumbing began to flourish in America. Add to this, home building was very active in the Hamilton and Wenham area.

**Robert Robertson's** plumbing supplies and services was the first business to open in the store next to the London Harness store (see picture pg. 2). Robertson, a plumber, sold plumbing supplies, as well as gas and electric hardware.<sup>14</sup> A Hamilton resident, he was active on the school committee for many years,

Robertson had a competitor around the corner on Railroad Avenue, in the Smith Block: Warren N. Sawyer.<sup>14</sup> Town records, however, show Robertson was the sole supplier of plumbing supplies for the town hall and the schools.

Based on information in the Hamilton Annual Town Reports, Robertson closed his business about 1918.

The next known occupant of 20 Bay Rd. is the **Hamilton Branch Library**. In May 1924, the South Hamilton Branch Library moved to the building, following a fire that destroyed its previous location, Daniel Kimball's variety store on Railroad Avenue.<sup>16</sup> He was the same one who was the original manager of the London Harness shop, at 16 Main St.

Along both sidewalls, there were bookshelves for the branch's 1,200 books. The branch librarian, Jennie Perley, sat at a desk near the back of the office. A potbelly stove heated the room in the winter. The town paid a rent of \$27.50 per month, which was \$12 more than it had been paying at Kimball's store.<sup>11, 12</sup>

The branch library would be here until 1956, when it moved to the vacant Jonathan Lamson School building on Railroad Avenue.

The move came about when U. S. Post Office notified the town that the branch library space had to be vacated, because it had been requisitioned for enlargement of the South Hamilton post office, next

door at 16 Bay Rd.<sup>40</sup> The combined space, according to the rental agreement, was 40 ft. wide and 54 ft. deep. The lease also included basement space, and the alley in the middle of the building.<sup>30</sup>

Occupying both 16 and 20 Bay Rd., the expanded **South Hamilton Post Office** had a partition of post office boxes stretching across its width. A door in the center of the partition led to the mail sorting area. There were two standup desks in the front, for use by postal patrons.<sup>46</sup>

During periods of high package deliveries, the post office used the alley to hold and sort items. The alley had doors, with locks, at the front and back.<sup>46</sup>

The post office remained in the brick block until 1985, when it moved to Railroad Avenue. Peter S. Wyman was Postmaster. With the post office leaving, 20 and 16 Bay Rd. returned to being separate stores.

Following the post office, the Seacoast clothing store, operated by Robert Gamble, opened at 20 Bay Rd. It remained for about two years.<sup>49</sup>

In 1991, **Bay Road Bikes**, owned and operated by Robert Newell of Beverly and Stuart Thorne of Manchester opened at 20 Bay Rd. (see picture pg. 2)<sup>48</sup> They specialized in road and cross-country bikes. Thorne formerly was a professional cyclocross racer. (*Races run on courses having pavement, wooded trails, grass, steep hills and obstacles, requiring the rider to quickly dismount, carry the bike while navigating the obstruction and remount.*)

This was the second bike business to be in the brick block: John W. Goodhue sold and repaired bikes at his shop at 26 Bay Rd., from 1900 to 1919, and later at his Railroad Avenue shop. Goodhue sold the common utility bikes.

Previously, in the late 1800s and early 1900s, across the road, in the building on the depot lot, Lester E. Libby had a bike shop: he sold Columbia bikes.<sup>1</sup>



**Parking area** behind Black Cow building.  
Photo, Bing, 2012



**Cozy Corner** ice cream parlor sign remains on side of the brick building, though quite faded. Photo, Jack Hauck, 2012



In 1993, when Beverly Interiors moved out of the brick block, Bay Road Bikes did the same, moving to 52 Railroad Ave. Bay Road Bikes moved to have more space for its increased business.

In 1994, Joseph Leone opened the **Black Cow** restaurant at 16 and 20 Bay Rd. In 2012, he completely remodeled the enlarged interior, creating a casual open dining area and built a modern and larger kitchen.<sup>20</sup>

In 2016, the Black Cow expanded into what had been 26 Bay Rd.

## 26 Bay Road

In 1900, the brick block also was seen as a good location for a store offering home hardware.

