

# VILLAGE VIEW

ANDREA  
LEONARD

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Paul Chesbro brought them over to show me. "Maybe you can write about them. People might like to know..."

Side by side on my desk are a sterling silver tankard and a little book that measures four-and-one-half inches wide and less than eight inches high. It contains only 140 pages. Published in 1854 and entitled, "Memories of a Grandmother by A Lady of Massachusetts," the book comes from Sturgis Library's Henry C. Kittredge collection. Inside its front cover Kittredge has written, "This book is valuable for its picture of Capt. Benj. Hallett of Osterville, an early and pious coasting captain." Its author? The book does not say. Kittredge's note about Captain Hallett might lead nowhere were not much already known about the Hallett family.

Briefly, Captain Benjamin Hallett was born on January 18, 1760, and died on the last day of 1849; he married, in 1782, Abigail Lovell. From that union there came twelve daughters (ten of whom lived to adulthood), and one son, Hon. Benjamin F. Hallett, United States district attorney under President Pierce. Commissioner Henry L. Hallett of Boston was a son of the Hon. Benjamin F. Hallett. Captain Benjamin Hallett

with a house full, she being one in a family of twelve daughters and one son, we were going to live there also... how could she feel so discouraged? Her dear parents had given her a welcome, and I, too, was added to join the many there."

Her grandmother, Abigail, is described as of "the old school, but of strictest delicacy and refinement...always at evening sitting in the same chair, knitting without ceasing. How freely she gave to the poor! How kind, how indulgent, was this parent to me when left to her care by my mother."

She writes then of Captain Benjamin Hallett: "And my grandfather! full of the impulses of charity, love and piety...who was ever like him in this world? Abiding with them through many a year in the joyousness of girlhood, to them I turned when stricken with sorrow and desolation, and by them was I comforted."

And, as that joyous girlhood is sketched, she names the full house of daughters: Temperance, the eldest; her mother, Mercy; followed by Abigail, Persis, Penelope, Christina, Henrietta, Adeline, Julia, and Martha. The youngest was the same age as she and, together with Julia, they formed a trio of curiosity about the romances of the older girls.

In the autobiography, the writer tells of her own early marriage to a young physician, of their happiness, of accompanying him to the Caribbean where he practiced, of the birth of their son who was to grow up and father nine children. She



served three years in the American Revolution, was a pioneer in the coasting trade, and raised the first Bethel flag in Boston harbor. He was a Christian patriarch of the Baptist Church for 65 years.

The small volume tells us more, much more, for the author was Capt. Hallett's granddaughter, and she lived in his home during her girlhood. Her mother, Mercy (Hallett) Dewey, placed her daughter with her own parents after her husband, Samuel Dewey of New Hampshire, died prior to 1820.

The granddaughter writes of her great-grandfather who "drank his cider from a massy silver tankard and wore real silver buttons the size of a quarter of a dollar on his coat." As I read her words, I admire the handsome tankard sitting on my desk. It once belonged to James Lovell, Abigail (Lovell) Hallett's father, and carries the touchmark of Moody Russell, silversmith of Barnstable. It bears on its handle the initials GSP, probably its original owner, a name lost in mists of time. Could it have belonged to James Lovell's wife's father? Were his initials GSP?

Of her mother, the author says: "Her father, a rich man

writes of her young husband's death of yellow fever. The story continues through a second marriage of contentment, the arrival of another son and two little girls, one of whom dies at the age of two years. After her second husband dies, she returns with her three children to the Osterville home of her grandparents.

Later still, as the children grow, she moves to the city, loses her life's savings through an unwise investment, and is forced to sell her home and its furnishings; she becomes a teacher to make a living and manages to provide for herself.

And we do not yet know her name!

How are we so sure about her family background? The slender volume is full of hints. We search other sources for corroboration, and find a key in Simeon L. Deyo's *History of Barnstable County*, published in 1890. On page 255, we read, "In 1854, Mrs. A.M. Richards, a daughter of Captain Benjamin Hallett of Osterville, wrote a volume of 140 pages, published by Gould & Lincoln, Boston, and entitled, *Memoirs of a Grandmother by a Lady of Massachusetts*."

Deyo's error is in detail; Mrs. Richards tells us herself she is Captain Hallett's granddaughter, not his daughter. Also, Deyo gives the title as *Memoirs* rather than *Memories*. We forgive him.

To a person with no knowledge of Osterville and its old families, the letter O that Mrs. Richards uses for the place where her grandparents live might be meaningless. She speaks of her uncle Frank, one son amongst ten daughters; she lists the names of the aunts and they correspond to the children of Captain Hallett; she refers to the husband of one of her aunts, giving his initials, B.B. We know Abigail married Barnabas Bates.

One thing we don't know is why Mrs. Richards was so humble, so modest, that her name was not printed as author of the book. We wonder, too, how Simeon Deyo discovered Mrs. Richards had written the little book and why, considering how personal an account is given between its covers, he mentioned it in his *History of Barnstable County*.

If this slim volume or if that silver tankard could speak, they would tell a wealth of history of Osterville. As it is, we hold the book in our hands, wondering that it reveals as much as it does. And we take up the tankard by its handle, enjoying its balanced weight and appreciating its age. And we thank Paul Chesbro for bringing this story to light. Without his searches, Osterville's history would be sparse. There would be many more gaps in our knowledge. With each new discovery, each additional fact, other pieces of the puzzles fall into place.

Yes, Paul, people will like to know about the little book and about the sterling silver tankard. Thanks for sharing them with us.