

VILLAGE VIEW

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Diaries. Wills. Obituary notices. Epitaphs. Ship captains' Logs. Letters. Genealogies. Photographs. Legends. History. That's what it all adds up to. And what makes history? People do. People don't make geography, nor mathematics, nor science; these exist whether there are people or not. But without people, there is no history; there's nothing but facts. Cold hard unromantic unfeeling facts affect us, but they don't make history. They don't change. They are static. People are never static. Not only do they differ as individuals, they change from year to year. Sometimes they change from hour to hour; they respond to conditions around them. In the early years of **The Village Advertiser**, the front page often featured a photograph of scenes or people long gone from Cape Cod shores. Most of these pictures were con-

tributed by Paul Chesbro who has been collecting pictorial and documentary evidence about Osterville and its people for twenty years or more.

As the village's unofficial historian, Chesbro, with the help of Bucky Crosby, gave us **OSTERVILLE - A WALK THROUGH THE PAST**, a handsome hard-cover book published in 1979 and now almost out-of-print (but not quite). Anyone who might like to own a copy would be wise to purchase his soon; fewer than 200 remain.

During the past year, there appeared in **The Village Advertiser** a series of photographs of World War I doughboys who grew up and lived most of their lives in Osterville. These, too, have come from Mr. Chesbro's collection, as did the letters the boys "over there" wrote home in 1917 and 1918.

At the present time, Chesbro and Crosby are compiling material for another book they hope to bring out, a project even more ambitious than their earlier work. "This book," Chesbro says, "will include a written history of Osterville, going back as far as you can go. There'll be articles taken from the *Barnstable Patriot* between 1869 and 1935."

Perhaps you can imagine the hundreds of hours Chesbro has devoted to research; still to come are hundreds more to organize the material. I've read some of the articles about Osterville and its people and found them fascinating. To whet your appetite, in months to come I hope to give Village View readers occasional previews of the book's contents.

There will be a chapter about Osterville men who served in the Revolutionary War, the Mexican War, the Civil War, and World War I. Another chapter will quote from old wills. How would you like to read what your great-grandfather left his heirs in 1869?

Old maps will illustrate how Osterville grew; ancient gravestone inscriptions, excerpts from diaries and logs, stories of the California Gold Rush of 1849, and records of the old Beacon Club will put Osterville's past into perspective. A chapter on the new Osterville will help future historians when the 1980's are looked upon as the "good old days."

To illustrate how a diary contributes to our understanding of the past and how the precise flavor of a period, long faded into the mists of thousands of yesterdays, can be recaptured, consider these few passages taken from a diary kept by a 15-year old boy who lived in Osterville in the second half of the 19th century. His name was Clifford Lovell.

It begins on New Year's Day, 1871. "Happy New Year. Very pleasant this morning. Aunt Chloe gave me this diary. Grandma and Aunt Lydia each gave me 5 cents. Grandpa gave me a lead pencil and 10 cents. Went sleighing down to Mrs. Jones'. Got supper for mother."

This single entry tells us that over a hundred years ago, a teenager felt well-rewarded with the simple gifts he received. We learn snow blanketed the ground on that January morning, but the day was fine. We take note Clifford's chores included helping his mother by preparing a meal.

Two weeks later, Clifford reports, "Very pleasant today. Went a gunning over to Willis Leonard's this forenoon. Played baseball up in general field this afternoon. Went to the auction in Israel Crocker's store. Went down to grandfather's after my milk."

We know more about Clifford, now, and about Osterville. Baseball was a recently invented game when Clifford was a lad. His grandfather kept a cow. Clifford knew how to handle a gun. Later entries give more details of this aspect of his boyhood.

"January 21, 1871: Went to Micah's Pond after muskrats... January 26: Snowstorm commenced this afternoon. Mrs. Lucy Crosby had a baby last night. Set my trap for a muskrat and caught a snipe... January 30: Very pleasant.

Caught a very large muskrat. Dug a track between the clothes poles so mother could hang out her clothes... February 7: Went to school and learned all my lessons. Went skating this evening on Parker's pond and had a splendid time. Built a large fire on the pond... March 3: Not very pleasant. Very windy and some rain in the afternoon. Went to Lizzie Codd's funeral in the forenoon at the Methodist-Episcopal Church, and Capt. James Parker's, in the afternoon at the house. Seems just like Sunday."

Now we have a picture of Clifford's daily life: school exercise, shooting and trapping, and village social activities revolving around births, deaths, and marriages.

March 8: Very pleasant indeed. Went down to grandfather's and helped him get in 3 loads of hay. In the afternoon went out a fishing down to Lot Pond in R. C. Ames' boat... March 9: Caught a muskrat in the morning. Skinned him and put him on a shingle. Got my trap in a good place, I guess...

March 11: Caught a muskrat this morning. It was alive in my trap and tried to fight me, but I killed it... March 14: Went a flatfishing this day but did not catch any of any account. Had Uncle Oliver's old leaky boat so we had to bail out half of the time... March 20: Spaded up the garden this forenoon. Percy and I went a gunning mostly down to Sampson's Island..."

Listen to Clifford's words. Read them aloud. You can begin to hear the way old-time Cape Codders spoke the English Language. People didn't go hunting or fishing. They went "a-fishin' and a-gunnin'." Cape Codders now in their 80's well remember when everyone they knew spoke this way. This is the way history brings the long-departed back to life. Remember the old Mother Goose rhyme, "Bye, baby, bunting, Daddy's gone a-hunting, gone to fetch a rabbit skin to wrap his baby bunting in," and the one that begins, "I saw a ship a sailing, a sailing on the sea..."? Maybe others spoke so, as well.

While Chesbro and Crosby labor to get their new book ready for the printer, we can participate. Look around for old documents or pictures of Osterville's past. Tucked-away papers, old deeds, scrapbooks, contents of trunks in attics, long-undisturbed, all are potentially rich sources. Either Mr. Crosby or Mr. Chesbro would be glad to consider using such documents to supplement the wealth of information they have already gathered.

Bits of historical memorabilia, things that may seem trivial, ordinary, or of little importance might fill a gaping hole in the history of the village and its people. Often the pieces fit together to complete the story, like parts of a jig-saw puzzle. Thus the past can live again and provide us with insights we can find in no other way.