

VILLAGE VIEW

ANDREA LEONARD

To reach the attic of the old Cammett House, now perching on its new foundation on the Osterville Historical Society property at the corner of Parker and West Bay Road, I braved the narrow plank to the open doorway, wandered through the few small rooms on the first floor, and then sidled through a narrow opening, straddled an open hole in the floor, and mounted the stairs with treads barely four inches in depth.

With no particular purpose in mind, I was drawn to the attic. Perhaps I imagined some tiny memento of the people who had lived in the house at different times during the past 200 years would reveal itself to me. Perhaps I looked for a ghostly reminder of some long-lost relative. Whatever I sought failed to put in an appearance.

Instead, dusty old beams and rafters, wide floor boards, some patched, some with knotholes revealing the rooms below, met my gaze. Carefully making my way over the single flooring, I stepped only where the stringers (visible through the cracks between the boards) supported my weight sturdily.

Waiting there, hoping for some silent sign from the distant past, I noted rough-hewn beams notched oddly as though, old as they are, they had been second-hand when the house was first constructed. Noted, too, were the powdery signs of rot in places, of worm holes, and the remains of wasps' nests still clinging to the roofboards.

No expert in such things, I breathed deeply and found the place awash with smells I'd smelled in other old attics of Cape Cod houses. Even as I turned to descend the stairs, there was readiness in me for discovery. None came except the knowledge that under these eaves in an earlier century my great-

grandmother might have stored a bridal quilt, a trunkful of hem-stitched and embroidered linen, perhaps letters of the War of Independence, or other simple treasures with meaning only for her. Like me, she had once been young and full of dreams. And in this house she had spent her youthful years.

Downstairs once more, I admired the brickwork of the two fireplaces set back-to-back in the central chimney. Not that it was fine masonry. It wasn't; but the bricks were old and had been placed with care in the shallow hearths to fit their appointed place. Nothing was square or straight; it lent a certain charm.

Most of the interior walls had been stripped of their old plaster. The sheathing was bare in most places even of laths; but the stripes where the laths had lain were darkly visible on the wood. What paint remained on mantelpiece and cupboard

doors peeled and flaked. Restoration would be a monumental task, but loving hands would one day put all right.

The panelling around the fireplace was of the simplest design. No artistry here; little more than practicality. The ancient panes lighting the windows distorted the views beyond the glass. That pleased me, somehow. Moving cautiously, I once more negotiated the plank, and stood again on solid ground.

Engaging a mustachioed man in conversation was easy. His name, he told me, was Lavender; he has worked for Bob Hayden for over 30 years. He told how the inside of the house had been braced with framing members before it was moved, said the hearths had been rebuilt with old brick taken from another old house taken down several years ago, one of the same vintage as the Cammett House. This was done because more modern common brick had been used to replace the old ones, probably sometime in the early 60s.

Two men crawling around in the semi-darkness under the house moved sand with their shovels; their muffled voices could be heard where we stood talking. A stone-lined root cellar, one which will duplicate that found beneath the floor when the house was moved from its previous site on Main Street, will be excavated and constructed. Some parts of the house, Mr. Lavender said, had been built from old boards from the saltworks that once lined the shores of West and East Bays of this village. Other wood must have come from an even older barn or cottage, for those boards were not white with salt.

He spoke, also, of the damage from leaks in the valleys where the kitchen ell had been attached and the two roofs met. The asphalt roof shingles would, he assured me, be removed and replaced with new wooden ones.

"It's hard to find, these days," he said, "people who know how to work in these old houses, how things were done originally, how to restore things authentically."

And I'm sure it is, and yet I'm sure such people are still among us. "It will take a long time," said Lavender, "to put this all back together the way it once was, but it'll be done, eventually. Work goes slowly, though, since the money for it comes from donations. We must schedule our progress to the income as it's received by the Historical Society."

Slowly, then, the old Cammett House will be brought back and will stand in restoration, an example of an Osterville family's shelter two centuries ago. Painstakingly, and with learning gained at each step of the dismantling, men will enable this antique dwelling to re-assume gradually its humble simplicity and exhibit in full dimension a home typical of those earlier years.

Lavender's interest was apparent and sincere, his concern for authenticity evident. "I took pictures from the day we started of all parts of the house from foundation to rooftop and from end to end; should some detail be forgotten, there's a record of how we found it, and everything we've uncovered as we've gone along."

Walking away from the spot where the old Cammett House has found a new resting place, brushing through ankle-deep grasses of late May, grasses studded with weeds and wildflowers, a warm feeling of satisfaction kindled inside me, a warmth no raw damp wind off West Bay could quench. The Cammett House will, one day, be completely restored though I know not how soon nor precisely how the financing will be achieved. I know, though, with a certainty, the day will come when its old floors will gleam golden with wax, its walls will be whitely plastered, and the paint on cupboard doors and mantelpiece will flake no more. The keywork over the mantle will be restored to its original condition for the admiration of visitors who will appreciate its simplicity rather than its grandeur.

And once men have finished with their tools, women will come in with homemaking skills. Curtains will hang at windows, carpets will stretch before the brick fireplaces, furniture of the era will appear from dusty attics and musty cellars, out of barns, down from overhead storage in old garages, and from under other eaves. Cupboards will sparkle with dishes and glassware. Pillows and cushions, bedding and linens, wash bowls and pitchers, pictures for the walls and lamps for the tables, will give homyness to these bare rooms.

How will it all come to pass? No one knows. We know only this. It shall come to pass.