

*From: "Treasures of By Gone Days"  
Created by: Fred Temple Knowles*

### *Henry Knowles Cummings Family of Orleans*

That was H. K. Cummings pursuing his avocation, as two or three of his Orleans contemporaries did. On the counter of his dry good store on Main Street, he kept a pile of prints from his negatives, which he sold for 25 cents each. By the time of his death in the 1950s, at 87, Cummings the photographer had amassed about 1,000 views of Orleans scenes and people. His plates and some of his prints are preserved now at the Snow Library, a valuable record in the history of the town.

Henry Knowles Cummings, born in the last year of the Civil War, discovered the fascination of photography the years from 1885 to 1905. The dry goods store that he ran on Main Street grew out of his father's interest in the pants factory. Joseph H. Cummings had joined with William H. Howes in 1872 for the manufacture of shirts, overalls, and pants. Originally, the plant housed rows of women at sewing machines run by foot treadles, their basement shop lit by kerosene lamps. When steam power came in 1899, as many as 200 people worked there, turning out 700 pants and overalls a day. Henry's camera recorded the scene. A great fire destroyed a large part of the pants factory in 1908 but H. K. Cummings continued his trade in "Dry and Fancy Goods and Gent's Furnishings, Boots, Shoes, Rubbers, General Merchandise." H. K. Cummings, "tin, ramrod straight", married "pretty doe-eyed" Theresa, the sea-going daughter of Captain Alfred Paine and his wife, Mary, who had gone to sea with her own father, Captain Seth Doane. Many of Cummings' plates recorded family scenes.

Together, Henry and Theresa spent much of their time at sea making many trips, by sail or motor, to Nantucket. This sea-going interest can be seen reflected in Cummings' photographs of ships and seamen, life-saving crews and fishermen. He believed in Orleans and its future. In 1897, Orleans held a grand celebration for the centennial of its being "set off" from Eastham. A huge tent stood ready for the festive Centennial banquet. That day a gale wind blew down the tent. Said Cummings: "The folks can have a finer celebration in 1997."

Henry is said to have had a mistress, Phebe Steere Brown. It is believed they had a daughter\*Elizabeth Brown, who inherited the Knowles Family Homestead on Academy Place (Henry's home for many years with his wife Theresa). The home was later sold in 1954 to Charles & Sandy Terrell, who in 1989 converted the homestead into "Academy Place Bed & Breakfast" They ran the B&B for nineteen years, and sold the property to a realtor and investment consultant for their business office in 2008.

### **Henry Knowles Cummings Biography by Henry Scammell**

"Henry Knowles Cummings was born in Orleans, Massachusetts in 1865, the final year of the Civil War. Although the railroad line reached his small village on the eastern end of Cape Cod that same year, young Henry arrived three decades ahead of the town's first telephone or automobile and more than 40 years before the canal that would make the peninsula an island. With limited means of communication and rutted streets and highways often turning to rivers of mud in rain or melting snow, in many respects mid-19th century Cape Cod was more insular than today's remotest outpost. It was a far different world than the Orleans that Cummings would leave nearly nine decades later.

Descended from merchants and sea captains, H.K. began working in the family store in the center of town by no later than the age of 16, serving the 200 employees of the Joseph Cummings and William Howes pants factory as well as the general public. He spent the next 70 years behind the counter, dispensing dry and fancy goods ... gent's furnishings, boots, shoes, rubbers, general merchandise."

Although he liked to position himself as a hard-working, clear-eyed pragmatist - "never loafed in my life," he told the Cape Codder, "been steady ever since I left high school" - those traits often combined with a touch of the visionary, even the romantic. Most of the changes in his lifetime would come from technological, social and economic forces that originated elsewhere, like the glaciers that gave Cape Cod its shape and substance. A natural

entrepreneur, Cummings had the intelligence to recognize these evolving opportunities and the adaptive skills to make the most of them.

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That side of Cummings wasn't limited to his photography, which he began around the age of 20. At 30, he bought a telephone set for \$15, then with his brother, George, planted the poles and strung the miles of wire needed to make it work. As sole owner of the new company, he sold hook-ups to his neighbors for \$10 per year (the first subscriber was Walter Mayo, whose duck farm was out on Nauset Heights), eventually linking 32 Orleans businesses and families to each other and the outside world. The venture lasted only five years before the arrival of New England Telephone and Telegraph.

