

village view

by Andrea Leonard

Do you imagine you've never been a tourist? Almost everyone's the equivalent of a summer visitor at one time or another.

How about your weekend in New Hampshire to enjoy the fall foliage? How about your trip to the city for the symphony, the theatre, or a show at the art museum? Or the day you took the kids to Nantucket on the ferry? Or the time you visited Heritage Plantation in Sandwich?

Have you been to Sea Land of Cape Cod in Brewster to watch the porpoises perform in their pool? Did you also stop at the Museum of Natural History, or the visitors' center at the Cape Cod National Seashore Park? Have you wandered as far from home as Provincetown where perhaps you admired the view from atop its monument?

Perhaps, while in the vicinity of New Bedford, you stopped at the Whaling Museum; or maybe you saved that for another day and drove on to Fall River to go aboard the Battleship Massachusetts to get an idea of what it was like to spend World War II years in the U.S. Navy.

While in Boston, you might have taken time off from your shopping to cross the Mystic River to Charlestown and board "Old Ironsides", as the U.S.S. Constitution is fondly called. On Boston's waterfront you may have visited the aquarium with its three floors of marinelife displays.

You could even have ridden through Boston's famed Public Gardens on a swan boat, or lunched atop Prudential Tower. I hope it was beautifully clear the day you did that.

Did you walk the Heritage Trail and visit the Old North Church, Bunker Hill, the golden-domed State House, Paul Revere's home, and Fanueil Hall? Or did you wander further afield, into the suburbs, and take in the historic sights at Lexington and Concord?

Did you stand on the little bridge spanning the river that's hardly more than a brook, watching the leaves float down the peaceful stream, and try to imagine what happened the day the Redcoats marched out of Boston to battle the farmers of Middlesex County? Could you hear the echo of the Shot Heard Round the World?

Have you been to Plimoth Plantation to see how our forefathers lived during their first years in the New World? Did you stand at the rail in the shade of the portico sheltering Plymouth Rock and think how you'd have felt, stepping ashore

after surviving the three-month voyage across the Atlantic Ocean and finally coming to your destination there?

Did you go aboard the replica of the Mayflower moored in Plymouth Harbor and visualize sharing its cramped quarters with nearly a hundred others as that storm-tossed small ship valiantly plowed westward over the sea?

Were you ever one of the hundreds of thousands of people who've visited the Marine Biological Laboratories at Woods Hole? Has Ecology House in Marstons Mills been on your itinerary so you could see for yourself what it might be like to live underground?

If you've done any of these things, you too have been a tourist. If you haven't, you've missed some of the best entertainment and educational experiences our corner of the world has to offer.

And these are only some of the places to go and things to see that Cape Cod residents and visitors may choose from.

If the island of Nantucket has never been your port of call, you may have shipped out for Martha's Vineyard. There you could have wandered over to Edgartown where the ferry crosses the harbor to Chappaquidick; or driven to Gay Head where the tall clay cliffs are battered day and night by ocean waves foaming at the base of that colorful promontory.

While in Sandwich, you may have taken refreshment at Daniel Webster Inn after viewing the fine displays at the Sandwich Glass Museum. The Old Daniel Webster Inn burned to the ground several years ago and upon its site now stands its successor, a handsome accommodation with a reputation for excellent food and service.

Did you see Cape Cod's oldest, the Hoxie House, and wonder how frightening it must have been to huddle inside while hostile Indians came pounding on those stout doors?

At Brewster you might have discovered the old mill at the side of Stoney Brook Road, its moss-covered waterwheel reflected in the herring pool making it one of the most picturesque places to visit on the lower Cape. If you did find it, surely you took the time to follow the path along Stoney Brook to the pond above and the tumbling cascades below the mill.

While in Provincetown, you almost certainly wandered along the waterfront and out on the long fishing pier, MacMillan Wharf. It's named for Admiral Donald MacMillan, the famous Arctic explorer, who made his home in that village.

Provincetown's beaches at Race Point are famous, and the huge dunes, purple-shadowed and powerful, dominate the scene. No one can leave Provincetown without being impressed with the truth of Robert Louis Stevenson's simple children's poem which reads in part, "Little drops of water, little grains of sand, make the mighty ocean and the pleasant land."

Returning home, the journey would be incomplete without a side trip to the Backside of the Cape where the Atlantic rolls up onto the shelving sands, its waves dashing themselves to death against those ever-changing ever-shifting hills of Truro and Wellfleet.

At North Truro there stands a sentinel: Cape Cod Light. There at the edge of the sea, high above the crashing combbers, buffeted by wind and rain, storm and flying spray, still stands the lighthouse that's been the beacon sought by all ships making port along the northeastern seaboard. It warns mariners they approach one of the most dangerous stretches of water between East Port, Maine, the Cape Hatteras, North Carolina.

The tiny village of Wellfleet was once the center of a thriving oyster business, the luscious bi-valves being harvested for shipment not only to Boston markets, but also to New York's finest restaurants.

Chatham's lighthouse stands alone today; not long ago there were two overlooking the towering cliff. "Twin Sisters" they were called. The one nearest the sea is gone, a victim of erosion. The sea giveth and the sea taketh away, land.

If, in Plymouth, you visited one or more of the many historic houses, you've learned how the early settlers lived, raised their families, cooked their meals, wove their cloth in the early Seventeenth Century.

Or perhaps you believe you're truly not a tourist because you've missed all these sights. Maybe your activities are limited to the immediate local area and you never go further from home than the library, the post office, the historical society and the shops along Main Street; you may limit yourself to places within walking distance.

Even so, even so, if you've visited your library, you've seen its historic displays; if you've stopped at your local historical society, you've had a taste of the past; in those few minutes or hours you spent there, you were touring.

That's what a tourist is. When people visit Cape Cod, they absorb some of the historical flavor abounding in each village; they sample the fragrance of the old and the new, mingled as they are in every Cape Cod town.

Tourists, you may believe, are only those who come for the day crowding our beaches, only those who roam aimlessly through shops, only those who arrive by sightseeing bus, only those who wander up one side and down the other of the more commercial business centers, or only those whose necks are strung with camera equipment.

Not so. You, too, are a tourist. And that's not necessarily a term of opprobrium. It's only a word that means 'one who travels from place to place for pleasure or culture'. Isn't that as good a reason to travel as any?