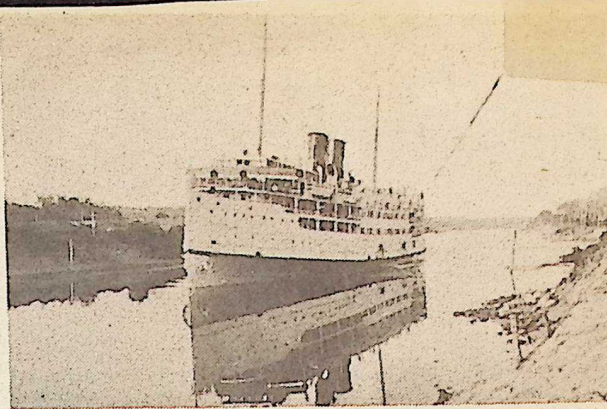


VILLAGE VIEW

ANDREA LEONARD



Steamship coming through the canal in its early days.

Before the engineers came, before the first stone was laid for the breakwater in 1909, before the dredge MacKenzie began gnawing at the eastern beach, the valley of Manomet was peaceful. The peace was shattered half-a-dozen times a day when a train passed through, chuffing its way to or from Boston, but the noise, smoke and steam soon dissipated.

Alongside the track in Sagamore stretched for a mile or more the sprawling sheds of the Keith Car & Manufacturing Company. The company, founded in 1829 by Isaac Keith, had sprung from a blacksmith shop and then grown to include a tool plant. By 1849, having established a sound reputation for smithing and tool-making, Keith was building prairie schooners to carry the adventurous to the California gold fields as



Mouth of the Manomet River, now the western end of Cape Cod Canal.

well as making the toolware used to search for pay-dirt.

The prairie schooners were of staunch construction; several are preserved today in museums and the finest specimens still carry most of their original equipment intact.

As the rails were laid, mile after mile, across the nation's prairies and over the Rocky Mountains, the Old Colony Line had sent a fingerling track south from Boston, and east through the valley of Buzzards Bay to Sandwich, to West Barnstable, on to Yarmouth, and beyond.

And in the peaceful valley, the Keith works grew again. This time they contracted to repair railway freight cars; later, to construct them. It wasn't long before the company gave itself almost wholly to rolling stock. By 1900 there were more than six hundred men regularly employed by Keith, building upwards of a thousand railroad cars a year along the right-of-way then called the New Haven Road.

Came the engineers of the Cape Cod Construction Company, and the gold of August Belmont; the dream of cutting a canal through the valley between Cape Cod Bay and Buzzards Bay began to come true.

More than four miles of railroad track was torn up and re-laid, for it crisscrossed the planned course of the waterway several times. As the work on the canal progressed, the Keith Works continued to thrive.

Finally, on July 4th, 1914, the canal opened to traffic with Belmont leading the flotilla of ships over the final span of waters as they flowed together, joining the two great bays of Massachusetts, eliminating the need to hazard the shoals and storms of open ocean off the back side of Cape Cod, and making of our narrow land, 'til now a peninsula, an island.

Visions of the future entertained by members of the corporation who succeeded in cutting the canal were fantasies of progress they were convinced would surely follow.

Wrote J.W. Miller, Vice President of Cape Cod Con-

struction Co., "In no event should the canal itself be bought by the United States. It has been built by businessmen as a commercial proposition, and they wish and have asked for no government help."

Prophetically he went on to say, "In these days of un-democratic tendencies to control all business in Washington, it is well for the thoughtful to consider the effect of a "Centralized policy' upon intra-coastal canals. It would retard their making, for should this canal prove a financial success, an incentive will be at once given to financiers to invest in other similar marine projects, if not hampered by unwise laws."

In spite of his fears that the federal government would ultimately control the canal, Mr. Miller foresaw tremendous growth at the canal's western terminus. "Every effort should be made," he wrote, "to create at the head of Buzzards Bay a harbor and maritime centre which, in the future, should rival the cities existing on Rhode Island's Narraganset Bay."

He believed that with the opening of the canal Buzzards Bay would become a second New Bedford or a city comparable to Providence, and promised no harm would come to the residential portions of the coast, pointing out that "Newport continues to flourish as a summer resort while Fall River adds yearly to its mills."

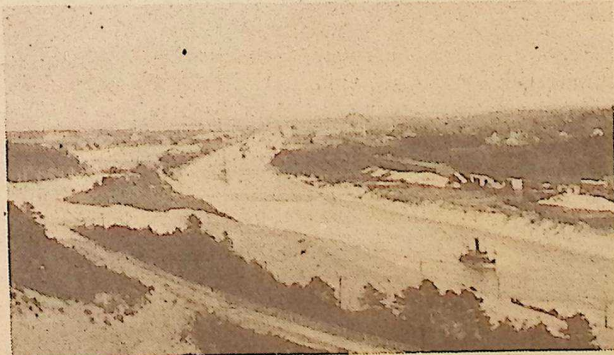
Miller's warnings went unheeded and his dreams unrealized; in August, 1917, an act of Congress made the canal a responsibility of the federal government. Even as the first ships traversed its length in 1914, the seeds of World War I were being sown in Europe. When the United States entered the conflict in 1917, the government had assumed full control of the waterway.

Following the end of World War I, financial instability in this country contributed to the no-growth doldrums; no city sprang up at the canal's western end. The early 1920s were marked by post-war bust-and-boom economy, followed at the close of the decade by the Great Depression.

World War II arrived on the heels of that financial disaster; there were better places to invest than Buzzards Bay; the cities of New Bedford and Fall River were declining. Many mills closed during the Depression never to reopen; many others throughout New England were leaving the state. The dream of a new city was stillborn.

Nor could the canal keep alive the Keith Car Works; the 1930's saw its doors close for the last time; its whistle, that had called to work men of the valley and signalled the end of their days for nearly a century, was still. Peaceful was the valley while through the canal plied shipping, north and south.

To help overcome the devastating effects of economic collapse, the government, under the Public Works Acts of 1933 and 1935, undertook widening and deepening Cape Cod



The Cape Cod Canal at Sagamore, 1926.

Canal; further work was done under the River and Harbor Acts of 1935 and 1945. The Bourne and Sagamore Bridges that span the waterway were built in the early '30s, as were the highways that now carry millions of automobiles along its banks, yearly.

At this 65th anniversary year of the opening of the Cape Cod Canal, peace reigns in the valley; cool breezes off Buzzards Bay stir pine boughs and oak leaves blanketing the hills of Bourneale.

Not even a rattle of trains along the tracks disturbs the quiet of the valley of the Manomet nor troubles ghosts of those who trundled across the plains in the prairie schooners nor echoes the rolling stock that Keith built on the banks of Cape Cod Canal.