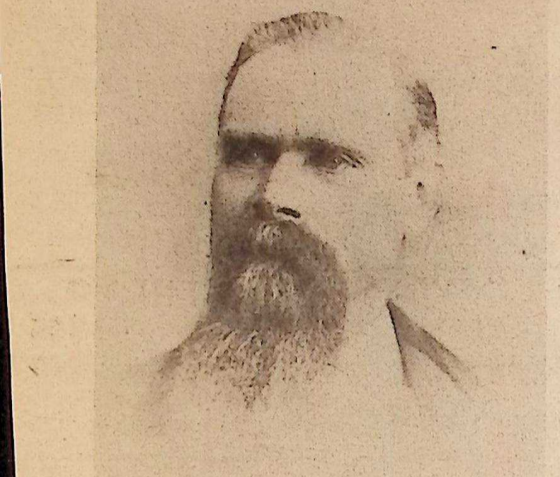


# Solving the mysteries of the past

by Andrea Leonard

Hour after hour, day after day, everybody is receiving and storing (or receiving and ignoring) information. It comes from whatever we see and hear, smell and taste, or touch. The sources include radio, television, newspapers and magazines, but are not limited to these. Much incoming information we reject as insignificant, retaining only what seems important. What is important depends on who and what you are. To the man who is Osterville's self-appointed historian, all information that helps him put together pieces of this village's past is important.



**FREEMAN B. CROCKER**, born in 1828, a native of the Town of Barnstable, went to California in 1849 during the Gold Rush. Because he had to go around Cape Horn, it took him six months to get there. He remained there until 1856, when he returned to the Cape and married Content Phinney Scudder of Osterville in 1859. Her father, Isaac, was a cousin to Captain Edwin Scudder. In 1858 he travelled to Iowa; then, in 1860, he crossed the plains by muleteam to Denver, where he entered into a partnership with Edwin Scudder. He was elected County Superintendent of Schools in Arapahoe County, where he also served on the City Council and the School Board. (Photo courtesy of Colorado Historical Society)

Paul Chesbro has been collecting old records, photographs, and histories of Osterville families for decades. His reputation—for tenacity in the search, for documenting or finding reliable sources for facts, and for his deep interest in all things pertaining to Osterville of an earlier era—is widespread.

A few years ago, Paul became involved in a quest for information about the old York home on East Bay Road. In the late spring of 1981, Chesbro received a phone call from a Mrs. Summerfield, of Yarmouth; she asked if he knew who had been the original owner of the house and the date it had been built. The earliest owner, Paul believed, was Capt. Philander Scudder, but there could have been an earlier one. He suggested that deeds recorded at the Barnstable County Court House would be the best source; he also mentioned to Mrs. Summerfield that the Hyannis law firm of Daniel Fern, which had handled the estate of Mrs. Jane York, a recent owner, might help her, and supplied the name of Mrs. Rosamund Milne, Fern's secretary at that time.

Mrs. Milne referred Mrs. Summerfield to Walcott Ames, Jr.; Ames had bought the property when the York estate was settled. Again Mrs. Summerfield sought Chesbro's help. Mr. Ames gave Paul copies of papers concerning the transfer of the property from the heirs of Philander Scudder to the York family in 1890. Paul passed the data on to Mrs. Summerfield.

There the story might have ended had not Chesbro recalled a chance encounter he had had in the early 1970s with a Mrs. Hubbard of Plymouth, Mass.; she was a great-granddaughter of Isaac Scudder, brother of Philander. Mrs. Hubbard had told Paul that she owned a lovely oil painting of Isaac and also that since none of Philander's children had lived to maturity, his nephew, William, son of Isaac, had handled his estate.

A few years later, while researching material for his book, *Osterville—A Walk through the Past*, Paul had written Mrs. Hubbard, but his letter had been returned. At the time of Paul's first contact with her, Mrs. Hubbard had also given him the address of her cousin, a Mrs. Neil Case, from Hartford, Conn., who, she thought, might have more information about the Scudder family. When his letter to Mrs. Hubbard came back, Paul looked up Mrs. Case's address and sent a letter to her. It, too, came back marked Addressee Unknown. Except for a strange coincidence, Chesbro might have given up at that point.

Hardly a week after Paul's letter to Mrs. Case was returned, he had a call from a Mr. Wynne who had recently purchased from his sister a very old house near Bumps River in Centerville, adjacent to land now owned by the Cape Cod Museum of Natural History. Mr. Wynne, while insulating the attic, had found some very old correspondence between Isaiah and Alfred Scudder. Did Paul know more about these two men? Paul did. Not only did he share his own information with Mr. Wynne, he suggested Wynne talk with Mr. David Hinckley of Sunset Lane, because the Hinckley family, years ago, ran an old mill near Mr. Wynne's house.

While talking with Wynne, Paul discovered he lived near Hartford, Conn. Would Mr. Wynn look for the address of Mrs. Neil Case in a Hartford telephone directory? He certainly would. A few days later, Paul received Mrs. Case's latest address and phone number. The old letter, enclosed in another envelope, was remailed, but a reply was long in coming.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Summerfield needed urgently the information about the old Scudder-York house on East Bay Road. The house had been purchased by Mr. Robert Kesten who was restoring and renovating the place; an Open House for the benefit of a charitable cause was scheduled in the near future; Mrs. Summerfield must order a dated plaque for the house. After searching records at the Court House, she had concluded the house was constructed in 1810 by Ebenezer Scudder, father of Philander and Isaac. Paul had no information to contradict her findings. The plaque was made, the Open House received rave reviews, and a generous contribution was made to the charity.

