

# village view

by Andrea Leonard

How do you suppose mankind first learned to use flotation materials as the key to unlock the apparently limitless reaches of the seas? Was it a drowning person, clinging to a lifesaving log that just happened to be within his grasp? Was it a child playing with twigs along a peaceful river's edge who observed that the larger the piece of wood, the greater the cargo it could carry?

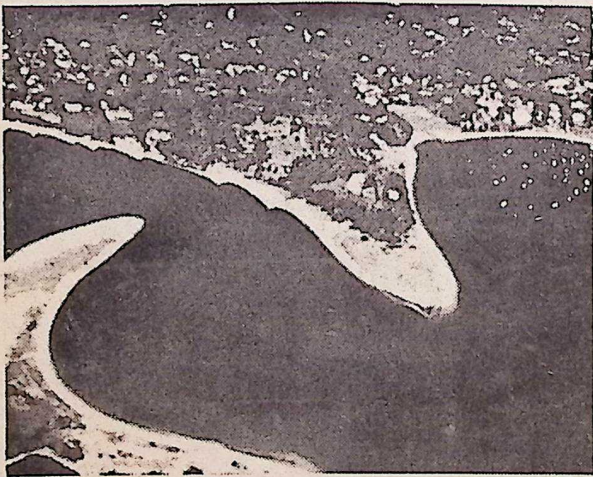
We shall never know for the answer lies hidden in the mists of antiquity. We do know, however, the call of the sea remains alive within us all, an atavistic lure to take to the waves in a canoe, boat, or ship, to launch ourselves upon the waters.

Throughout history, as man ventured upon the oceans and his craft became more sophisticated, he built, along the shores and in the harbors, a variety of docks, piers and anchorages where his boats could safely be moored awaiting his need or pleasure. Nothing about these structures has harmed the planet's environment.

It's not the docks which have spawned the oil slicks; it's not the piers that have fouled the waters. No anchorages congest the sea-ways. Rather, they provide a safe haven, a sanctuary to come back to, a home port where wives and children await the return of the sailor, the adventurer, the fisherman.

Constructing a pier for a boat is as natural to our species as going to sea in the first place. And, given the technology, deepening the waters so his craft isn't left high and dry at low water is also a natural response to stimuli.

Sometimes, in our dedication to protecting our environment, we forget we're as much a part of our ecology as the micro-organisms, earthworms, humming birds and bees.



Man, for all his brains, is but a member of the animal kingdom, just as are the striped bass, the rodent and the reptile, and all the other beasts- domestic and wild- with which the earth is populated. As such, man may properly do what comes naturally.

Man in his natural state alters his environment; so do other forms of animal life. Birds build nests, foxes dig dens, cattle feed on meadow grasses, seagulls scavenge the beaches. And man uses tools to improve his surroundings, ease his labor, enhance his pleasure. That's wrong?

Over in Cotuit there's a furor because an owner of 1,335 feet of shorefront property proposes to build a pier to accommodate his boats: a Boston Whaler, a 23' inboard-outboard, and a 17' O'Day Sailer. The plan calls for the pier to commence at an existing wood bulkhead now on the premises, and run in a northerly direction 144 feet.

This pier would extend about 125' beyond mean high water and about 97' beyond mean low water; it would commence 92' southeasterly of the northwesterly property line, be 4' wide and include an ell at the extreme end measuring 28' by 8'.

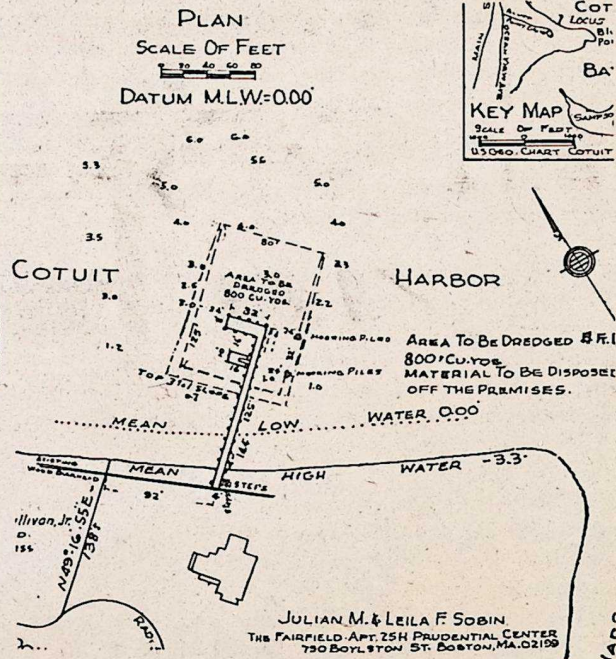
In addition, there would be a 16' by 10' wooden float and ramp laying approximately 15' inshore of the ell. There would be steps to the beach above mean high water. Currently at the extreme end of the pier, there is less than two feet of water at mean low tide. (See accompanying plans.)

