

Keeping Our History Alive



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FROM THE EDITOR

Our winter issue offers much to discover and for some, to remember. Our archived newsletters and features have been transformed from less than perfect digital links to handsome, crisp pdf files that will remain intact and easy to read for the foreseeable future, thanks to our website wizzes at Paraclete Design. Our archives page also now sports Tables of Contents for each issue all the way back to 1996: we encourage you to take a trip to our early history and savor the many colorful stories of Old Village people and places! We were fortunate to have ACWA Board President Edie Cerebi take time from her hectic schedule to give us an insider's view of the Chase property and its long-running summer program. We're also indebted to John Whelan for recounting his harrowing experience at the near-loss of his property in 1987; to Tracy Foley for her charming ode to a stalwart neighbor; and to Elizabeth Stryjewski for her amazing tale of heroism on a Christmas eve long ago - with extra thanks to Elizabeth for her kind assistance in editing and proofreading the news. Joan Horrocks' lovely photograph of the picturesque Cottage on School Street seems a fitting emblem of our gracious and welcoming neighborhood.

Best wishes for a wonderful holiday season,

Jennifer Longworth
newsletter@oldvillagechatham.org

PRESIDENT'S LETTER

Greetings Villagers,

My hope is that you've all had a wonderful fall and are happily preparing for the upcoming holidays. Chatham continues to be bustling, especially on our lovely fall weekends.

Although next summer seems to be in the distant future I am asking you for suggestions for a speaker at our Annual Meeting. Input from our members is always valuable to our board and we look forward to hearing from you.

We now have a committee which oversees requests to the Historical Commission for alterations to homes that are National Register contributing structures. We will try to notify and discuss the requested changes with abutters whose opinions are vital to the decision process. Please communicate any concerns /suggestions you may have concerning life in our beautiful neighborhood. I wish you a happy and peaceful holiday season and New Year.

Warmly,
Winnie Lear, President
directors@oldvillagechatham.org



Old Village rooflines. photo © EJH 2024

Preservation, Service and Community: Insights from an Insider ~ Jennifer Longworth

Old Village members delight in gathering each summer for a casual afternoon overlooking Mill Pond at the gracious Porches home, the centerpiece of the Avis Chase Women's Association property. We had the opportunity to ask Edie Cerebi, longtime visitor and now board president of ACWA, about her perspective on the value of this historic and welcoming site. To anchor our timeline: Avis Augusta Morgan Young was born in Chatham on January 4, 1867 to Mary Augusta Young and Selucius Morton Young, a seaman who died four months after her birth. Avis died October 19, 1953 (source: avischasewomensassociation.org). – *Ed.*

Can you recount some of the milestones of the property's historical timeline for us – how it changed from private residences to fulfilling Avis Chase's wishes and legacy?

The properties now known as Chase Cottages have a storied and intertwined history that begins with Avis Chase's mother, Mary Augusta Young. Mrs. Young resided at 52 Water Street in the house now known as "Mother's House." She also owned and operated a dry goods store at the corner of School and Water. She moved the business to Main Street in 1900.

According to historical records, in 1907 Avis and her husband Captain Silman Chase moved the store structure to where it stands now at 20 Water Street and renovated it to become a summer cottage. The conversion included the addition of porches on three sides: one of the house's most striking features, it is the reason it is known as "Porches" today.

"Pond," the cottage that stands at 25 Water Street, was a boathouse that Avis moved from the edge of Mill Pond below to its present location in the early 1950s and converted into a residence for the ladies as part of her vision.

Avis and her husband moved to Philadelphia in the late 1890s when Silman came under the employ of George Widener of the prominent Widener family. This move was a major turning point in the lives of the two Chatham natives. It was during that time that Avis became acquainted with the women of the Young Women's Christian Association of Philadelphia. The women left a lasting impression. In her will, Avis left the three properties, 20, 25, and 52 Water Street, now known as Chase Cottages, to the Association in a Trust "to be available for the benefit, rest and recreation" of its members. We carry on her legacy today.



Avis Chase photo courtesy ACWA



Edie and Ted Cerebi. photo OV

How and when did you become involved with the ACWA, and how have your relationship and role with the ACWA and the Old Village property evolved?

