

# VILLAGE VIEW

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If you've never played the role of tourist on Cape Cod in summertime, think of the possibilities open to us who live here. Imagine how a tourist feels, what he sees as he looks at scenes familiar to us. To experience that, a few weeks ago three of us arrived early in Hyannis on a lovely August morning to take the train to Buzzards Bay and a canal cruise.

Our first surprise was the throng of people who, like us, waited to board the train. Everyone in the crowd was a stranger to all the rest, excepting those who formed family groups like ours. Quite unlike a suburban commuter train platform, where neighbor nods to neighbor because they've been fellow travelers on the 8:13 five mornings a week for years, the area where we waited corralled an assemblage who had never laid eyes on one another before and, probably, never would again.

Our second surprise was the arrival of a caravan of three enormous tour buses. These drew up a few minutes before departure time and discharged another couple of hundred people, bona fide tourists all. The tour bus passengers were herded to the far end of the train where they were boarded ahead of those of us holding individual tickets.

Finally, with a surge reminiscent of New York subways at rush hour, the mass of waiting would-be rail-riders inched toward the steps of the cars, mounted and found seats. Just as on trains of yore, no tickets were collected until the train was rolling; then Conductor Earl Bourne came through, punch in hand, and placed a pink stub under the seatback tab to indicate we were legitimate riders. That brought back memories...

Many years ago during World War II, while traveling in a crowded train between New York and Providence, I found no vacant seat. As many others were doing, I perched on top of my luggage at the end of the car. After the conductor punched my ticket, he collected it since the train was not scheduled to stop again until it reached my destination. He gave me one of those stubs. Not having a seatback to secure it, I somehow lost the stub. And then, when the conductor next came through the cars, I was accused of having stowed away. But that's another story...

Leaving the Hyannis yards, the train moved slowly, came to a full stop at the Iyanough Road crossing, then gathered speed as it rattled toward Yarmouth. Twice more, before we merged with the main line of the Old Colony, at the Y where the Hyannis spur comes in from the south side, we stopped at flag crossings. People driving cars on roads today aren't expecting trains at grade crossings.

At Barnstable, we saw from the open windows the rear of the house of correction. Within a wire-fenced enclosure a dozen or so men were exercising in the sunshine. Rifles at the ready, three uniformed policemen watched the inmates. On such a glorious day, I did not like to think any living person could not be free.

Somber thoughts were soon displaced as the cars swayed out of woods and across the Barnstable marshes at Proctor's crossing. After passing the West Barnstable depot, one of the few old stations still standing on the Cape, the route parallels the King's Highway through cranberry bogs and sparsely built neighborhoods to East Sandwich. Here, near the state fish hatcheries, quail and pheasant are raised for release each fall. From our seats, we could see the hundreds of birds in their pens. The tracks recross Route 6A and skirt Spring Hill before carrying us into Sandwich village.

At the station platform the train stopped to let off those passengers who would visit Sandwich and Heritage Plantation. All of the tour bus folks left the train, even though (Conductor Bourne told us on his next walk through our car) one busload was scheduled to continue to Falmouth and take a ferry for Martha's Vineyard. Not until their bus driver appeared to reassure them could they be persuaded to resume their journey.

We left Sandwich, watched the electric plant slide by, and were soon running at a good clip along the Cape Cod Canal's south side between the bike trail and Route 3. We waved to fishermen, joggers, and cyclists making the most of the fine weather. They waved in return. As the train slowed on its approach to the railroad bridge, Conductor Bourne paused again at our seats.

"You'll be interested," he said, "three times this summer we've had to stop this side of the canal to let off a hysterical woman, panicked at the thought of going over the railroad bridge. I don't know what troubles them, but we drop them off and pick them up again when we come back onto the Cape and head down to Falmouth."

"Don't worry," we promised him, "we won't panic." And we didn't. Minutes later, our train came to a halt at the Buzzards Bay depot. We were promptly escorted to a couple of shuttle buses and transported out to State Pier where we embarked on a sightseeing boat for the two-hour round-trip cruise the length of the Cape Cod Canal.

Since none of us had ever before seen the waterway from sea level, we enjoyed our voyage. Disembarking at the pier, we were in good spirits. After a light lunch in Buzzards Bay,

we strolled the length of the shopping district, commenting on the sparsity of attractive business establishments, and speculating upon whether the grants recently allotted to the Town of Bourne for improvements would be a successful venture.

Buzzards Bay could offer tourists a pleasant hour or two were there some attractive shops, a few shade trees, and a more restful ambiance. To achieve a quieter and more peaceful atmosphere, Bourne townspeople might consider prohibiting trucks downtown and, alternatively, routing heavy traffic onto the by-pass.

Improvements made recently in building a park next to the depot, between Main Street and the canal, point to growing recognition among Bourne's town fathers and Buzzards Bay's business community that the village is potentially viable. As saplings planted there mature to trees, the park will become a green oasis, attractive to residents and visitors alike.

Back at the station, we viewed the Corps of Engineers' display, gathered a handful of advertising brochures and descriptive literature from racks, talked with the lady at the Chamber of Commerce Welcome Desk, and then watched the slow descent of the railroad bridge span being lowered to enable our train's return to pick us up.

On board once again, we relaxed to the rhythmic beat of iron wheels on iron tracks, to the familiar swaying motion as the train made its way down-Cape to Hyannis once more. Riding the train again was pure nostalgia; in our youth the trains ran to and from Boston several times a day. Baggage, mail, and passengers, once upon a time, travelled by rail rather than by road.

Conductor Bourne made his way through the cars a final time, calling, "Hyannis, Hyannis...please leave by the forward end of your car." Being a tourist, just for one day, is a splendid experience.