Village View

by Andrea Leonard

Cape Codders aren't the only ones who get bitten by the nostalgia bug. Most people have fresh and clear memories of their youthful years and enjoy reminiscing about The Good Old Days.

Roger C. Hacket of Raleigh, North Carolina, talks about his childhood in Kentucky. "We lived in Livermore in 1903 when I was four years old. On one hot summer's day the town'speople were more excited than they'd been at any time since the Civil War.

"The cause was the first automobile ever seen in Livermore, Kentucky. It had been driven from Owensboro, about twenty miles away, and had taken the driver and his buddy most of the morning to make the trip over the winding, dusty and rutted country roads.

"The car was a two-seater with no top. It had a high clearance and sure made a lot of noise; there was plenty of exhaust as well. Although autos had been in the developmental stage for ten years at that time (there were suppose to be about 10,000 cars in the U.S. in 1900; one for every 7,600 people), it's safe to say that in 1903 the overwhelming majority of the population had never seen one.

"In rural and small towns probably no more than one person in a hundred had seen a car. Thus, the whole town turned out that day in Livermore. I remember."

A man named Wilfred Beaver who lives in Sparta, Wisconsin, tells his story. "Do you remember when towns had their own bands? The bandstand stood in the middle of the park, encircled with freshly painted benches where people came to sit and listen to the music.

"The round building was raised above the ground and had seats for speakers and town leaders. On the Fourth of July political candidates told the voters what they wanted to do if elected.

"Usually the matter of patriotism was interlaced in the long speeches -- with personal references of how the man had fought for his country in time of war or a national emergency.

"As the years passed, accounts of war duty became quite dramatic and made listeners wonder why anyone else had been needed. The Mayor, his council, the local banker, and other important people spoke also.

"Many town folk could be seen nodding and dozing as the speeches wore on into the hot afternoon. Yes, I remember those days."

Mr. Beaver also speakes of the iceman. "In the not too long ago, refrigeration was furnished to city and town dwellers by the ice man. His job was an essential one.

"City dwellers, living mostly in three and four story apartment buildings, had cards with four different numbers on them to indicate how many pounds of ice they wanted. The iceman chipped off that weight from his large slab and carried it up the flights of stairs to his customers.

"A horse-drawn wagon, lined with old burlap sacks to keep the ice from melting, was driven from stairway to stairway through the alleys.

"The iceman wore woolen shirts, summer and winter. He also wore a leather vest, reinvorced over the shoulder he used most in carrying the blocks of ice.

"His diet of garlic, greens and homemade red wine kept his body in fine physical shape. Alas, the electric refrigerator eventually forced him out of work."

From Windsor, Nova Scotia, comes another memory of days gone by. "I remember the day of Halley's Comet. There had been dire predictions that gasses in the comet's tail would end all life on earth. People were terrified. Some committed suicide.

"Since my parents did not believe such tales, we were not alarmed. We didn't fear the world was coming to an end; in fact, we were curious to see the marvelous sight.

"A cousin of mine was on Boston Common where a crowd had gathered to hear about what the comet would do. People were weeping and voicing their fears of the coming end.

"A man standing with his weeping wife asked my cousin, 'Don't you believe it?' 'No,' she said, 'I believe the Bible.' The couple stopped lamenting and began to smile.

"The day arrived. I was on my way to a neighbor's house to do an errand. I was a child, alone in a deep ravine in the woods. The sky darkened, but I was not afraid. It was only Halley's Comet passing by."

One Bessie Oates of Mt. Olive, North Carolina, recalls her

childhood, saying, "When I was a child we lived on a farm. My parents raised most of the food we ate.

"Back then, people raised rice in this area. They also grew wheat and carried it to the mill to have it ground for meal. Most people killed their own hogs for meat, and I remember how cold it used to be when my folks killed our hogs.

"During hog-killing time, we young people were in school; it was a happy time to come home and smell the aroma of fresh sausage and other good things.

"It seemed especially good after walking the three miles from our one-room school house. We had one teacher who taught all seven grades.

"At the end of the seventh grade you were through with school. Very few finished high school in those days because you had to leave home and live in a town with a high school. That meant a lot of money. Most people didn't have it."

E.E. Messinger, an old-timer now living in Florida, grew up in rural Wisconsin. "I remember when we were children in the woods of northern Wisconsin and my father and mother went out into the forest to cut down trees in the deep show, piled them high on the sled and hauled them to the sawmill two-and-a-half miles away.

"Sometimes the temperature would drop to forty below zero, and we had to bundle up all we would to keep from freezing as we walked over a mile to school.

"Once my father froze his nose and had to rush outside to rub it and restore circulation.

"My father dug a well by hand, twenty-seven feet deep. He put the dirt in a pail, and my mother or my big sister drew it up and dumped it. Father finally struck solid rock; then, at great risk to himself, set dynamite and rushed up the ladder and away, before it exploded.

"In this way he drilled fifteen feet into the solid rock and there we got the best water in the world."

We all have memories of childhood that stay with us all our lives. Present-day grandparents recall sleeping in unheated bedrooms, coal-fuel furnaces, cooking at kerosene kitchen stoves and stoking wood-burning stoves in the parlor.

We remember out-houses, oil lamps, and pumps at kitchen sinks. Those who are now great-grandparents remember sleeping in feather beds, the first moving pictures (before "the talkies"), the first crystal radio sets, and the first automobiles.

To some, the first airplane appeared like an astonishing motorized bird, and was like the first automobile seen in Livermore, Ky.

Most people over forty remember passenger trains coming twice daily to Cape Cod, blackouts during World War II, and navy ships and submarines passing through the newly-widened Cape Cod Canal.

Some remember standing on the bank of the Canal, before it was widened, and seeing their friends on the deck of the New York Boat as it traveled from Boston to New York City on an overnight voyage.

Memories are being made everyday. People now parents of young children will look back, twenty or thirty years from now, and tell their grandchildren about the first television sets, about the first men to walk on the moon, and how great a step we took when we first began to explore outer space.

They will look at pictures of 1975 automobiles, or see them in a museum, and speak of those old gasoline-driven vehicles with affection colored by memories of youthful hope and idealism.

Those who are children now will, someday, have their own childhood memories to pass along to coming generations.

What, I wonder, will be the remarkable things they tell of, when they look back?