I became involved with the organization as a participant in the Chase Cottages Program in 1988 and have returned to the Cottages either as a participant, volunteer, or an administrator every year that the Cottages have been open since. From 2000-2003 I taught and later administered the YWCA Tech Girls and NetPrep programs for middle and high school aged girls in several Philadelphia Public Schools. During that period, I served for a short time as secretary on an Interim Board. I rejoined the Board in 2018 and served on the Membership Committee as Chair. I joined Molly Malone-Munsell as a Chase Cottage Administrator three years ago after the death of long-time Chase administrator Diane LaForce. This past June I was elected president of the Board of Directors in the first election since the passing of our longstanding president, Wandra Powell.



Porches freshly painted. photo © EJH 2024



Happily hosting the OVA. photo OV

Can you talk a bit about your early years visiting the cottages? Do you recall your first impressions?

The first year four of us made the long trip from Philadelphia together. We had no idea what we would find. What we encountered was this beautiful setting and charming houses in a place like nothing we had experienced before. A favorite activity almost immediately became taking long walks through the Old Village and beyond. It took us a bit to adjust to terms like “roundabout” and “quahog,” and we were schooled by a young boy on the proper pronunciation of Eliphamet, but the charm of the Cottages, the Old Village, and the wonders of the Cape have brought us back with others for over three decades. What also grew out of the early years for us, and I believe for others, was time spent reflecting and listening to the trials and triumphs of the women we shared the house and time with each year.

You stepped in this year to help as in-season property Administrator this year. What does this role involve?

I just stepped in earlier than expected. In a nutshell, the Administrator’s role is to make sure that the houses are prepared for the week’s participants, to be on-call for any problems or concerns, and to oversee the general maintenance of the houses and property. We also see our role as a link to the surrounding community.

How has your experience of these historic houses changed or broadened with the hands-on duties to care for guests and property, and with day-to-day living in the Porches home?

My experience has taught me that one needs to be prepared for anything at any time, that upkeep is constant, and that there are few things better than a Mill Pond sunset. It is also nice to watch the women come and go and share their experiences while they are here. The interior of Porches, with its antique pieces, and portraits and photographs of Avis, Silman, “Gussie,” and George are a constant reminder of the history of the property and the legacy of Avis Chase.

How does the ACWA property differ from the environment your guests are coming from?

Most of our participants come from urban or densely populated settings, but I think the question should be how does the environment at Chase influence our participants. The tranquil, stress-free setting gives them an opportunity to refresh and recharge at a place that they would not be able to avail themselves of otherwise.

How do you think the architecture, the interior details, and the surroundings affect guests during the week they are here, and perhaps beyond? Are there physical elements that you feel are most important to preserve?

I think that spending time amid the houses of the Old Village and in an historic home helps your mind disconnect from the present day. Walking down the streets, reading the names of the houses makes you wonder about what life was like when the families lived here. Did the captains return from sea? What other occupations did the residents have? Were they prominent citizens or commonfolk? Add to that the open spaces, the rose and hydrangea bushes, the cool breezes, the quiet streets, the starlit nights, the sound of the ocean, the ocean itself, and you can readily see how Avis Chase's vision was formed. Those who stay at Chase carry the time spent here as a fond memory. I have encountered women in social situations outside of the organization and to a person they have all spoken of the wonderful experiences they have had at the Cottages.

The houses and open spaces in the Old Village need to be preserved in their entirety. This includes the Chase property.



View of Mill Pond from Porches. photo OV



Plants and pollinators. photo © EJH 2024

As President of the ACWA, are there any special goals or projects you have in mind for the ACWA property/community?

We continue our philanthropic activities in Philadelphia including as our goal there and at the Chase Cottages in Chatham to serve our members to the best of our abilities. There is ongoing restoration at the Cottages especially due to the high winds and rain in 2023 and 2024. We expect this to continue and are preparing to apply for grants for historic restoration projects at Porches in particular. In 2023, we led The Chatham Women's Club on a walk and talk about the history of ACWA including the Old Village Chase Cottages. This year The Chatham Walkers attended a similar Porches event.

At Mother's Meadow, which abuts Mother's House at 52 Water Street, we have been working on a pollinator project, cataloging and adding native seeds to the pollinator-attracting plants already growing there.

