

## 233 MAIN STREET - THE LITTLE CAPE HOUSE

~ by Martha Crawford and the Gray Family



photos courtesy the Gray family

We're honored to bring you this lovely portrait of a quintessential Old Village home. This story has it all: social history, surprising architectural and artistic details and most special of all, a family bond strengthened by a shared love of place. We are so grateful to Martha Crawford and other members of the Gray family for generously sharing this tale that spans centuries. The staying power of this house seems a fitting way to say farewell to 2024 and greet the New Year. Best wishes from all of us at the Old Village News. - *Ed*.

At the corner of Main Street and Shore Road, there sits a Little Cape House that has been there for centuries. If the walls of this house could talk, there are hundreds of stories they could tell of the many lives that have passed through the doors since the day the house was built, c. 1790. Having owned and enjoyed 233 Main Street for the past fifty years, our family is proud to share some of its history.

Originally this house was located below the old Twin Lights and was moved following the breakthrough of North Beach around 1850 to its present location. The first known deed to this house at its current site dates from 1857 when Josiah Hardy, Jr., the earliest known owner, sold it to Joshua Eldredge. Thereafter, it was sold to Sylvester Small and his wife Reliance, and in 1875 they sold the property to Harold Simmons who sold it to Everett and Mercie Patterson in the same year. In 1876, Sam Ellis purchased it from Everett's widow for \$500 dollars.



Wide floorboards feature prominently in the house.



The charming front door beckons.

In 1890, Sam Ellis sold it to William F. White who lived there with his wife, Bertha (Nicols). After William's death, Bertha sold it to Almena Kent in 1906. Almena owned it until she died, at which point it was willed to Josephine Atkins, who owned the houses on either side of the property. Josephine did not live in the house; she rented the property for many years to a succession of people. These included Ellsworth Parker Nickerson, his wife Ida and their daughter Avis (later the wife of Frank Masaschi), and Jack and Dora (Forgeron) Pitts and their daughter Eleanor, who ran it as a boarding house famous for its lemon sponge pies. When Jack died, Dora married Patrick Richard. Later, Mrs. Mabel Dumont, a music teacher at Chatham High School, rented the house and gave music lessons there. Subsequently, she established the Handicraft Tea Room on the property, and Harold Dunbar, a noted local artist, painted some Chatham mural scenes in one of the rooms. The history of ownership of is available thanks to two sources: Mary Ann Gray, who as an archivist, researched the deeds and other historical facts about our house over the years; and the Old Village Historic District Founding Document.

In 1975, after much thought, Rev. and Mrs. Brooks, who had inherited the property and were unable to take care of the house because it needed so much care and attention, decided to sell it to Ralph and Mary Ann Gray. The Gray family connection to 233 Main Street began one afternoon in July 1975 when Ralph and Mary Ann were walking by and saw the For Sale sign in the front of the house. They loved the location, and Mary Ann, an archivist, loved the architecture and history of the house. So it was an easy decision for them to purchase it, helped by the fact that Mary Ann's parents, James and Helen Woodward, had retired to Chatham.



The hearth oven in the midsection of the house, and the two-seater outhouse

The Grays had been renting cottages for two-week vacations in Chatham for numerous summers in the Old Village area, first on Andrew Hardings Lane and then on Silverleaf Avenue. The large family (their six children included Megan, Martha, Pam, Sue, Sarah and Bill) needed more space and they loved the idea that everything was within walking distance, including the beach at Holway Street, the band concert in town, baseball games, and other activities. So every summer since 1976, great Gray family memories have been created at 233 Main Street. The family would come the day school got out in New Jersey and would leave the day before school started. Ralph would come on weekends from his job in New York City, and Mary Ann had the summers off from teaching, so she stayed with all the children at the cottage for the entire summer.

The architecture of 233 Main Street is significant, since the house retains all its original structure. It is a three-bay-deep half Cape with a rear wing. It rises one and a half stories from a low brick and stone foundation to a bow roof with a chimney in the left bay. The exterior sheathing is shingle with simple corner board and fascia trim. The entry is aligned with the chimney in the south bay. It exhibits the common late 18th to 19th century surround of pilasters, four-lite transom and molded cornice. The shed on the property even has a two-seater outhouse.





Harold Dunbar's restored scenes of Chatham grace the dining room walls.

Mary Ann retired to Chatham in June 1999, and her love for Chatham and the history of the town continued to grow. She became very involved in the Atwood Museum, the Old Village Association and the First Congregational Church. Ralph had passed away in 1997. She worked on her other properties in town but still would go back to the cottage and work as much as she could. She continued the quest to get the written history of the cottage available to all of the family.



Mary Ann Gray reigns over the July 4 parade

This coming summer will mark fifty years since the day Ralph and Mary Ann purchased 233 Main Street. The house is now full of Gray family memories, including one room which is completely full of pictures of Fourth of July celebrations, when the entire family returns for the week. By last count there were twenty-five framed pictures of each Lobster bake held on July Fourth. For us, it is the biggest holiday of the season - Christmas in July! The family has even given names to several of the rooms, and rehearsal dinners, birthdays, graduations, weddings - you name it - have all been celebrated there. The Parade used to go by the house, and we had the best seat in town. Mary Ann was the Grand Marshall in 2013.

The Grays have spent every summer since that first one at 233 Main Street, and worked all over Chatham, including some town mainstays: Surfside Inn, Christopher Ryder House, Flemings, Impudent Oyster, Mayflower Shop, Candy Manor, Chatham Bars Inn, Sandy's Diner and Friendlies, along with sitting at the same beach for fifty years at the end of Holway Street.



The house in 1975 when the Grays bought it, and as it looks today.

Sadly, Mary Ann passed away in Chatham in September 2023. To honor her memory, this past September the family returned to work on 233 Main Street on the first anniversary of her death. What better way to celebrate her life than working on her one true love, the place where the family all wants to be together? Her spirit lives on in the house. 233 Main Street now has three generations of family members: six children, eight grandchildren and two great grandchildren of Mary Ann and Ralph, laughing and having fun at the house now and in years to come.

PS Keep your eye on the front door. It is forever changing to make you smile when you walk by.



The Gray family at the end of Holway Street ca 1978



The whole family July 4, 2024.



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