

Keeping Our History Alive



Holiday berries © EJH 2021

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CHIMNEYS OF THE OLD VILLAGE

FROM THE EDITOR

Joan Horrocks' photographic tour of chimneys offers a lovely selection that prompts us to look more closely as we walk around our neighborhood. The word chimney was first recorded in English around 1330. The physical chimney underwent numerous stages of evolution and varying degrees of efficacy – as a means of egress (or not) for the soot and smoke of open hearths. Before 1796 most chimneys were built abutting the house exterior; fire-prone wattle and daub chimneys were often built leaning away from the house so that if they caught fire they could be “easily” pulled down. As Franklin stoves were replaced by shallow, more efficient Rumford stoves, chimneys were integrated into the house structure or situated in its interior. Post-1796, a gap left between the chimney's upper portion and the building wall persisted for fire safety.

Chimneys still provide essential venting of exhaust from furnaces, water heaters, boilers and fireplaces. Fortunately for us, our fireplaces are now unsmoky places to gather, roast chestnuts and marshmallows, share stories and perhaps sing the odd shanty. Our own Old Village chimneys are both functional and decorative, a link to our past and an enduring symbol of our desire for fellowship. Our thanks to Joan for capturing so many instances of beauty.

Thanks also go out to the intrepid Elizabeth Stryewski for her recounting of her most recent trip to Monomoy, John Whelan for his poignant reminder of the hard work accomplished to create our historic district, and to Nancy Koerner and Debbie Aikman who are our proofreading angels and so much more.

Savor the holidays,

Jennifer Longworth
newsletter@oldvillagechatham.org

PRESIDENT'S LETTER

Dear Fellow Villagers,

This fall has offered an array of lovely sunrises and sunsets. The beauty of our neighborhood's architecture is made even more obvious when the leafless trees reveal our many extraordinary historical homes. I marvel at the huge number of walkers who discover the Old Village even on our cooler and usually very windy days.

My hope is next summer we can once again gather at the Porches or another location to meet new and old neighbors for an afternoon of wine and friendly discussion. It has always been helpful for board members to learn neighbors' concerns and interests before August's annual meeting. You can also contact us through our website about any suggestions for speakers or programs that might be of interest.

We will miss Cape Abilities and hope they can find another location in Chatham. Their Farm Market has been a most popular addition to the neighborhood, and we will miss the many friendly faces of the staff and volunteers. We look forward to learning what the owners' plans are for the future.

I want to recognize the efforts of Jennifer Longworth and Lisa Green and the huge success of Kids for Food and thank Nancy Koerner for her continued work on the annual dues mailing.

I wish you all a wonderful and healthy holiday season.

Warmly,
Winnie Lear, President
directors@oldvillagechatham.org

Return to Monomoy

After an invigorating (freezing) November boat ride out to Monomoy, I was dropped off near the southern tip of the island by the folks of the US Fish and Wildlife Service. I am on my way to add to the presentation I had begun at the lighthouse two years ago. As reflected in articles for the OVA last fall, I volunteered to be part of restoration efforts and as I began to look for information on the lighthouse, I was delighted to discover not only wonderful stories about the keepers of the light but also that the island itself has a fascinating history. I then set out to tell these stories in an exhibit at the lighthouse and today I am headed there with some additions.

Once on the island, I sling my backpack over my shoulders and head east. From where I am on the beach, the top of the lighthouse tower can just be seen peeking over the dunes. The half mile path begins as soft sand, traversing the dunes between tufts of beach grass. The path then descends through marshy bogs and across hard peat. Sleeping bag, pillow, toiletries, all the necessities for a stay at the lighthouse are stowed in my backpack, including my mini Keurig, as I would consider a hot cup of coffee on a cold November morning essential. When I began this project, water would have been on the list to be carried in as well, but a filter has since been added to the lighthouse's well and if you can get by the odd color and taste of the water that comes out of the tap, carrying your own in is no longer necessary.



