

VILLAGE VIEW

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Soon after Paul Chesbro and Chester A. Crosby, III published their first book, *Osterville, A Walk Through the Past*, they started thinking about another which would tie together many of the loose strings of information about old families of the village.

Thousands of hours of work, study, and research later, that second book is beginning to take shape and form. With their kind permission, I've gathered a few morsels of information that will probably be included in the narrative that will accompany some of the many photographs illustrating the pages of the new book.

Imagine picking up a local newspaper and reading the following description of Osterville: "This quiet, pretty village, located a few miles west of its more ambitious and pretentious sister, Centerville, girt round by a sea of waters and evergreen pines, enjoys a seclusion all its own. Being one side of the most travelled highways, its solitude is broken only by the daily advent and exit of the mail coach, or the rattling lug wagon, moving slowly along, bearing to a market the only manufactures of the place, pine and oakwood, or an ambitious peddler with three horse power and team, radiant with glistening paint and golden letters, dashing through the long quiet street."

With the exception of Osterville's physical properties, and its location in relation to Centerville, few of its residents would believe the writer was describing our home town. The reason, of course, is that the writer of that paragraph lived and wrote of Osterville over a hundred years ago, in 1869.

More detailed description follows with: "It has been thought appropriate to change the name of this place to 'Sleepy Hollow,' as it has enjoyed a nap of about the same duration as Rip Van Winkle's. Twenty years ago this place showed signs of life and activity which are not visible now. Then, oftentimes a dozen or eighteen sail of vessels, belonging mostly in the village, were seen in our harbor; cargoes of corn, flour, etc., were landed. In the two shipyards, at either end of the village, the ring of the builder's hammer and cheery saw were heard. Now it is quite an event for even one vessel to drop anchor in our harbor, and the shipyards have lost all semblance of their former use."

Does it seem possible that Osterville's bays were ever bare of sailing craft? Or that no boat building was going on along the shore? Or that East Bay was once a boat-building center of activity? Changes come and go in this small community, even as they do in others on Cape Cod. The reasons differ from time to time, however, so let that earlier chronicler tell the historical story.

"The reason for this sad decline is comprised in the word Death. That insatiable monster has either whelmed vessel and entire crew, or selecting the captain as his prey, has hurled him from his confident walk on the quarterdeck to an instant watery grave.

"Others, and some of our principal men, have gone to the village churchyard never to return. The whole place has felt the loss of our most energetic and best men, and fatherless

families and widows are found in almost every other house in the place."

As we think back to those times, over a century ago, we should remember that the nation had recently passed through a scorching Civil War, followed by an economic depression that came close to foundering our ship of state. The newspaper reporter continues, "The old post-and-rail fences our great-grandfathers built still show their lengths of mossy rails along roadsides, and the oldest inhabitant can hardly remember when the last house was built. Thanks to a former generation, we have a few ancient balm giliads and silver oaks for shade trees, but these are fast disappearing before the march of time and fierce gales, and nothing is being planted to take their places."

The picture we are getting is, indeed, a gloomy one. All is not lost, however; a bit later we find struck a happier note: "The west end of the village runs down to the borders of one of the best, if not the best bays for boat sailing that can be found on the Cape. Here boatbuilding is carried on quite extensively by Messrs. Horace and Worthington Crosby. Their centreboard sailboats are hard to beat in speed, and they cannot be beat in honesty of build.

"Stepping on board one of them at their wharf, we start with a flowing sheet, pass through a beautiful bay, then glide into a wide flowing river; we pass the elegant home of Mr. Perkins of Boston, erected on a high bluff where, a few years ago, the pines held undisputed control, and from the brow of which the sunset view cannot be surpassed in beauty. From the river we glide into another and larger bay, and the pretty tree-embossed village of Cotuit stands before us like a picture. If we like a dash of spray, we steer out boldly through a narrow passage and are soon dashing over the waves of the Sound."

Who composed those flowery paragraphs, we probably shall never know, but essentially the words are as true today as when they first appeared. Thinking about Osterville's past, about the changes she has seen, we can also rejoice in the ways the village has stayed the same through all the years; we can wonder, too, about the future.

Let fifty years or so pass, and we find more changes and more samenesses described of Osterville. In that interim the nation as a whole witnessed an Industrial Revolution. Its effects were felt here as the following commentary written in 1928 illustrates.

"It's about time the officials placed a cop at Crocker's corner (Eds. Note: Hansen's.) The traffic is each day growing exceedingly dangerous at this point. Officer Lovell was obliged to leave his post at Mulberry Corner several times and clear out a mix-up in Post Office Square."

With summer came even more traffic problems. A July 1928 news item reads, "Over eleven hundred cars passed the Osterville Fruit Store in three hours by actual count last Sunday. The traffic was unusually heavy, a constant stream of cars coming from the four corners at this point. It is felt by all that the little park at Mulberry Corner should be done away with. It is a most dangerous place and we fail to see why the Highway Department does not do something about it."

These are but a few crumbs taken from the notes Chesbro and Crosby have amassed for inclusion in the book soon to be published. As companion-piece to the earlier volume, the book will provide many people with family roots in Osterville a more complete picture, not only of their own ancestors, but of the place that shaped their lives and characters.

Someone, a century hence, may think then, as I think now, "The more things change, the more they stay the same."