

# VILLAGE VIEW

ANDREA  
LEONARD

VILLAGE ADVERTISER September 22, 1983

At the corner of Parker and West Bay Roads in Osterville, the Jonathan Parker House shelters the collection of the Osterville Historical Society. Two afternoons each week, all summer long, the museum is open to its members and the general public. Behind the museum stands the Boat Shop where displays of Crosby memorabilia are to be seen. In boating and yachting circles, the very name Crosby is revered.

And, just west of the Jonathan Parker House, is the John Cammett House, one of Osterville's oldest. To save it from demolition two years ago, this house was moved here from its original location on Main Street when that property was being cleared for condominium construction.

Expert opinion dates the Cammett house to 1720 and deems it representative of those built by impecunious farmers who worked the thin sandy soil of the Cape's south shore. Village history tells us nothing of when or how John Cammett acquired the property. We know only that he and his wife, Eliza, resided there in the early 1800s.

A copy of John Cammett's will, dated January 18, 1854, refers to the property as the homestead. Of particular interest is the extent of Cammett's holdings when he made his will.

After providing that his debts and funeral expenses be paid out of his personal estate, Cammett "devises and bequeaths to my wife, Eliza Cammett, the use and improvement of all real estate and personal estate during her life if she remains my widow, and if improvement is not sufficient for comfortable support, the power to sell."

His will continues, "After improvement of my wife ceases, either by death or marriage, I give and devise to my son, David Cammett, the use and beholden forever to homestead in the village of Osterville, bounded as follows: Beginning at the southeast corner by the highway; then northerly by said way as the fence now stands to Stephen West's land; then easterly by said land as fence now stands to corner; then northerly by said West's land and William Blount's land as the fence now stands into the cedar swamp about 4 rods to a corner; then easterly by the swamp of George Lovell, as old fence now stands into the pond; then southerly from the pond, by John H. Blossom's land as fence now stands to the corner; then westerly by land of said J.H. Blossom and land occupied by John Lewis, as fence now stands, to the first named corner, about ten acres with buildings standing thereon."

This describes an irregularly shaped parcel. If plotted on an old map, the bounds run from about where the condominiums begin on the east side of Main Street and run to a point almost opposite the fire station, then turn right away from Main Street a few hundred feet, turn left to go behind two properties now fronting on Main Street, turn right again after entering the cedar swamp and continue to the edge of Sam's

Pond. Then, to square off the parcel, the line runs back again, paralleling Main Street, to a point approximately opposite the original starting place, and then west to that point on the street.

But this was not all the land John Cammett owned when he made his will. He continues: "Also the following described peace (sic) of woodland lying to the westward of Samuel Crosby's dwelling house. Commencing to the northeast corner thereof, then southerly by woodland and cleared land of Samuel Crosby as trees are marked and fence stands til it comes to the pond; then westerly by said pond and swamp until it comes to woodland of Samuel A. Wiley; then northerly by said Wiley's woodland, and woodland of Levi Kelley, until it comes to other woodland of Samuel Crosby, then easterly by said Crosby's woodland and woodland of George Lovell until it comes to the first corner, being the same lot which said David conveyed to me by deed dated January 29, 1840; containing about 12 acres."

The bounds of this parcel began at the approximate point where, today, Tower Hill Road T's with Pond Street, then run south to Sam's Pond, turn right and skirt the pond and cedar swamp for an indeterminate distance, then go right again approximately to Pond Street, and along it, back to the starting point. Since this is described as woodland and there is no indication any part goes into the swamp, it may be presumed that Cammett owned most of the upland on the right of Pond Street between the street and Sam's Pond, and extending to the right angle just before the Tower Hill Road corner.

Nor was John Cammett yet done. He goes on to describe another parcel of woodland, "a little north of the other woodlot, bounded as follows: Beginning at the east corner of premises adjoining George Lovell's woodlot at a stake and stones; then westerly as trees are marked to a corner adjoining land of Samuel Crosby; then northerly by said Crosby woodland and woodland of Erastus Scudder, until coming to a blind road; then easterly by woodland occupied by heirs of Stetson Jones to the first named bounds, containing about 7 acres."

This parcel, rectangular in shape, lay on the opposite side of Pond Street, probably within the area now bounded by Milne and Waterfield Roads, and Pond Street as it makes a 90° turn and leads toward Centerville.

John Cammett also mentions "the undivided coves and strips of salt marsh which I own equally with said David Cammett, situated and lying at the north end of Grate Oyster Island."

In a final paragraph John Cammett wills, "All estate, real and personal not heretofore in this will disposed of, I give, bequeath, and devise to my three daughters, Eliza Lovell, Mary A. Bacon, and Lucinda Hinckley, and their heirs forever, to be equally divided." He named and appointed his wife, Eliza Cammett, executrix; dated the instrument; and signed and sealed it before three witnesses.

Cammett's will indicates his son as having entered into agreements to buy and sell land as early as 1840. David must have been an adult at that time, and his father at least middle-aged. Therefore John Cammett was born prior to 1800. We also know from the Rich letter written in 1877 that both John and his wife Eliza, and David and his wife, Mercy (or Mary), were all deceased. (See *Osterville, A Walk Through the Past*, Paul Chesbro and Chester A. Crosby III, 1979.) This same source tells that David's wife was bedridden for 30 years, so we can presume he was at least in his fifties when he died. His father's birth, again, would have occurred before 1800.

Whether John Cammett was born in the house and inherited it, or whether he purchased it, perhaps we shall never know, but as each piece of the puzzle comes to light, the picture grows more complete.

Today we look at the simple old Cammett House, read the will of one of its earliest inhabitants, a poor farmer who lived on Poverty Lane, as that part of Main Street was called in those days, and learn he owned nearly thirty acres of land in the heart of Osterville. We can but wonder what changes in property values another century may bring.