

## Keeping Our History Alive



© EJH 2023

### IN THIS ISSUE

IF THE WALLS COULD TALK ~ THOREAU AND CHATHAM ~ A MEANDER

### FROM THE EDITOR

Our newsletter focuses on the timeless aspects of our beautiful surroundings, the reassuring warmth and dignity manifested in our architecture, our landscape and most of all, our membership.

Special thanks to Ellen Briggs, intrepid president and founder of Protect Our Past, a dynamic local organization dedicated, like ours, to educating homeowners about the often unappreciated benefits of preservation. As Ellen indicates, we have a wealth of information and energy to share. Thanks also to Joan Horrocks for her artistic and poetic eye in capturing our surroundings, and John Whelan, who eloquently calls our attention to the similarities and contrasts in our Chatham experience, and those of America's illustrious nature chronicler, Henry David Thoreau.

Savor your holidays,  
Jennifer Longworth  
[newsletter@oldvillagechatham.org](mailto:newsletter@oldvillagechatham.org)

# PRESIDENT'S LETTER

Greetings Villagers,

Chatham's Main Street is sparkling with holiday lights and happy shoppers. Blessed with a mild December, the merchants have had a wonderfully successful season.

Work has begun on the Eldredge Garage as the plan for a visitor center has materialized. The other project that is a most welcome surprise is the preservation/ renovation of 193 Main Street, the former Calico Cat. We look forward to enjoying the beautiful results of the owners' efforts to restore this iconic building.

In an effort to increase awareness of the Old Village, its history, and its placement on the National Historic Register, we have joined the Chatham Chamber of Commerce. Membership will hopefully give us more of a voice in the Chatham Community.

As always, I encourage you to communicate your questions and concerns and to continue to refer to our website for news from the Old Village.

Wishing you a happy holiday season and good health in the New Year.

Warmly,

Winnie Lear, President

[directors@oldvillagechatham.org](mailto:directors@oldvillagechatham.org)

---

## If the Walls Could Talk ~ Ellen Briggs

Why do thousands of people of all ages stroll through the Old Village of Chatham year after year? What attracts them? Is it the care-free feeling one has when walking along the narrow streets with little to no concern for the absence of sidewalks? Is it the intimate feeling of belonging given by the humble homes lining the streets? It is fair to say that these houses with character communicate with those passing by. Be it a Cape Cottage, Greek Revival or even Colonial Revival in nature, each emits tales from the past. How so?



The artistic craftsmanship is different from rubber stamped new builds. The windows have multiple panes, instead of the more commonly used picture windows of today. One has to imagine their interiors, beginning with the chimney's location. Along with that, one then imagines who lived there years ago. The variety of welcoming doors were often hand-made by tradesman, some being more decorative than others. They exude warmth, even on a cold day. Their variety of eaves also contribute to their harmonious message. This feels like home. And, of course, each house in the Old Village has stories, more than one, from the past. This too contributes to their character!



If the walls could talk in these Old Village structures, what would they tell you, what would you learn? Protect Our Past is collecting such stories for our 2024 film. We invite you to share yours with us: Sea Captain's tales to ghost stories and anything of intrigue in between. Please send them to me: [ellen@protectourpast.org](mailto:ellen@protectourpast.org). The Creative Team at Protect Our Past looks forward to reading them!



# Henry David Thoreau and Chatham

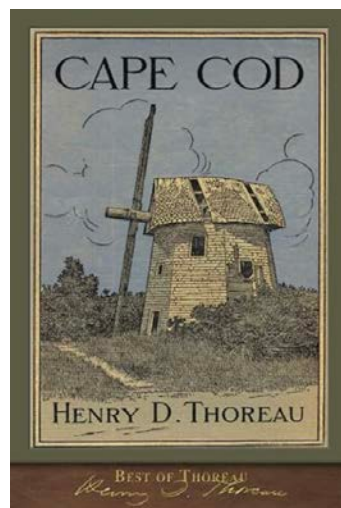
## ~ John Whelan

Recently, I decided to read Thoreau's *Cape Cod* (SeaWolf Press, Orinda, CA, 2020). I really should say re-read the book since I had read it years before. Cape Cod is considered by many to be the first travel guide for this area. Thoreau was a very interesting character. He was a naturalist who chose simple living and close observation of nature. He excelled as an essayist and his philosophy has been very influential. He was a forceful abolitionist and delivered lectures attacking the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850.

His essay *Civil Disobedience* proposed peaceful resistance as a way to protest government policies he considered unjust. Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr. were among those who followed his concept of peaceful resistance. Thoreau was born in Concord, Massachusetts and attended Harvard College. He was a friend of Ralph Waldo Emerson, who introduced him to the leading writers and thinkers of Concord. Thoreau never flourished in society and never had a strong source of income. He moved to the woods to focus on his thoughts and writing. He believed in living with very few of life's conveniences, and built his simple, small house on the shores of Walden Pond, on land owned by Emerson.

He lived there for two years; thinking, writing and observing nature. After returning to live with the Emerson family, he wrote, revised, and eventually published *Walden, or Life in the Woods*. The book became a classic that espoused simplicity, harmony and natural beauty. Thoreau started to travel and explore areas that interested him. One of those areas was Cape Cod, and he traveled here four times. His travel itinerary, interspersed with his philosophical writing, made for good reading and enjoyed a degree of commercial success. *Cape Cod* was published in 1865 after Thoreau's death from tuberculosis at age 44 in 1862.

