

# VILLAGE VIEW

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Now that the Old Cammett House has passed safely over the brow of the hill on Parker Road to its new site on Osterville Historical Society's property, I think of it as settling down to more centuries of service.

What life might have been like in this house when it was new is hard for us to imagine. To my knowledge, there are no documents describing the village in the early-to-mid-1700s. We do have, thanks to a gift made to the Historical Society by Mr. Stanley G. Lovell of Jacksonville, Florida, (and which will be reproduced in the book now being compiled by Paul Chesbro and Chester A. Crosby, III, as a sequel to their earlier work *Osterville, A Walk Through the Past*), a diary written by a little girl who lived in Osterville in the mid-1800s, when the Cammett House was already more than a century old.

Her name was Lucy Baxter, and she did not, to anyone's knowledge, reside in the Cammett House. But wherever in the village she lived, her experiences couldn't have been too different from those of whoever did occupy the old house. Lucy's diary entries, therefore, give insight into the daily activities of her era.

At the age of 10 years, she began her diary and continued it for six months of the year 1864. As we know, gold was discovered in California in 1849. Although events relating to gold discoveries were far removed from Lucy Baxter's daily activities, her young life was touched by them, for the entry of January 2nd, 1864, reads in part, "We received a letter from Aunt Cora on Tuesday saying that Uncle William arrived at San Francisco the day before

Christmas. Quite a decent passage, four months and twenty-two days."

The next day Lucy wrote, "Dark and cloudy. Was in hope it would not be very cold, but it is. The Baptist Sabbath School scholars are going to have a concert tonight. Grandma was going up to Aunt Lucy's, and I was going with Ella to the concert. But it is cold. I am afraid she won't go, but she may. My ink is so pale that I think it must have frozen last night. It was so cold that Grandma's dough that was set to rise froze in the cookroom."

And a few weeks later Lucy tells of a special day: "January 22: Pleasant. 'Tis my eleventh birthday. Went to school Wednesday and stayed all night to Aunt Lucy's." The next day a short entry reads, "Pleasant. Grandpa is 66 years old today." On January 25th, we find, the village was confronted with an educational problem: "Pleasant. Have been down to Mr. Hamblin's school this afternoon. There is no school as Mr. Holway is sick, or we suppose he is as he went home Friday and has not come back yet." And the following day: "Mr. Holway has given up the school. They talk of having Mr. Edward Ewer to teach. I guess he is a pretty old man, for ma went to school with him and so did Aunt Lucy."

Lucy writes on January 28: "Very pleasant. Have been over to Mr. Crowell's in Hyannis to get a pair of new shoes...costing \$1.85." She reports that she went up to the school on the 1st of February, but Mr. Ewer had not come. "I do not believe he will," she writes. "If he does not, I shall be very vexed." Then she adds that Miss Hinckley is coming in the afternoon to cut her grandmother's dress.

A few weeks later we learn Lucy is doing needlework; she writes: "Mother says if I will finish my quilt before next July she will give me a needle book, so I am going to try." Only a week later she reports in her diary that she has six squares of patchwork done since Tuesday, "added to my 32 makes 38; 69 is the number required, so I have got 26 more to make." Her arithmetic isn't as good as her spelling!

We find that 1864 was a Leap Year; Lucy's diary entry on February 29 reads: "The last day of winter, can it be? I cannot make it seem so. It does not seem as though tomorrow would be the first day of spring. However, the flowers will come all the sooner. I have been sick with the sore throat so that I have not been able to write."

By the 23rd of March Lucy had completed 59 squares of patchwork. Outside the snowdrifts were so deep she spent the day in the house. She must have worked on her patchwork all the rest of the week, for the March 28th entry reports she finished her squares and was glad. Two days later she made five more squares, however.

Two interesting entries pique our curiosity. March 28 tells that Mr. Warren Small and Mrs. Mary Waitt were married on the 24th; on April 20th, however, Lucy writes with no explanation that Mrs. Waitt and Mr. Small are not married. It may have mattered little to a girl of eleven years; then again, the details may not have been considered fit for the ears of one so young.

Lucy's entries refer obliquely to the Civil War. In mid-March she mentions it is stormy and then writes, "I might have known it would have been as the exhibition for the soldiers comes off tonight; however, they will have it two nights." Again, in mid-June, she records: "A soldier is in. One of his arms is in a sling. His name is Mr. Hughes." Money-matters concern Lucy, too. "Strawberries are \$.40 a quart!" And the weather, always important: "June 22: It is very pleasant, but Grandfather says if it does not rain pretty soon, everything will dry up and die."

Lucy's diary provides insight into those first six months of that long-ago year. Although she probably didn't live in the Cammett House, we have more recent word from a person who knew the old house well. From Mrs. Roy Markwith of New Jersey comes a letter describing the house when her parents, Vernaid P. and Ruth A. Johnson, bought it in 1950. Although Mr. Johnson died a year later, his widow kept the house until 1955 when it was sold to Miss Caughlan. Mrs. Markwith writes:

"The 1728 house was charming, comfortable, and complete. Mom and Dad freshed it with paint and Colonial wallpaper. Sandwich glass windowpanes, hopefully, still grace its front door. There are Colonial fireplaces with built-in Colonial cupboards, back-to-back in the dining room and living rooms; wide plank floors; a narrow staircase to the attic; first-floor bedrooms with baths and private entrances. Mom chose a particularly lovely Colonial wallpaper for the dining room and had a pine table especially made to her specifications. She had the knack for making a home inviting, warm and attractive, and had pretty antiques, pewter, china, etc.

"In the spacious, homey kitchen ell was a wonderful big black double-duty cookstove. One end of the stove heated the kitchen and was where next morning's creamy oatmeal often cooked slowly overnight. (Mom maintained this was the only proper way to cook oatmeal!) The new-old brick-patterned linoleum suited this kitchen. Under the kitchen table was the trap door to the root cellar, and off the kitchen was a trellised porch.

"Other than the root cellar, the house had no foundation. We thought it was built on 12' x 12' beams, directly on the sandy soil, so were interested to read in the *Advertiser* that the floor joists were oak tree trunks with the tops hewn flat to hold the floor boards, and that stones had first been laid on the ground.

"Along the driveway of the house, leading to the quaint combination guesthouse-toolhouse-garage, trumpet vines climbed the long fence in profusion, and hummingbirds drank their fill. Roses climbed the trellises and the little Cape Cod fence in front.

"It's been 26 years since we stayed in this very special house, yet we never pass it without slowing to admire it and worry about the broken shutters and look of neglect in recent months. It makes us very happy that the Historical Society has raised enough funds to save this building and move it onto its new foundation by the Jonathan Parker House."

It makes a lot of people very happy, Mrs. Markwith, and Osterville is indebted to you for your description of the house as you remember it, a quarter-century ago. Perhaps, someday, a precious document will come to light and tell us more about Osterville's past and even, possibly, something more of the earliest days of the Cammett House.