

village view

by Andrea Leonard

"Travel is broadening" is a maxim we often hear but seldom apply directly to ourselves unless we're mulling over some problem and, while visiting some unfamiliar place, find solutions there that may be applicable at home.

At the height of the autumn foliage season many Cape Codders head up-country to the mountains of New England; most of us put local affairs behind us once we cross the Cape Cod Canal. This year, over the holiday weekend, we joined the exodus. Nightfall of the first day found us on our state's other Cape, Cape Ann.

Although Cape Ann offers many of the same attractions to be seen on Cape Cod, it's a far more compact area. It's considerably closer to Boston, of course, but proximity to the city hasn't appreciably affected the rural character of the countryside. Most of it is no more developed than most of our own Cape's mid-section.

Differences immediately apparent are the rockbound harbors of Manchester, Gloucester and Rockport as well as the colder waters surrounding Cape Ann; samenesses are the decidedly New England atmosphere, the pervading tang of salt in the air, the patchwork of fields, streams, marshes, wetlands and uplands harmonizing with the architecture of old houses. Essex County feels almost as homelike and familiar as Barnstable County.

We even found ourselves being detoured when we attempted the shore drive from Rockport to Pigeon Cove; the road was torn up and littered with heavy equipment. They were installing sewers.

In Rockport, a two-and-a-half hour drive from home, we explored. We drove in circles around town, learning the general layout and coping with traffic for twenty minutes when a parking space opened up; we pulled in, feeling fortunate, and continued on foot. It was then we began to see parallels between Rockport and some Cape Cod communities. That broadening aspect of travel began to work its magic.

We wandered down a narrow lane towards the harbor; on either side of the street old fishing shacks had been converted to specialty shops, their front doors opening directly from the pavement. Nowhere along the lane was parking permitted.

Between some of the shops pathways and passages led to the harbor's edge; the harbor itself was lined with bulkheads, pilings and rocks. Behind some of the shops were private residences; other stores extended back to the bulkhead and, although boasting only twenty or thirty feet of frontage, had ample display room since they were, in some cases, as much as fifty or sixty feet deep.

There were gift shops, toy shops, needlework and leathercraft shops. There was a general store with the usual miscellany, a silversmith, a dozen or more art galleries. One shop was doing a rushing business in strudel. Candlemakers, wood carvers, bird carvers, glass blowers, all offered their wares. We counted three fudge and candy stores within four blocks.

The street wasn't exactly crowded with people, but there were plenty of other people walking about, as we were. The shops were busy even though a stiff breeze blew and a salty drizzle fell slightly and not unpleasantly. We didn't miss our umbrella but we were glad of our windbreakers.

Bearskin Neck, the area was called; it enjoyed plenty of foot traffic, yet offered no convenient places to park cars. We spent an hour windowshopping and browsing before retracing our footsteps the quarter-mile to the place we'd left our car. Throughout the tour of the area we participated in a holiday

camaraderie shared with all who were similarly spending the day's final business hours.

Although we wandered along but a single street in Rockport, we couldn't help realizing it contained twice as many shops as Osterville's business area. That parking space was non-existent created no deterrent to shoppers or sightseers. Cash registers were jingling happily, gifts and souvenirs were selected, bundles were wrapped and bagged. At least half the people we met on the street carried purchases, treasures to take home, or perhaps gifts for Christmas presents.

Where did all these people come from? I wondered.

As we were leaving Rockport, I had my answer to that question. In a far-less-populated part of the town, a sign advertised all-day-parking for \$2 and offered free bus service to Dock Square where that shop-lined lane led to Bearskin Neck. The parking area was well-patronized; there were even a few tour busses parked along one side of the lot. Unloading its passengers was a small bus; it obviously shuttles passengers to the business area, making half-a-dozen round-trips an hour.

It occurred to me a similar service could solve Osterville's summer season parking problems. There are several possible locations for such a parking-and-shuttle service. Behind the Wool Shop are acres of field, for example; these aren't being used for any purpose now. Possibly the parking lots used weekends by communicants at Our lady of Assumption Church could be leased Monday through Friday during summer months. The United Methodist Church, off Pond Street, has a good-sized parking lot that's empty much of the time.

Rather than attempt to limit growth of the village or to provide adequate space for parking cars in the center of the village, might it not be feasible to encourage visitors to leave their cars on the outskirts and come into the village by shuttle bus?

If it works in other communities, why wouldn't it work as well in ours? The parking areas now available could then be utilized by employees and shop-owners. These people must now park as far from their places of business as possible to leave open convenient spaces for prospective customers. After being on their feet all day, six days a week, it would be a blessing to working people to find their cars only a step away when they lock up their shops for the night.

Osterville, like Rockport, attracts thousands of summer tourists. Business people depend on them and solicit their trade; it's their living.

Everyone who makes his home in our village finds summer traffic hard to bear, deploras any suggestion that acreage in the business section become public parking.

Osterville, like other Cape Cod villages and like those of Cape Ann, is bound to attract more small shops and businesses in the future. Wouldn't now be a good time to plan an alternative to heavy traffic in our village? Wouldn't now be the best time to plan ways to reduce traffic and take pressure off the limited parking available?

People who already own busses, those they lease to the school department for transporting youngsters, have made the biggest investment. Unused and unoccupied land can usually be leased. Wouldn't it be worthwhile to consider such a suggestion? Wouldn't it be sensible to investigate the possibilities?

Many people are concerned about the growing demand for parking space; they recognize the inevitability of growth in the village; those of us who remember other Cape villages as they were fifty years ago wonder if Osterville must go the same route some of them have gone.

The solution lies in planning for orderly expansion, in providing alternatives to down-town parking. And that's why travel is broadening; it enables us to discover how other villages have solved the same problems and suggests we may tailor those solutions to our own situation.