

village view

by Andrea Leonard

You run across the most fascinating bits of literature in the oddest places, sometimes. Just the other day while waiting for the dentist's receptionist to usher me into the waiting reclining chair, I thumbed through a dog-eared magazine chosen at random from the stack on a corner table.

The magazine's title I never noticed; in fact, the cover pages were missing. What caught my eye among the classifieds was a column entitled: Matchmates.

Now one of the things about writing columns is the constant need for new material. Another thing about it is the need to keep a finger on the pulse of what people are doing, thinking about doing, or wishing they could do. For these reasons, anything that's got to do with people and ways they cope with personal problems gets to me where I live.

So, when a publication heads a section of its classified ads "Matchmate," I'm hooked. You could be too.

Would you read an ad if its first word was "sensual"? Sure you would. Especially when the second word was "virile". It continued, "Kind, loving Son of Nature wants little woman under 40 with no bad habits. Am 5'6", 120 lbs, 40ish (look younger), long-haired vegetarian. Employed. Into arts, athletics, outdoors. LEO, P. O. Box, City, Zip Code."

In particular, the words "no bad habits" registered with me.

Wouldn't that be marvelous? What angel from heaven would be so immodest as to present herself as lacking any bad habits?

The next ad was placed by a gal of 34 who seeks a responsible vegetarian/macrobiotic man. What in the world is a macrobiotic man? Sounds like a disease. Another lady, a widow of 58, invited correspondence without specifying sex, life-style, or concerns of any kind. She lives on a middling-sized farm in a midwestern state.

What terrible loneliness prompts placement of ads like these? Or is it loneliness? Perhaps it's simply a way to reach out to the world, a way of saying, "Here I am. This is what I'm like and what I'd like to find in someone else. If you're interested and can qualify, let's share ideas first, and perhaps time together if that seems like a good idea."

Still waiting to see the dentist, I read on.

"Eternal companionship desired with Christian man (trim, under 50, self-sufficient) for woman same. No children. Send photo." Would you?

A fellow who describes himself as "old fashioned" and retired from the military is looking for a gentle, dependable, hardworking wife. What you read into "old-fashioned" is up to you, of course, but I was struck by a vision of KP under the beady eye of a top kick.

Then there is the "country girl of 22 with a daughter who loves mostly everything." Watch out, little girl, watch out.

There are bachelors who seek correspondence with widows or single women, but reject divorcees out-of-hand. Or women well past their middle years who are "into metaphysics and Eastern philosophy."

They say there's someone for everyone, and after reading several inches of this column, I begin to believe it. Have there always been people who look beyond the borders of their home communities for their counterparts?

What's happened to the tried-and-true methods of finding compatible people to spend our time with? One of the places people used to look for companions was at church. There must be five or six churches within fifteen minute's drive of every hamlet and village on Cape Cod. And while this isn't necessarily true of every hamlet and village in the country, there must be at least one church within an hour's drive of every residence in the nation.

Another place people meet people (and that's the way to meet additional people) is at educational institutions. Classes, whether conventional ones, evening, adult, or senior citizen courses, provide opportunities for socializing and meeting people who share common interests.

So do morning coffees, political meetings, afternoon teas, prayer meetings, environmental groups, clubs that specialize in reading, mechanics, woodworking, handicrafts, barbershop-quartets, rockhounding, or you-name-it. Then there are various cultural groups: the art association, little theatre, and music makers.

There's even the cocktail party circuit. It's easy to break into: give a cocktail party.

Does it make any difference how you meet people? Seems it could. The wise person would hesitate to advertise in a column like "Matchmate" or answer an ad from it. There's an invitation involved, issued by the wide-eyed and naive—and no matter whether you're a man or a woman—to unscrupulous persons whose single purpose is to exploit.

There are distinct advantages and built-in protections to meeting people in conventional ways. A person who lives in the same part of the world that you do has some sort of standing in his community, and you don't have to hire a private detective to discover what sort of reputation he or she may have. His or her neighbors, and yours, already know and will be overjoyed at the opportunity to tell you.

Still, there's a romance and mystery about the stranger from afar, about the notion of finding a soul-mate despite the wasteland of miles that separate you and the cultural diversity of your backgrounds. That romance and mystery are often lacking in the boy-next-door.

Let's see, now. What sort of ad might I be tempted to answer?

"Well-to-do, youthful, intelligent (but not too intelligent) male seeking over-50 lady into nature, the environment, travel; must possess sense of humor and be willing to winter in warm climate."

