

# VILLAGE VIEW

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Growth and change continue to come to the villages nestled on the south shore of Cape Cod. Last spring a dozen or more of Osterville's enterprises played children's games. Some played musical chairs. Others played leap frog. A few played hopscotch.

To keep up with who was where, when and find where they'd pop up next, you needed a map and a score card. To the transient tourists, it made no difference; they arrived, pattered around the business district, poked sunburned noses into every nook and cranny, made their "courtesy purchases," and departed, satisfied they'd visited one of the Cape's most charming villages.

They were correct. It is still attractive. But how long can it retain its image with the rapid changes that now tumble, one after another, at an ever-quicken pace? You don't suppose the spate of changes has dwindled to a trickle, do you?

Scheduled for the immediate future are more condominiums, this time on Main Street, just west of the village center. In the process of that construction, one of the oldest houses in the village will disappear from the knoll where it has stood for over two centuries. That the condos will be attractive, I've no doubt; that they will offer a convenient location, I concede. That they will radically change the appearance and the character of our village, I'm positive.

Why should anyone object? Why feel sad when an ancient dilapidated house is to be replaced with modern construction that will provide far more efficient use of the land, far more living space for people who want to move here, and especially, if it's done tastefully? After all, a house is but an inanimate material thing. Like furniture, automobiles, clothing, and appliances, houses wear out, get tired, aren't worth rehabilitating.

And yet... I hate to see it happen. As the old landmarks disappear, the village loses, for me, its identity. I yearn to wave a magic wand and make it possible to maintain the physical integrity of images that make this single tiny part of the world unique.

In my mind's eye this place is still the quiet hamlet where I spent my childhood. When I approach it from the west, I look to the right, and mentally see the waters of the bay glistening beyond the fields. They are invisible to most people, now hidden by trees and new construction; but my mind erases the interference and the sight of the bay, shimmering beyond the gentle incline sloping shoreward, is still imprinted inside my head like a four-color photograph.

When I stop at the post office there stands on the corner,

not that brick and mortar building, but a small white clapboarded house that was once the Methodist parsonage. Surrounded by sheltering trees and a broad green lawn, the house snuggles sleepily into the hillcrest.

As I glance up Tower Hill Road, it's a narrow lane, hardly more than a footpath, leading through fields starting to fill with upland cedar, pitch pine, and oak trees, and not a shopping center and condominiums, backed by a housing development. Before my own time, I know, that road was the only approach to the small settlement from the west. It wound between ponds, as it still does, and led through unbroken wooded acreage to Mystic (now Marstons Mills) and, in the other direction, dead-ended at West Bay's shore.

In the heart of the village, our small library and a good-sized residence were separated by green grass where the hardware store now sprawls to welcome its customers. Beyond, in the field, a farmhouse presided over its encircling tilled gardens. Once there were barns and outbuildings, a hen house and yard, and along the fences grew wild flowers and weeds. Quail, pheasant, squirrels, and rabbits lived and played where we now pick our way in search of places to park our cars.

Crocker's Store crowned the hill where Main Street and Wiano Avenue fork. The old building with its oiled board floors smelled peculiar, exuding a century's accumulation of leather, food stuffs, dry goods, farm needs and fishing gear, musty and dusty. It was an odor unique to that place, one I'll never encounter again, yet one that were my nose to detect unexpectedly in some other spot, would transport me back in time fifty years. It all went up in smoke and flame one January night when the mercury rose to a mere ten degrees above zero, and the old furnace in the cellar became overheated. The face of Osterville changed overnight; in the morning, only charred timbers lay smoldering in the cellarhole where a building had been the day before. The empty sky loomed large at the intersection.

Growth and change came again, and again, and again. And Osterville looks no more like home, today, than any other place. Do I care? Yes. Why do I care? It's difficult to express in words.

When changes come gradually, it's only a minor shock to the psyche. And it may seem to some that Osterville has developed with orderly progression. Later-comers to the vicinity may hardly notice the scenic differences. Their vision doesn't include the views I reconstruct from memory. Their own childhoods were spent in different localities. Perhaps were they to return to those places, see them today, and recall them as when they were young, they could understand my sense of loss.

It may be a matter of expectations; changes are expected in large cities or even small ones. Growth must follow when populations burgeon. That's only rational; of course, there's nothing rational about my emotional rejection of growth and change in my own hometown. It's purely subjective and, ad-

mittedly, illogical. Nor is there anything I, or any of us, can do to halt the alterations that must follow as the popularity of this neighborhood swells.

Still, I find myself unprepared. My expectations are unfulfilled. That, of course, is my problem, and I will do well to adjust my expectations to reality, to accept the inevitability that the places I remember and thought would always stay the same cannot remain static and must give way to the new.

As property values rise, as business opportunities multiply, as more people discover and appreciate the advantages awaiting them if they move here, they compare Cape Cod to places where they live now. With comparison, this area appeals more. Thus, we must squeeze over and make room, not only for them and their houses, not only for their children in our schools, not only for their contributions, not only for their crimes, not only for all those additional cars on our narrow roads and filling our limited parking spaces, but also for the services they expect and for the shops they wish to patronize.

As they have every right to do, people come, and in their wake commerce expands. If zoning ordinances restrict business from spreading horizontally, it expands vertically. Now we find ourselves descending to basement levels to purchase goods and services or conduct business; we even find ourselves climbing stairs to offices on second floors. Each structure in the village center is like a balloon being blown up to bursting point.

And, with it all, the place that is home, as no other place can ever be, disappears, assumes a different aspect, grows unfamiliar, and is gone forever, as ephemeral as a rainbow, a sunrise, a snowflake. Or a childhood.