

Village View

# Historical Society trying to rally villagers to save 1728 Cammett House

by Andrea Leonard

Good things are afoot! Only a few weeks ago I was bemoaning the changes coming to Osterville; recent developments make me feel better about them. Through the thoughtfulness and generosity of Messrs. Lebel and Shields who propose to build condominiums on the land, the little old house on Main Street, just west of the village center, has been offered to the Osterville Historical Society if the Society will move the building.

Land is available at the present site of the Society's museum, the Jonathan Parker House. An estimate of the cost of moving the structure has been obtained, as well as the cost of a foundation. These figures total approximately \$15,000. Another \$5,000 to \$7,500 will be needed to recondition the exterior of the house; this work should be done before the snow flies to protect the interior from the weather.

Interior work, also needed, will come later, of course. The first goal is to build a foundation, move and set the house, and repair the exterior. This ancient house, one of the oldest in Osterville, should be preserved. Its architectural integrity has never been disturbed.

The present treasury of the Osterville Historical Society is inadequate to take advantage of this opportunity; in fact, there is barely enough in its coffers to cover one year's expenses for maintenance of the present museum buildings. The Boat Shed that houses memorabilia of the Crosby Boatbuilding industry, is in need of repairs.

While many people in the Osterville-Wianno community are active in the Historical Society, are sincerely concerned about maintaining the character of the village, and will do all they can to support a fund-raising drive, saving this structure so that it may be appreciated by posterity deserves the support of the entire village.

We can't stop change, nor can we stand in the way of progress. Through concerted effort, however, we can make the best of things. This is a chance to preserve an important vestige of Osterville's past and secure a portion of our heritage that, once destroyed, can never be recreated.

The house in question, sheltered by ancient catalpa trees, stands on a gentle knoll on the north side of Main Street, just beyond the Old House Antiques Shop. Its original owners are not known to me, but in the early 1800s it was the home of Mr. and Mrs. John Cammett whose son, David, inherited it when his parents died. He resided there with his wife, Mary (who was bedridden for 30 years), in the last decades of the 19th century. Early in this century, the house became the property of the Isaac Lovell family; then it passed to Mrs. W.L. Phelps who owned it at the time of the Tercentennial of the Town of Barnstable in 1939.

More recently the property has belonged to Miss Cynthia Gilman who is, because of failing health and advanced years, no longer able to live alone there. The old house, lately purchased by Messrs. Lebel and Shields, was slated for demolition until their offer to the Historical Society.

My own great-grandmother, Lucinda Cammett Hinckley, was a daughter of John Cammett and spent her childhood in that house; it is likely that other village people can trace their family trees to people who once called this ancient house "home." Even if they cannot, no resident of Osterville, recent or long-term, should fail to support efforts to save and restore this lovely relic of our past.

In today's economy, \$20,000 is not a great deal of money to raise for such a worthwhile project. And yet, bearing the expense should not fall to the lot of only a few. Saving the old Cammett house ought to be a community-wide effort.



The old Cammett House, circa 1728, one of Osterville's oldest houses, is threatened to be torn down unless the Osterville Historical Society can raise the funds needed to move and restore it. (Photo courtesy of Paul Chesbro)

one in which all Osterville takes part, pride, and pleasure. As the work progresses and this authentic antique begins a new phase of its existence, the undertaking can be enjoyed by everyone, the results can be satisfying, and the rewards can be of lasting benefit. Perhaps this is the catalyst the village needs to motivate our youth to participate actively in a worthy cause.

Moving is not a new thing to old houses. Although this one, as far as anyone knows, now stands on its original foundation, many others have been jacked up and settled at new sites. In years past, some were put on rollers and hauled across fields by oxen; some were floated across the Sound on barges; some were flaked and then reconstructed at new locations. In recent years such moves have been accomplished more quickly and easily with modern machinery.

On behalf of the Osterville Historical Society and the little old Gramma Cammett house, now threatened with destruction, I appeal to all Osterville's people to combine their resources and energies to preserve this precious fragment of our beloved past. This is an opportunity for village people to demonstrate that they care, that they value their historic ancestry, that they appreciate the present charm of Osterville, and that they will exert themselves to preserve it for the future. This is a chance to work to achieve a tangible and enduring goal.