And, if I were willing to pay for an ad in a "Matchmate" column, how would I phrase it and still be entirely honest, upright and above-board? Let's see...

"Somewhat cynical, sometimes waspish female columnist, values privacy but enjoys some sociability; seeking companionship of healthy older male without dependents with whom to explore possibilities. No Promises."

That should draw some responses! On second thought, though, it probably won't.

It's just a joke! Don't for a split second take me seriously. This one's mostly for laughs. On the other hand, if you see such an ad in the classifieds, and you're tempted to respond, do be careful. Literature's full of stories of unwary men and women who've been taken in; so are the newspapers; and so are the police records.

Be wary. The boy-next-door may not be so exciting, but at least you know where he's coming from, and you can take plenty of time before getting very deeply involved.

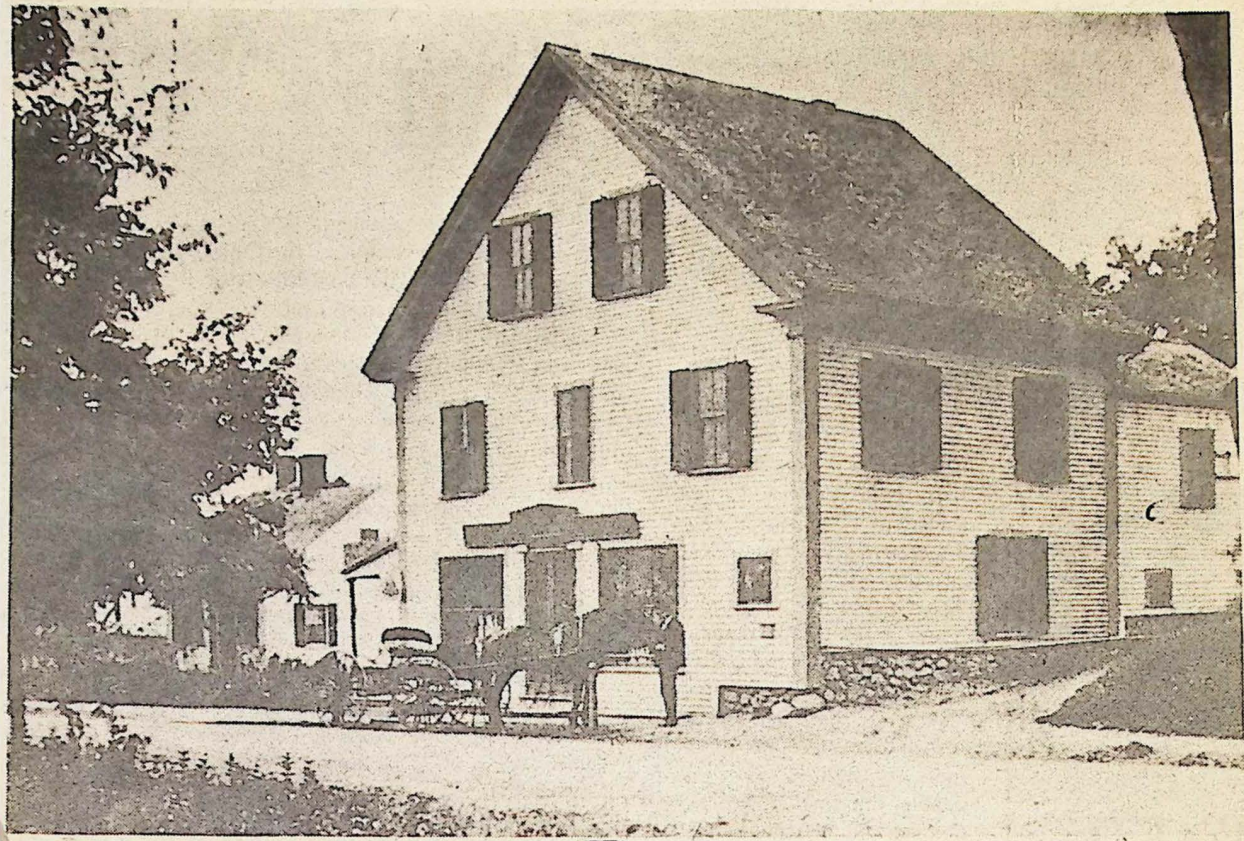


Photo above shows Henry Crocker's general store on Main Street, around 1900. The building, still standing, is now Swift's Store.