

THE CAPE HAS INTERESTING ARCHITECTURE

At our last meeting, an expert in historical architecture, Claire Baisley, lifted our eyes to see beyond the low-browed Cape Cottages and consider other styles of architecture of historic significance on the Cape. Ms. Baisley broadened our view, from the classic three dimensional one of single-house, house-and-a-half and double-house, to include Federal, Greek Revival and mansard roofed homes, and many other styles selected by our world-roaming predecessors on this peninsula as expressions of their taste, wealth and self-assessment of individual importance. These varied styles add color and interest to our villages, and we thank Claire Baisley for broadening our view.

THE ART OF SCRIMSHAW

"Idle hands are the instruments of the devil." Our Puritan and Quaker ancestors knew this saying well. To be sure, there was little time for idleness in the day to day life of our ancestors. Survival was a full-time job for all in the days when nearly all of life's necessities were home-made or home-grown. But aboard the great whaling vessels which relentlessly pursued their greasy luck on voyages counted in months, not days, there were periods when idleness and boredom became a problem. It was a fortunate Master who could interest his crew in the time-consuming art of Scrimshaw. Come and hear an artist who lives here in our town tell us about this fascinating art. The April 14th meeting will be held at V.I.C. Hall, Dennisport, at 7:30 PM at which time Mr. Arnold Lett of West Dennis will tell us more about the folk art of the whalers, Scrimshaw. All welcome.

THE STREETS OF OUR TOWN

Around town, here and there, we find clusters of streets with related names. For instance, along the Airline, we find Pilot, Jet, Wing and Propellor. Near Thoreau Drive are Walden and Longfellow. Off Route 134 we find Cypress, Hemlock, and Hickory. Most of these clusters of streets were originated by builders who wanted to define their development and probably have no significance from an historical point of view. But one group of names may be significant in echoing some of the most distant history of the Cape. I speak of a cluster of streets which run from Old Bass River Road to the East Shore of Bass River at Kelley's Bay. Names which orient us to their historic meaning are Norse, Viking, and Lief Erickson. Dr. Fred J. Pohl of Harvard University in his book entitled Vikings on Cape Cod, postulates the theory that the fabled Vinland described in the Norse Sagas may have been located on Bass River and he puts forth some interesting evidence to support his theory. If you are intrigued by the early visits of the Norsemen to North America, you would be interested in attending an afternoon of coffee and conversation with a genuine Viking, Eric Anderson, who lives on the River and who has studied all the evidence which points to a Viking settlement here. He will speak informally at a Coffee Hour at Jericho House on Sunday, April 12 at 3:30 PM. All are welcomed. From Mr. Anderson, you can also learn the origin of other Viking Street names, such as Thorwald and Freydis, two more of the several Viking Streets of Our Town.

MENDING WALL

My family loves poetry. I very much miss having a young one around to climb on my knee and ask me to read a "poing" as one of my sons called them. A favorite of ours has always been Robert Frost, whose verses written about the mountain country, nevertheless, have a certain ring for all of New England. I dare say that none of my children can pass a stand of birches without observing whether they have been bent down by a swinging boy, nor can they ride through a softly falling snow without wondering whose woods these are. In springtime, one of our favorites has been "Two Tramps in Mud Time", the part that begins, "The sun was warm, but the wind was chill, you know how it is with an April Day." But our second favorite at this season is the very provocative "Mending Wall", which gives to fences a meaning far beyond that which most of us understand. This poem of all of Frost's is appropriate to our part of the country where good fences did, indeed, make good neighbors not only by practice, but also by law. Early Plymouth Colony records are replete with references to keeping good fences with rather strict penalties to those who did not. Each town elected Fence Viewers whose job it was to inspect the neighborhoods' fences and make sure they were fencing in or fencing out as they were meant to do. Fences were important in defining property. Old deeds can be very frustrating to interpret, for they constantly set boundaries "as the fence now stands", which is very hard to interpret into rods, chains and links, never mind feet and inches. Now I guess by this time you are all aware of the North-South rivalry which existed in our mid-Cape towns due to differing social and economic needs. Here is another example of a difference. On the north side fences were, as in Frost's poem, stones set upon stones. This material was naturally available due to the glacial deposits of fairly large rocks which travelled with the glacier from the northern part of the continent. But the south side, being built from glacial outwash had few rocks of any size. Fences on the south side had to be fashioned from wood, most commonly from the cedar which grew in the southside swamps. As fences became more a decorative than a practical necessity, fence builders developed many styles which home owners could have custom made to suit their wishes. The Society for the Preservation of Antiquities tells us that Alonzo Capron of Dennisport was the master fence designer on the south side of