On the north side of the alley leading to the back of the building, Hamilton Hardware opened (*Not to be confused with the Hamilton Hardware that opened in 1926, on the other side of Main Street in the Scahill building, now the Talbot building.*). John W. Goodhue of Hamilton, the owner, had been in the hardware business since 1885, when he opened a hardware store in Ipswich. Goodhue, in 1898, expanded his business to Hamilton, opening a store in the Adams building on Willow Street, before moving, in May 1900, to the brick block building, where he also repaired bicycles and sold agricultural tools.<sup>3</sup>

Annual town reports show Goodhue was a perennial supplier of hardware supplies to the town. He likely closed his store in 1919.

A year later, 1920, the first year of prohibition, the brick block had its first "restaurant." James Pappas, who lived at 25 Home St., with his wife, Julia Stavroula, opened the **Myopia Café** at 26 Main St.<sup>49</sup>

<sup>298</sup> The Pappas name was a shortened version of the Greek name, Pappadoyiannis.<sup>52</sup>

Just two years later, 1922, James Pappas died. Julia's brother, Soteris Apostolakos, took over running the restaurant.<sup>46</sup> Previously, Soteris, called "Charlie," ran, at 58 Railroad Ave., a lunchroom that also had a couple of pool tables.

As previously mentioned, in 1929, Charlie Soteris Apostolakos, bought the brick block building and the property, on which it stood.<sup>32</sup> The Myopia Café, in 1930, became a tavern, when prohibition ended.

In 1961, Julia Stavroula Pappas died.<sup>15</sup> Her daughter, Anna (*b* 1917) inherited the Myopia Café. Then, in 1971, following the uncle's death, she (*Anna Pappas Landers Larson*) inherited the property. The Myopia Café closed in 1975.<sup>7</sup>

A reminder of the Myopia Café came in 2003, when Greg Leavitt opened a restaurant, with this name, on Railroad Avenue. It closed in 2004.<sup>5</sup>

A reminder of Soteris Apostolakos and Anna Pappas remains in Hamilton: In 2011, the Soteris

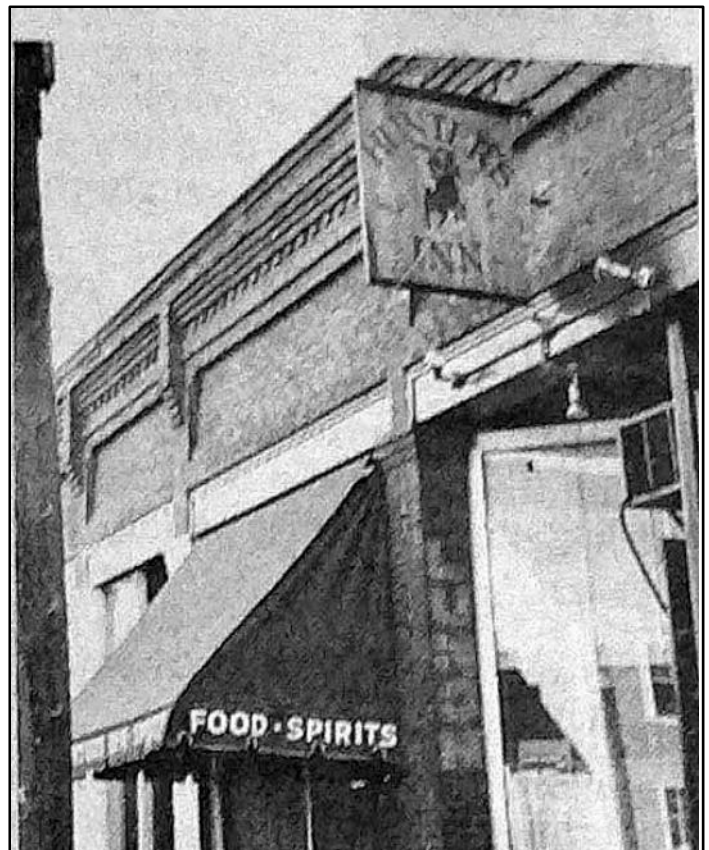
Apostolakos and Anna Pappas Memorial Scholarships began to be awarded to students graduating from the Hamilton-Wenham High School.

