

VILLAGE VIEW

ANDREA
LEONARD

A thoughtful off-Cape friend has provided a clipping from Brockton's local newspaper in which columnist Ken Dalton questions the origin and meaning of the word Scusset.

To most of us who know Barnstable County from end-to-end and sea-to-sea, Scusset designates a portion of Bourne lying beyond the Cape Cod Canal, east of Route 3 and south of the Plymouth County line. This much Mr. Dalton has himself concluded.

He finds, however, the meaning of the word to be a mystery. And well he might, for the term is a contraction of an Indian name for a neighborhood early settlers of the Town of Sandwich called the Valley of Manomet. This intelligence comes from one of the most fascinating collections of descriptive prose dealing with the Cape's early history and its families ever to roll from the presses. Also according to that collection, present application of Scusset to its locale is misplaced.

Anyone who possesses a copy of Amos Otis' **Genealogical Notes of Barnstable Families**, and who will read his chapters with care and attention, will find in them a treasure of information about the Cape, its early years of settlement, and the men and women who made their homes on this peninsula in the 7th, 18th, and 19th centuries.

Even though Scusset, in either locus, is situated miles beyond the boundaries of the Town of Barnstable, the term, its meaning, and its origin are given in full detail by Otis.

To solve the mystery plaguing Mr. Dalton, Amos Otis supplies the following:

"The first settlement in Sandwich was made at Manomet in 1627, and the foundation of the trading house built that year can yet be traced, the spring from which they obtained water is yet to be seen." Here Otis refers to Aptuxet Trading Post, since restored in a reproduction of the trading house.

"...and the remains of the landing place or wharf. It is on the south side of the river, about half-a-mile west of Monument Depot, on the Cape Cod Railroad." The river Mr. Otis mentions is now swallowed up by the Cape Cod Canal.

A settlement was made at Mos-keeh-tuk-gut in 1637, and soon after at Scusset, Spring Hill and other places."

And then Mr. Otis gets into the discussion of Scusset, the word. "Moo-ne-noo-ne-nus-cus-set-- the village, and Moo-re-noo-ne-nus-caul-ton- the river or stream. I have before remarked that Indian names are descriptive terms. These long names have been contracted to Scusset.

"The meaning of the long name applied to the river seems to be the murmuring stream, or perhaps a better translation is

'the stream where murmuring sounds are heard in the evening,' and the name of the village implies 'a landing place on that stream.' "

Fortunately for us, Mr. Otis, ever the stickler for precision and detail, was not satisfied with giving his readers so incomplete a description; for he continues, "A similar name was sometimes applied to the long valley which terminated at Scusset or West Sandwich." At the time Amos Otis was writing, the Town of Bourne had not yet separated from the Town of Sandwich, and the village he refers to as West Sandwich was to become, after 1804 when Bourne incorporated, the village of Sagamore.

It must have been a treat to know and talk with Amos Otis for he is not content to stop there but goes further. "In all languages there is an analogy between sound and sense, and particularly in barbarous or unwritten languages. Our English word murmur is one of this character, and the Indian Moo-ne-noo-ne is one of the same character and represents the same idea."

Although the sentences Mr. Otis pens to complete his discussion of Scusset have little or nothing to do with the name, his comments are worth sharing.

"The Indian names of birds and beasts are often imitations of the song or cry of each. The crow, the blackbird, the duck, the goose, and all the birds were continually chanting to the Indian their individual names, and so did the beasts of the field and the buzzing insects."

In a November 15, 1861 introduction to the collection of historical notes he compiled, and which were published first in a series of newspaper articles, Amos Otis disclaims responsibility for the material he presents as fact and asks interested readers to supply documents to correct errors.

He also suggests that "those who take an interest in these articles cut them out and paste them in a scrapbook leaving on each page a wide margin for corrections, additions and notes. To those who take less interest in the matter, I would suggest that they cut out the article in relation to their own families and paste at last the genealogical portion on the fly leaf of their family bibles: --their grand-children may take an interest in the subject if they do not."

The original volume, often called the Amos Otis Papers, was published in 1885 by F.B. Goss, and edited by Charles F. Swift to include revisions Mr. Otis had made in his notes after they had first appeared in print. Few copies of the first edition are in existence. A reprint, offered in 1979, is enormously enhanced by an index (which the original edition lacked) prepared by Charles A. Holbrook Jr., of Yarmouth Port. Copies of the later edition are already scarce, but a search of Cape Cod bookstores may still turn up a few. Worth its price, this book is recommended to all who enjoy studying Cape Cod's history, and particularly to Mr. Dalton for solving mysteries.

The light touch

Andrea Leonard, columnist of "Village View" of the Village Advertiser on Cape Cod, sent us a clipping of her Aug. 11 column with a note: "Thought you'd enjoy the enclosed 'scussion of 'Scusset..."

We enjoyed hearing from her immensely. Her column was a long one, several hundred words long, full of detailed history and personal comment.

We also liked the fact that she did not apologize for the "'scussion of 'Scusset'" remark in her memo to us. Many persons with a quick quip or bright pun or clever mot often feel a necessity to defend their above average intelligence.

We appreciate people who can intersperse a light touch, a sense of humor, a *joie de vivre* in writing or conversation.

It is a gift. Not many have it. Brockton attorney David Leavitt has that touch. His notes to us are gems.

In Ms. Leonard's column, she refers to our column of earlier this summer in which we wondered what the name "Scusset" meant. We knew it was of Indian origin for we had looked up the geographical boundaries and histories of the region. Nevertheless, we had been hopelessly bogged down with facts that skirted around exactly what the name "Scusset" meant.

Her entry to us refers to and recommends highly, Amos Otis' "Genealogical Notes of Barnstable Families," which she calls "a treasure of information about the Cape, its early years of settlement, and the men and women who made their homes on this peninsula in the 17, 18th, and 19th centuries."

Would you believe the answer is not a simple one? That's why it takes a column of over 800 words to explain.

Mention is made by Mr. Otis about the word "Moo-ne-noo-ne-nu-cus-set," the village, and "Moo-re-noo-ne-nus-caul-ton" the river or stream. These long names have been contracted to Scusset.

K.G.D. Says

KEN DALTON



What river or stream? Where is it now?

The making of the Cape Cod Canal obliterated or swallowed up several natural landmarks, byways and inroads.

They no longer exist, the "Stream where murmuring sounds are heard in the evening" as Otis describes it, remains in history books.

We also took note that in the "Village View" column, the last paragraph by Ms. Leonard states that "The original volume, often called the Amos Otis Papers, was published in 1885 by F.B. Goss. The "G." in "KGD" is Goss, for mother's maiden name. Wonder if he was related to us? Back to the history books.

LAST WEEK, we were suddenly the center of attention. "What did she say to you?" we were asked after a press conference with Cloris Leachman and Noel Harrison, who appeared at Fal-mouth.

We were a bit self-conscious. "Well, what were you two talking about?" was the persistent digging by amused spectators who watched Miss Leachman, Academy Award and Tony Awards winner, come up to us across the room, and standing close, ran her fingers through our rather bushy eyebrows. John L. Lewis type of eyebrows.

We grinned and obliged with an answer. "She told us not to have them cut. They looked great."

We never realized that eyebrows could be a conversation opener. It was fun.