

**Sturgis Library Archives
Genealogical and Personal Document Collection**

John D. W. Bodfish Papers

MS. 13

Extent: .5 Linear Foot

Scope and Content Note: The John D.W. Bodfish papers contain biographical material, photographs and commencement programs, a political button for the Progressive Party of 1912, and a manuscript of his unpublished autobiography "This is my Life." There is also a collection of over 300 poems written by Bodfish that span the period 1897 to 1949.

Historical and Biographical Information: John D. W. Bodfish was born in West Barnstable on November 6, 1878 and died on October 6, 1956. He had very poor eyesight as a child, but he graduated from Barnstable High School in 1896 and Hyannis Normal School (now the Community College) in 1899. He became a teacher and principal of Osterville Grammar School until going totally blind in 1901. He spent the next 7 years at home working on the family poultry and cranberry farm. He married in 1908 to Louise Elizabeth Clark, a childhood friend. This put his life in a new direction with energy, enthusiasm and purpose. With the help of a sighted wife, he accepted a position in Delaware teaching the blind. He then attended Law school at Boston University School of Law 1911, becoming a lawyer on Cape Cod doing trial work. His autobiography gives many examples of the cases that made up his career. Some of the most interesting involved prosecuting underworld figures on Cape Cod selling illegal liquor during Prohibition.

As a local lawyer, Bodfish was very active in community activities. He was a charter member of the Federated Church of Hyannis, Cape Cod Hospital and The Cape Cod Farm Bureau. He also served the community as Town Counsel, County Commissioner, Cape Cod Chamber of Commerce, Barnstable County Bar Assoc. and Hyannis Board of Trade. While on the Town Counsel he participated in the restoration and development of Sandy Neck and gave the town its first park, Bodfish Park.

In broader fields of public service, he suggested to President Hoover that the government build the two bridges over the Cape Cod Canal and saw his dream realized, represented his district in the Massachusetts Constitutional Convention from 1917 to 1919, where he fought against the death penalty and advocated the courts have power over controversies between employers and employees, providing against lockouts and strikes.

All his adult life John Bodfish wrote poetry, and much of it is preserved in these papers. His poetry portray his personal love of country, family and Cape Cod plus his viewpoints on many contemporary topics. His autobiography is a tale of how he turned his handicap

into a strength. His vast contributions to the life of Cape Cod continue to be appreciated by millions.

Access: Unrestricted. Credit Sturgis Library Archives for publication.

Acquisition: Gift of Rev. Russell H. Allen (grandson-in-law)

Processed by: Jim Haworth 4/98. Contents added and finding aid revised by Lucy Loomis, July, 2007.

CONTAINER LIST

DOCUMENTS AND MANUSCRIPTS		
Box	Folder	Contents
1	1	Biographical article by Rev. Russell Allen of J. Bodfish 1878-1956
1	2	Correspondence and genealogical information
1	3	Photographs, Commencement Programs and Progressive Party political button (1912).
1	4-12	J. Bodfish poetry 1897-1949.
1	13	J. Bodfish Autobiography 'This is My Life : The Blind Barrister of Cape Cod'.
1	14	J. Bodfish Autobiography 'This is My Life : The Blind Barrister of Cape Cod'. Second copy – photocopy.
1	15	Newspaper articles: “Sandy Neck Beach only a part of the Bodfish Legacy” “Bodfish’s 30-year-old advice may still ring true”
Tube 1		Two diplomas: Barnstable High School, 1896 State Normal School, Hyannis, 1899