*Cape Cod* follows his trip from Concord, first through the South Shore and then to the Cape itself. He traveled by stage coach after reaching Sandwich, along what is now Route 6A. His discourse is filled with humor and quite a bit of criticism of what he observed.



The Cape was a desolate place since almost every tree had been cut down for use building ships or homes. The naturalist Thoreau did not find this attractive. He also wrote a critical paragraph about the looks of Cape Cod women. He noted that the few he saw looked “pinched up” and “had lost all of their teeth”. He went on to write that the husbands looked a little better. He cared most about the landscape and wrote that in a number of areas the only growth of note that he noticed was the native “poverty grass”.

Writing about Chatham, he claimed to have read “that fogs in Chatham are more frequent than in any other part of the country; and they serve in summer, instead of trees, to shelter the houses against the heat of the sun”. Thoreau then quoted “the historian of Chatham” as writing that “in many families there is no difference between breakfast and supper; cheese, cakes and pies being as common at the one as at the other”.

The description of Chatham with regard to the fog seems apt, but I would debate his description regarding the looks of Cape Cod women. If teeth were missing here, I might suggest that they were also missing in many across the country. People in Chatham found financial survival difficult so I do not question the description of the eating habits.

Our village was being built during the time of Thoreau. Many of our homes date from the 1800's. If Thoreau revisited today, I believe he would praise the beauty and simplicity of our older homes today.

**A Meander**  
**words from *Cape Cod* by Henry David Thoreau**  
**images by E. Joan Horrocks**



*At length we reached the seemingly retreating boundary of the plain, and entered what had appeared at a distance an upland marsh, but proved to be dry sand covered with Beach-grass, the Bearberry, Bayberry, Shrub-oaks, and Beach-plum, slightly ascending as we approached the shore ...*



*We often love to think now of the life of men on beaches,—at least in midsummer, when the weather is serene; their sunny lives on the sand, amid the beach-grass and the bayberries, their companion a cow, their wealth a jag of driftwood or a few beach-plums, and their music the surf and the peep of the beach-bird.*





*The ocean did not look, now, as if any were ever shipwrecked in it; it was not grand and sublime, but beautiful as a lake. Not a vestige of a wreck was visible, nor could I believe that the bones of many a shipwrecked man were buried in that pure sand.*



*This Monday morning was beautifully mild and calm, both on land and water, promising us a smooth passage across the Bay, and the fishermen feared that it would not be so good a drying day as the cold and windy one which preceded it. There could hardly have been a greater contrast. This was the first of the Indian summer days ...*

# Old Village Association Officers 2022-2023

President: Winnie Lear  
Vice President: Debbie Aikman  
Treasurer: Nancy Koerner  
Clerk: Lisa Green

## Term ending 2024

Bill Horrocks  
Winnie Lear  
Carol Pacun

## Term ending 2025

Debbie Aikman  
Lisa Green  
Nancy Koerner  
Fred Miller

## Term ending 2026

Lisa Edge  
Greg Horne  
Jennifer Longworth  
Kim Longworth

## Village News



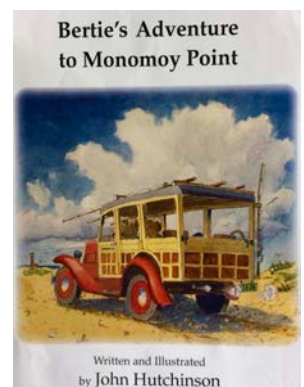
Tim regales a lively tour group with First Congregational Church of Chatham UCC in the background

Think you know all there is to learn about Chatham? Take a stroll with **Chatham Walks** and discover what you don't! Tim Wood, editor of the Cape Cod Chronicle, offers a history-packed, often humorous 90-minute walking tour of downtown Chatham, exploring the buildings, people and history that made Chatham what it is today.

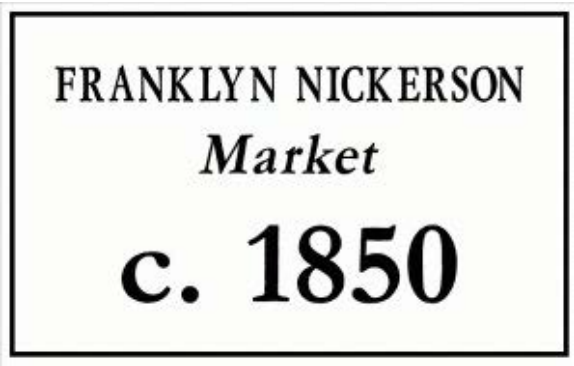
Call **508-737-5646** for more information or to reserve.

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), image, author/director name, publisher and date, and where to find the book/film locally and online.







## 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

Year built

Over 670 Chatham houses are eligible for these signs; over 100 are in the Old Village. The information and application are available by [clicking here](#). For street designations in the Old Village visit our webpage.

Subscribe:

[newsletter@oldvillagechatham.org](mailto:newsletter@oldvillagechatham.org)

Follow us:

Instagram @ovachatham

Facebook [oldvillageassociationchatham](#)

Your email will be used only for OVA communications. We welcome newsletter contributors as well!



© EJH 2023

## HAPPY HOLIDAYS!

**Old Village Association**

P.O. Box 188

Chatham, MA 02633

[newsletter@oldvillagechatham.org](mailto:newsletter@oldvillagechatham.org)

[directors@oldvillagechatham.org](mailto:directors@oldvillagechatham.org)