Permission is sought to dredge an area 80' by 125' to a depth of 4 feet below mean low water to provide access to the pier, removing the approximately 800 yards of dredged material by barge to the Chester A. Crosby Boat Yard in Osterville where it would be trucked to a pit in Marstons Mills.

Approval to build the pier has been granted by the Barnstable Conservation Commission, subject to the provision that any shellfish be removed prior to dredging and replanted, and that the dredged material be disposed of at Dead Neck if permission were granted by the Army Corps of Engineers, to correct erosion there. This condition was accepted by the property owners and may be the subject of discussion between the Conservation Commission and the Army Engineers.

Later in 1977 the Water Resources Commission of the Commonwealth approved the project, subject to dredged material being disposed of above mean high water as originally contemplated, and License #414 was issued by the Division of Waterways, Department of Environmental Quality Engineering.

The principle objections to the dock appear to come from



Cotuiters who have neither visited the site nor viewed the plans for the project. It has been declared the pier would present a hazard to navigation, including danger to children and sailors of the Mosquito Fleet. Pollution of the waters is cited as another objection. The pier has been envisioned as ugly and pretentious. There are fears of a precedent being set.

As a native Ostervilljan, I've swum in Cotuit Harbor, rowed and sailed boats there, and even walked upon its waters. (Didn't know that, did you? The winter of 1934 was bitterly cold and North Bay froze solid; another pre-teenager and I, each carrying an oar just in case the salt ice, which we'd been warned was treacherous, gave way beneath our weight, walked across the frozen waters to Cotuit.)

At any rate, the facts reveal the length of the proposed pier has been exaggerated and the shallow waters around the Point, as is clear in the photograph, scarcely permit navigation in the area. Shoreward of the end of the pier, the bottom shoals to one foot of water in less than 40 feet.

To reach water of 4' depth at mean low water, one would have to go an additional 75' beyond the proposed end of the pier.

Further, the courses laid out for racing the small craft used by the Mosquito Fleet are nowhere near the pier site, and even if a boat sailed into these waters, because of the prevailing southerly winds during the sailing season, the 32' bluff rising above the shore at this point, would block winds and becalm the vessel.

Prior to the 1954 hurricane a pier belonging to Sidney Kirkman stood at approximately the same place it's now planned to construct another. It was 50' longer than the new plans call for. The Kirkman pier was built in the early 40's, was destroyed in the '54 hurricane, and never rebuilt.

In the fifteen years the Kirkman pier stood in the harbor, extending 50' further from the shore, not one incident of

danger or hazard to navigation or young sailors has been reported.

As for pollution, only one of the craft for which the pier is to be built has a head. It seems logical a boat tied up at a pier is less likely to dump human wastes into the water than one moored out in the harbor.

Discharge of waste and petroleum products is now closely regulated by governmental agencies. The plans for the pier call for salt-treated pilings, as recommended by the Conservation Commission, and would, therefore, introduce no creosote into the water.

Congestion in the harbor is more a result of non-Cotuit residents cruising into the area, or mooring in the harbor, than of boats belonging to shore-front property owners who tie up at private piers.

Whether the pier is aesthetically pleasing is a matter of opinion, since beauty is in the eye of the beholder. For centuries, artists have found piers and docks appropriate subjects for portrayal. The pier's form and design is dictated by its function and seems no more or less ugly than any other functional construction.

Precedent-setting could be a legitimate objection since the construction of one pier could encourage the building of others. Many Cotuiters who are disturbed by this possibility may not be aware that every pier application must be judged by its own merits, and in each case the threats to navigation, pollution, and congestion must be individually examined. Obviously, in most cases the water depths, the channel and other factors would prevent, or make unnecessary, the building of a 125' pier. The factors present in the current situation may be unique to this particular part of the shoreline.

Town of Barnstable zoning codes dictate the use of piers, but, in this instance, permission is sought for a private residential facility as an accessory use to an existing single-family residence. This pier ought to be judged on the circumstances rather than prohibited because of vague threats and unwarranted fears.

Cotuit is, has been, and will continue to be one of the Cape's most charming villages. Not the least of its charm lies in the remarkable character of its inhabitants. Time and again Cotuit residents have demonstrated their deep feelings for their village as well as their capacity to think for themselves, reach independent conclusions right and proper for them, and to stand up and be heard.

Although files may bulge with comments from objectors, it's a good bet several Cotuiters have no objection whatsoever to this pier construction. Those are the people who still believe there's an inalienable right of a shore-front property-owner to own a pier so he can bring his boats safely to port-even as he, himself, would want to do-even as our ancestors did for untold eons.

There may even be some Cotuiters who have already voiced objections but who may re-think their positions and be big enough to withdraw their negative comments.

It's time for Cotuiters with positive views to let their voices be heard lest their own rights be snatched from them by precedent-setting findings.