In October of the same year, 1981, Paul was at Sturgis Library in Barnstable poring over old *Barnstable Patriots*. In an 1872 issue he found a lengthy story about the suicide death in Denver, Colorado, of Capt. Edwin Scudder, native of Osterville. Mr. Scudder, according to the article, had been associated in business in Denver with Freeman B. Crocker. Might this possibly lead to additional information about Philander and Isaac?

Paul remembered another source where he might find clues: the late Mrs. "Max" Crosby had given him a collection of old records kept by several generations of the Lovell family. (Lovells were once a large and prominent village family.) Among the Lovell papers, Paul found recorded the birth of Edwin Scudder, son of Josiah, Sr., and Hannah (Lovell) Scudder.

Needing still more detail, Paul decided to write both the Denver Library and the Denver Historical Society, but had the address of neither. However, he did have a friend living in Denver, Bill Wood, who had worked with him one summer at the Wool Shop. Paul wrote the two letters, sent them to Bill with postage, and asked Wood to address and mail the envelopes.

After a six-week interval the Denver Library responded offering two options: one would cost \$25; the other, \$100. With Christmas around the corner and heating bills on the rise, Paul took no action. Just before Christmas there arrived from the Denver Historical Society a large envelope containing Xerox copies of other old newspaper articles recounting the suicide of Capt. Edwin Scudder. Also enclosed was a Xerox copy of a photograph of Capt. Scudder which had been obtained from the well-known Hart Collection of Early Western Photographs. Some pieces of the puzzle were falling into place.

When March, 1982 rolled around, Paul and his mother left the Cape for a month's vacation in Scottsdale, Arizona. Also

to Scottsdale went a package of papers and old records, including those of the Lovell family. In Scottsdale, when Paul was looking through and cataloging these documents, he noticed in the papers Walcott Ames, Jr. had given him, that the first-mentioned heir of Capt. Philander Scudder was a niece, Mrs. Content (Scudder) Crocker of Denver, Colorado. Nor did Paul's memory fail him at this crucial point.

He knew he'd read in the Lovell papers that Content P. Scudder had married Freeman B. Crocker. Sure enough, he confirmed their wedding took place in Osterville in 1857. This Freeman Crocker, then, must have been the same man who was in business with Capt. Edwin Scudder. All that remained was to establish relationship between Capt. Edwin and Content (Scudder) Crocker.

Deeper into the Lovell records Paul dug until he found the tie. Capt. Edwin Scudder was own cousin to Philander and his brother, Isaac, for their father, Ebenezer, was brother to Josiah, Edwin's father. Paul reasoned that Content, Isaac's daughter, was certain to have known Edwin, her father's first cousin. Through him she had met Edwin's business associate, Freeman Crocker, and married him.

For corroboration, Chesbro wrote again to the Denver Historical Society for details of Crocker. The society responded with a thumbnail sketch of his life and a photograph of that gentleman. Crocker had gone west in the Gold Rush of '49, remained for a time in California, returned to Massachusetts where he married, removed to Iowa where Edwin Scudder was working at the time, and finally, in 1860, both men moved to Denver where they established a business before Colorado became a state.

With the coming of summer, his busiest season, Paul had put aside, temporarily, his work on Osterville history. But in late June came the long-awaited response from Mrs. Neil Case. She wrote apologetically that she had begun to answer his inquiry of the previous September but had mislaid his letter and her own reply, re-discovering it only that week. While she knew nothing of her great-great grand uncle, Philander Scudder, she did have other information to share.

In her possession was a photograph, taken about 1890, of her great grandmother, Susan (Lewis) Scudder, standing in



**CAPTAIN EDWIN M. SCUDDER (1815-1872)** was the son of Josiah Scudder Sr., and Hannah (Lovell) Scudder. Born and raised in Osterville, Scudder went to sea as a young man. He later moved to Iowa and captained a boat on the Cedar River. In 1860 Scudder moved to Denver and entered the grocery business in partnership with Freeman B. Crocker. He was the brother of Josiah Scudder, Jr. Freeman, Zeno and Judge Henry Scudder. (Photo courtesy of Colorado Historical Society)

the doorway of her home on East Bay Road (the York House). "Aunt Susan," as she was known in the village, was the second wife of Isaac and step-mother of Content (Scudder) Crocker. At her death in 1900, Aunt Susan had been a widow for 53 years.

Once more Paul's remarkable memory came into play. He had often heard the late Ernest DeWitt, Sr., who had grown up in a house across the road from the York property, speak of "Aunt Susan." The pieces fit perfectly. Paul wrote again to Mrs. Case, asking for a copy of the photograph. After another long silence, Paul attempted to reach her by telephone. She was not at home. Two weeks later, he called again and, this time, was able to speak with her. Recently, the negative of the photo has arrived.

Researching the history of old Osterville families, a history still in the process of being created today, is a work that depends for success on a deep and abiding interest, a capacity to recall minute and seemingly insignificant details, a determination to sniff out and follow up each clue, and a willingness to investigate numerous blind alleys. At the same time, success may depend upon taking advantage of every stroke of luck that presents itself.

Paul Chesbro, over a span of more than twenty years of searching, by following the faint traces left by men and women who lived and died more than a century ago, has proven the relationships of one line of the Scudder family history. This is only a single piece in the larger puzzle he is fitting together. Once the thousands of bits of information he has acquired are organized, he hopes to publish his second book about Osterville.

Meanwhile, his search and his research continue.