Mr. H. K. was fascinated by history: the grandson of a merchant ship's master and related on his mother's side to the Sparrows, he traced his ancestry back to William the Conqueror. He married a sea captain's daughter, Theresa A. Paine, who as a child had accompanied her father in voyages around the world and was described as "the last deep water woman in Orleans." A frequent subject of his photographs, Theresa (he commonly shortened her name by a syllable to Therese) surpassed him in skill at his other lifelong hobby, which was sailing. In the halfcentury since his death (on May 21, 1953), H.K.'s other legacies - as a local merchant prince, as the Mercury who brought Orleans its first telephone, as an historian, a sailor, even his persistent reputation as a ladies' man - have vanished like sea mist in the Cape Cod sunshine.

Cummings wasn't the only photographer in 19th Century Orleans, nor is there any way to determine whether he was the best. But he combined an historian's sensibility with an artist's eye, and what remains is bright indeed. Today, through a happy combination of his own fastidious character, the sensitivity of his heirs, and the skill and dedication of the Snow Library's restoration team, his prolific output comprises a clear, uniquely varied, and absolutely irreplaceable window into America's past."

Henry Scammell  
September 7, 2004

### **Cummings and Howes Pants Factory**

"The Cummings and Howes Pants Factory was started by HK's father and William H. Howes in 1872 at Rock Harbor. It originally shared space with a meeting house and later a grocery store, then moved twice as the business expanded and in 1884 took over a former skating rink next to the Cummings' dry goods store in the middle of town. By the turn of the century, the factory boasted 125 sewing machines and some 200 employees. Distributed by Bunker Hill Pants Company, the factory's work pants and overalls were sold in every state in the Union. The store and the factory were separate businesses, but HK visited the plant frequently, and its employees comprised a major customer base for the dry goods sold next door. Just a bit further down Main Street, in the space now occupied by Snow's Garden Center, stood a second pants factory, this one owned by George Snow. The property later became the site of the Nickerson mill works building.

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Interior Elevation of the Cummings and Howes Pants Factory in Orleans, Barnstable, MA  
Another manufacturing enterprise that flourished on Cape Cod through to the end of the 19th century was boat building. While only a few yards were capable of producing the great multi-mast clipper ships that carried Yankee entrepreneurs to the farthest comers of the earth, the great majority of such operations functioned barely above the level of a cottage industry. Because Orleans had waterfront on two of the Cape's largest navigable estuaries - Nauset Inlet and Pleasant Bay - one of the most popular designs was the beamy, shoal-draft cat boat, a gaff rig with the mast at the bow that was ideal for shallow water work and recreation. HK photographed the cat boat Herold E. prior to its launch at A.O. Hurd's Yard in 1891.

### **The Cummings General Store (1887) Inset: View of Store (1954)**

No story of HK or his art would be complete without a picture of the Cummings General Store, started by his father, Joseph Cummings, during the Civil War, some ten years before the pants factory opened. HK worked in the store from the time he was 17 years old and later opened his own version of the store (see insert). Surely much of his knowledge of the community - reflected in the selection and posing of HK's photographs - began from behind the counter of his and his father's stores, as nearly everyone shopped there.

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#### **Richard Knowles Family Homestead / Snow Family / Cummings Family / Terrell Family House (Photo 1887)**

“H.K. Cummings purchased this house at 8 Academy Place and lived here until his death. Today their antique house at 8 Academy Place reveals vestiges of Theresa's green thumb in changing a farm landscape into a garden setting. The shade and fruit trees, bushes, and green lawn are still evident today. In 1946 a stroke ended 80 years of dedication to helping her family, friends and community. She left her entire estate to H.K. who died in 1953.

Theresa and H.K. gave their time, talents and pleasure to their community throughout their lives. Together they donated land that continues to benefit the townspeople today. Two examples of their generosity are the town landing at the head of the cove and the Orleans Yacht Club.

A portion of the Main Street property from the Cummings and Howes Company was, in total, transferred to the town in 1925. Orleans used it for the Police and Fire Station. That site today is Parish Park with the Town Recreation Center and local Chamber of Commerce.”