The closing of the Myopia Café, in 1975, did not end there being a restaurant in the brick block. Next to lease 26 Main St., in 1976, was Paul J. Duserick of Wenham.<sup>7</sup> He opened the **Hunter's Inn**. The upscale restaurant offered a wider array of food than the previous Myopia Café and specialized in seafood. The walls were decorated with horse paraphernalia and pictures.<sup>42</sup>

There were 12 tables and 6 booths when the Hunter's Inn business was at its prime. It expanded the dining area by removing an office at the back. The bar, which was in the front to the left from the entrance, had 8 stools.<sup>47</sup>

The kitchen was in the back. There were two restrooms in front of the kitchen on the right side, one each for men and women.<sup>47</sup>

Assisting Duserick at the Inn, from 1976 to 1983, was Daniel J. Connolly, the son of the owner of Connolly's drug store, located next door. He was a full-time employee during summers and school breaks and as a part-time employee during school years.<sup>47</sup>



**Hunter's Inn** was in brick block building from 1976 to 1984. It replaced the Myopia Café. Photo, Beverly Times.

After closing the Hunter's Inn in 1984, Duserick opened a restaurant further up Bay Road, called the Fox 'n Fern<sup>38</sup> The area later became part of the Depot Square Common Condominium, on the corner of Bay Road and Railroad Avenue.

While the Hunter's Inn is long gone, its front door became the front door to the Locksmyth barbershop at 161 Bay Rd., when it opened in 2013. The barbershop owner found the door at an antique dealer in New Hampshire.

Hunter's Inn was quite small, about 17 ft. wide and 54 ft. deep (*about 780 sq. ft.*). Patrons entered through a corner door at the street side. There also was a door at the back wall. Near the front and in front of the wall opposite the entrance there was a short bar, with stools. There were five tables, each with four chairs at the back. Behind the bar was a refrigerator for food used to make sandwiches.<sup>46</sup>

The restaurant and bar, generally called, Charlie the Greek's, became a very popular place among the working-class. A favorite, at lunchtime, was Charlie's meat loaf sandwich.<sup>46</sup>

Though apparently closed on Sundays ... the front door was locked, windows were covered with curtains and a closed sign hung on the door ... Charlie "held Sunday services" for men seeking cards and drinks.

Vehicles were parked behind the building and the alley provided a way for getting to the back door. There were occasional fights, but the police were never called.<sup>46</sup>

James P. Pappas, born in 1877 in Greece,<sup>43</sup> married in 1908 Julia Stavroula Apostolakos. She too was born in Greece (1888) and immigrated to this country in 1905. They first lived in Lowell, and later (1916) in Ipswich.<sup>43</sup> In 1920, the Pappas family, which then included three children, moved to Hamilton, from Lowell.<sup>43</sup>

In 1984, what had been a restaurant/bar for more than six decades became a fixit shop. Silas "Sy" Campbell of Wenham, who was retired, opened an appliance repair shop. Both he and his wife, Brenda, worked at the shop.

Some locals recall the Campbell shop to have been "cluttered" with various electrical repair supplies. Among this disarray of wires and such, Brenda sold costume jewelry. The Campbells stayed at 26 Bay Rd. for only a couple of years, before they moved their business to 31 Railroad Ave.<sup>46</sup>



**28 Bay Rd.**, at right end of the brick block, in 1910 became the Boston Store, owned by Osgood J. Kimball, who previously managed the London Harness store, 16 Bay Rd., at far left. Photo, above courtesy of Wenham Museum, 1900.



**Steel Magnolias**, a hair and nail salon, opened at 26 Bay Rd., in 1991. In the early 2000s, Sheila Wendell moved her business to 169 Bay Rd.

**Danielle Taylor Day Spa** was next to open at 26 Bay Rd. Its stay was until 2008, when it moved to 15 Walnut Rd. and from there, in November 2014, to 176 Bay Rd.

**French Lesson Boutique** opened at 26 Bay Rd. in 2008. Gilda Tunney owned and ran the women's clothing shop, specializing in lingerie. In 2010, French Lesson moved across Bay Rd. and the MBTA railroad tracks to the Hamilton Shoppes, occupying a store at 15 Walnut Rd.