Monomoy Lighthouse just before dawn. courtesy the author

As I cross the dunes, I think about the thriving community that was once here. Horse drawn carriages would have been plying the soft sand. Just to the south, children were running to school. Homes, wharfs and chandlers lined the coast. Looking over the vacant dunes, it's hard to believe there was ever anything but the gulls and mice that frequent these ridges today. I pass by a cranberry bog. Sampling a few of the delicious berries, I wonder if these were planted by residents of the island as I have rarely run across wild cranberries. Perhaps one of the lighthouse keepers had planted them generations earlier? Occasional oddities like this bog remind me that this island has been an integral part of Chatham life for generations.

I reach the lighthouse and let myself in for my three day stay. After unpacking my things and setting my Keurig on the kitchen counter, I set to work putting up the new posters. These include articles from the Boston Globe archives telling stories of the courageous surfmen of the three Monomoy life saving stations in the early 1900s. Stories of the Wadena tragedy of 1902 and the rescue of the crew of the Dorothy Palmer in 1923 are included. These were forbidding shores, shipwrecks were common and the heroism of those who saved countless lives should be remembered.



Monomoy Lighthouse in the setting sun. courtesy the author

As evening approaches, I give myself a break from my task and climb the lighthouse tower. The lightkeeper would have taken these very steps, with oil buckets in hand, perhaps on a freezing winter night with gale-force winds whipping the tower, forcing it to creak and moan under the strain. At the top of the stairs, a vertical ladder leads through a hole to the lantern room. It's a tight fit, I can't imagine doing it with buckets of oil. From the lantern room, the Chatham light blinks to the north. Turning around, I can see very faintly on the horizon, a light from Nantucket, most likely Great Point Light. This is the reason the Monomoy light was decommissioned nearly 100 years ago. With the higher power beams installed in the Chatham and Nantucket towers, Monomoy's light became superfluous.



An excerpt and art from a Harper's Magazine article and items from the Boston Globe archives displayed along with a whale vertebra found on Monomoy, courtesy the author

I return to the keeper's house and notice a light flashing in the window. No one would be wandering the beach with a flashlight at this time of year (I hope!). I look out and see that the beam is coming across the Atlantic waters and that it is stationary. I realize that it must be a beacon marking one the shoals. I'm not sure which, Stonehorse perhaps? Ships once marked these navigation hazards and thinking of what life must have been like on board and the important role they served, I make a mental note to further research their stories and to remember their heroism as part of the presentation here at the lighthouse.

Solar panels provide electricity here but with the short days and long nights of November, power reserves are low. I wake the next morning just before dawn, plug in my Keurig and realize the true extent of the power reserves.... there are none. So I decide to set off on a morning walk in hopes that by the time I return, there will be enough power for a cup of coffee.



Part of the exhibit is displayed on the livingroom wall of the keeper's house. courtesy the author

I head across the dunes to the east, reach the Atlantic and turn south toward the tip of Monomoy. Years ago, surfmen from the lifesaving stations would be roaming these shores much as I am now, looking for wrecks and survivors. We think of the beach now as a place to put up our beach umbrellas or go fishing, but in centuries prior these were dangerous waters.

Wrecks were common, occurring so routinely that people on land [mooncussers among them] made their living by scavenging their cargoes and then using the abandoned hulls not just for fuel to heat their homes, but the wood to construct them.

Upon my return to the keeper's house, the sun is shining overhead and I find that energy reserves are sufficient for a cup of coffee. Today I am installing a poster which includes an excerpt from an article by William Inglis from a 1908 issue of Harper's Magazine along with paintings by Harold Brett depicting the lives of the Life Savers of Monomoy. Once I put up a poster about the lighthouse keepers and an additional article from the Boston Globe telling the story of the three daughters of keeper James Smith, my task will be complete. Tomorrow morning I will pack up my belongings and head back over the dunes for my return trip to Chatham. My short stay here has given me the opportunity to immerse myself in the history of the island. I hope to continue my research, enabling me to tell the stories of the lives of the people who lived on Monomoy. As we protect this island for wildlife today, those who once lived here will not be forgotten.

~ Elizabeth Stryewski

Will The Circle Be Unbroken?