CALENDAR

April 7 & 9 Bus tour to Boston and Cambridge. Call Paula Bacon for Info. 394-5739
April 12 3:30 PM Tea and conversation at Jericho. Eric Anderson will share some thoughts on the Viking Explorations of Bass River
April 14 7:30 PM The Art of Scrimshaw, Arnold Lett, V.I.C. Hall, Dennisport.
April 21 7:30 PM Executive Board will meet at the home of Gail Hart
May Historic Preservation Month

MENDING FENCES -- continued

Dennis in the 1880's. Alonzo also owned a lumber yard on Center Street and was a carpenter. A few examples of his fences are in existence, but his artistry is mostly preserved in pictures which show elaborate fence posts which certainly demonstrate a desire on the part of the Crowells to keep up with the Bakers. As you travel around our town, take note on this comment on fences. Although I'm a southsider, I certainly do love the stone walls of the north side, but creative cedar fences must be admired for their artistry. An outstanding example of a beautiful gate from a customized fence in South Dennis has recently been presented to the Jericho House in the will of Harriet Barbour. To hear its humorous and interesting story, visit the Jericho House when it opens in June.

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

In the article about Cold Storage Road last time, I mentioned Prince Crowell, and that reminded me that I have meant for a long time to tell you something about Cape Cod names. Not surnames like Crowell, Howes and Thacher, but Proper names like Prince, and Crowell, Howes and Thacher, for that matter. The name Prince does not connote royal descent, although many Cape families do trace their roots back to British or French royal families. Remember that the first comers to the Cape were Englishmen from the southwest part of England. They were also, for the most part, Puritans. From this heritage they followed the custom of using Biblical names for their children, but from their English yeoman roots, they had learned and honored the importance of family names. First born sons on Cape Cod, as in Kent or Sussex, were most often named for their sire or grandsire. First born daughters most often were named for their mothers or grandmothers. Additional blessed events were blessed with names of favorite uncles, aunts and brothers-in-law. But now and then, a mother would choose to name one of her sons with her maiden name. That is how Prince became a given name on Cape Cod where it appears in the Sears and Howes family as well as Crowell, recognizing the maternal line which came from Gov. Thomas Prence, or Prince. He was a colonial governor who may be justly criticized for his intolerant religious edicts, but who must be admired for his adamant insistence that he would serve as governor of Plimouth Colony only as long as he might continue to live on his farm on Cape Cod! His homestead in Eastham was where he nourished many daughters and cultivated pear trees. These daughters honored their father by naming their sons Prince, and thus the name has become a traditional Cape name. So also we have such names as Crowell Baker, Howes Baker and Thacher Hallett appearing in the pages of our town reports. I can tell you from experience, that this practice has not disappeared, and that it does create a certain amount of confusion. My own husband (who, alas, is not a native Cape Codder, but very nice just the same) has been called the man with two last names. His given name is the maiden name of his grandmother. Please pause a moment and consider the plight of the champion of last name holders, as far as I have discovered. His name was Miller Thacher Thayer Nickerson, and think what a hard time a computer would have with that!

EZRA BAKER FIELD TRIPS SCHEDULED

For the third year, the D.H.S. will join with the committees of the two Historic Centers to plan field trips for the third and fourth grades at Ezra Baker School to our Josiah Dennis Manse and Jericho House. We encourage the students to try to imagine that they live in the house they visit, and try to tell them how their lives would differ from those they live today. Arts and crafts of the eras, as well as history of industry, Indians, sea chanties and the kind of energy used to manage the houses (mostly elbow grease!) are explored and discussed. Those who take part as Guides for these programs come away feeling that they have learned as much as they have taught. Would you be willing to give an afternoon to this very worthwhile project? The field trips will take place during the first week of June, and we need all kinds of help. from interpreters to people to help dress the children in their costumes for the day. Please contact Nancy Reid (398-8842) or Paula Bacon (394-5739) if you can help.

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