The French connection continued with the next shop to occupy 26 Bay Rd. In March 2011, 26 Bay Rd. became the **Jolie Tea Co.** (*Jolie in French means nice.*) Owned and run by Amy Job, the shop offered dozens of varieties of tea, including black, green, yellow and white, oolongs (*black dragon*), herbal, French, Mandarin, wellness, as well as tea blends called French 75, La Belle Rose, and Doctor Zhivago.

Tea drinking, while dating back more than 5,000 years in China, has not been as popular as coffee drinking. However, tea consumption is now growing steadily, especially among young people.

However, Joile Tea did not find enough customers

to remain in Hamilton. In October 2015, it moved to Salem.

If not tea, how about a beer or martini?

Early in 2016, Joe Leone expanded the Black Cow into 26 Bay Rd. After nearly 100 years, there once again is a restaurant at this location, where the Myopia Café opened in 1920.

### 28 Bay Rd.

The first business to open in the store at the north end of the brick building was **Brown's Pharmacy**: it opened in 1902. There already was an established pharmacy, run by Horace E. Andrews, around the corner in the Smith block on Railroad Avenue.

It seems that there was a strong need for medicine in the Hamilton-Wenham area, for the two businesses remained until 1909, when the Brown Drug Co. closed.<sup>1</sup>

**Boston Store** – In 1910, Osgood J. Kimball, after the closing of the London Harness, opened the Boston Store, which offered "just about everything," as an old-fashioned department store.<sup>8</sup>

Kimball expanded his services, in 1913, when the Hamilton main library opened a branch library in a section of the Boston Store. Previously, the branch was at Andrew's drug store in the Smith block on Railroad Avenue. Hours were 2:00 to 8:00 PM, on Tuesdays and Saturdays, later changed to Wednesdays and Saturdays 3:00 to 5:00 p.m. and 7:00 to 9:00 p.m. In addition to receiving rent, Kimball was paid for his services to people borrowing books.<sup>12</sup>

In 1913, Kimball sold his variety store to Nellie C. Goodrich. The **Goodrich Shop** business lasted until 1940. One of Nellie's employees was Jenny Mears. After working at the store for more than 20 years, Jenny Mears bought the shop (*see pictures pg. 8*).

At the **Mears Shop**, a customer could find clothing for all ages, toys, games, books, sewing and knitting supplies, jewelry, mixing bowls, cooking utensils and even American flags.<sup>8</sup>

Often, when a customer entered the Mears' Shop they'd hear a radio playing: it was a Telefunken (*Ger., distant transmission*). Mears was the local dealer for the German-made radio.<sup>8</sup>



**Boston Store**, at 28 Main St., owned by Osgood Kimball, left, employed Jenny Mears, right, until 1940, when she bought the variety store. She was 16 when photo was taken. Photo, Hamilton-Wenham Chronicle.

Mears was not only known for her multifarious store, but also for the munificent Jennie A. Mears college scholarship she funded from 1949 to 1973.

In 1971, Mears sold her shop to Amy McRae, who lived on Maple Street and had worked there for many years.<sup>8</sup> Thus, the tradition of workers buying the business continued. Amy McRae, who was the sister-in-law of Fire Chief, Bob McRae, closed her business in 1987.<sup>54</sup>

A later business at 28 Bay Rd. was the **Cormorant of Hamilton**, a family clothing store, run by Ann and Stephen Charette of Ipswich. It opened in 1994, and closed in 1997.

**Country Crossroads Realty** of Topsfield, opened an office in January 2011, but closed about 15 months later.

**Capefish Clothing** followed the real estate office, in the summer of 2012. Matt and Lauren Kelleher, both enthusiastic fly-fishers, opened a store offering quality outdoor wear, casual clothing and fly-fishing equipment, and



**A second floor was added**, in 1994, to provide more rentable space. Extensions behind the street side stores provided more space. Exterior stairs, built at the back, became a second egress for offices. Photo, Google, 2015

information on local fly-fishing locations, tying flies, and rods and reels.

*Jack Hauck, November, 2016*

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