As is often the case as winter approaches, I find myself staying indoors more to avoid the cold. And, as is also often the case, this is the time of year I go off on tangents. It was a problem in school and college and the habit of going off on tangents continues, although I feel it is no longer a problem. On my most recent tangent, I decided to review the various Ken Burns films that I had watched over the years on public television. I feel Ken Burns is an important historian and an influential educator and I have enjoyed re-watching several of his efforts. The most recent one was the wonderful series on country music. I am a country music fan along with so many other kinds of music. The opening and closing themes of the series involved The Carter Family and the song "Will the Circle be Unbroken?" The song relates to the death of the singer's mother and the concern that, as generations pass, the connection with the family history and traditions could be lost.

We live in what is called the "Old Village" of Chatham. The houses are closer together and most are of an older, traditional style. I believe that those houses of traditional style play a great part in what makes the old village so attractive. The Old Village today benefits from the efforts of a few very dedicated people who were determined to try to preserve the historic nature of the Old Village. The Old Village Historic District was established in 2001 and protects more than 300 properties from demolition and substantial alteration. The 300 properties represent about 85% of the structures in the Village. We can thank Carol Pacun, Eleanor Gelsey and many others for their hard work establishing the Historic District.



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The Historic District does provide some tools to help preserve that attractive architecture and look. Sometimes the concern is about size and mass; sometimes it is about the kind of alteration proposed.

In the past, most homeowners revered their historic homes and usually did their best to maintain them, but, lately, it has felt that the Old Village is under attack. Some new owners want bigger houses at the expense of traditional size and architecture. The Old Village Historic District does provide some tools to limit egregious alterations, but we should all remain vigilant.

There are not many homes with lights on as one drives around the Old Village on a winter night. When I was a walking summer mailman in the 1960's, there were lots of native Cape Codders scattered all around the Village. Today we are down to a very few. We "wash-a-shores", and, yes, I am a "wash-a-shore", often feel just as strongly about preserving the look and feel of the Village. But I am also concerned that with the change of Village residents' priorities the history and traditions of our area will be lost. I believe knowledge of that history is important as part of the preservation effort. It is my hope "the circle" will stay "unbroken" and that history and tradition will also survive. Happy Holidays.

~ John Whelan

Chimneys of the Old Village - Images by Joan Horrocks





Old Village Association Officers 2020-2021

President: Winnie Lear
Vice President: Debbie Aikman
Treasurer: Nancy Koerner
Clerk: Carol Pacun

Term ending 2022

Debbie Aikman
Nancy Koerner
David MacAdam
Lisa Green

Term ending 2023

Nancy Phelps
Jennifer Longworth
Lisa Edge
Linda Howes Salvi

Term ending 2024

Winnie Lear
Carol Pacun
Bill Horrocks

Village News



Cape Abilities' Farm Director Tracey Fraser sends holiday greetings: "We cherish our eleven years in the Old Village and look forward to finding a new location to continue to serve our wonderful Chatham friends." Cape Abilities continues to deliver their phenomenal farm market boxes to Chatham this winter, and you can find out more about ordering here:

Cape Abilities Produce Membership Programs

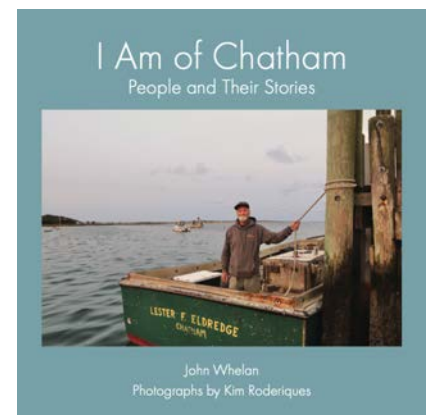


CALLING ALL AUTHORS AND FILMMAKERS

Have you or has someone you know published a book or produced a film about the Old Village, Chatham or Cape Cod?

Please send us title(s), author/director name, publisher and date, and where to find the book/film locally and online, plus an image.

We'll include this on our library page!



I Am of Chatham
John Whelan and Kim Rodriques, June 2021, Sockpirate Publishing

Chatham Historic House Signs

FRANKLYN NICKERSON
Market
c. 1850

Chatham Historic House Signs - houses 100 years or older are eligible for white rectangular signs that summarize the early history of the building, e.g.

Name of first owner
Function of building
The date

Over 670 Chatham houses are eligible for these signs, 107 are in the Old Village. The information and application are available on the Town web site. For street designations in the Old Village visit our webpage.

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HAPPY HOLIDAYS!

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