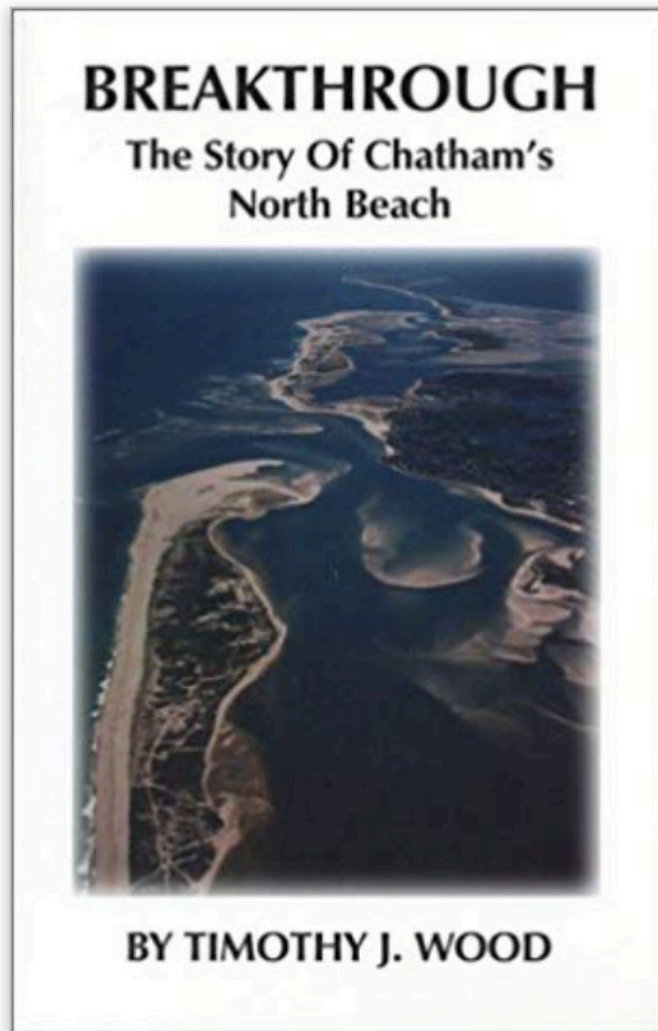
Breaking Point - A Time Of Stress And Loss **~ John Whelan**

This white-knuckle account details just one neighbor's experience after the storm of 1987. For more on its destruction, and how the OV came together after, see our archived Spring 2020 newsletter. *Ed.*

I owned a Suzuki Samurai that I often drove on North Beach. It was light and drove very well on sand. Actually, it was better on sand than on a highway. The break in the outer beach developed slowly. Living at 81 Holway Street, I was directly across from the area of the break. So when the water flowed over the beach, I decided to go out and take a look. The break was small that first day and only ran at near high tide. I drove across the break to the south with no difficulty as did a number of other drivers. Some went down to the southern end of the beach, but I was afraid of getting stuck when the water came back so I returned to the northern side of the break.

I do know that all the drivers made it back safely, although some had to drive through two feet of flowing water. It was exciting out there. We didn't know what would happen next. A number of times in the past, water had flowed over the beach only to have it filled in with sand within a few days.

At the time of the break, 81 Holway Street had about sixty feet of beach at low tide. The banking in front of the house was about eight feet above the beach and I had a little ladder to get down to the beach. Years earlier, there had actually been trees between the house and the beach. We called it the 'bamboo forest' in the late 50s and early 60s.



Breakthrough: The Story of Chatham's North Beach
by Tim Wood (Hyora Pub, 2002)

Our first impression was that the break would provide some positive benefit by washing out Pleasant Bay. It did also mean colder water at Holway Street, but we could handle that. The flushing of Pleasant Bay was supposed to improve the area for shellfish. I don't know if it ever did.

The homeowners on the beach met and we discussed our options. We scheduled a meeting with the Chatham Conservation Commission. At that meeting we naively asked for their advice. We were flatly told that their role was to rule on submitted plans and not to give advice of any kind. The Commission's thinking was dominated by Alice Hiscock, who was a firm believer in allowing the beach to be untouched. Should erosion take a house, so be it. The Massachusetts Wetlands Act does provide potential relief for those houses located on a "coastal bank", but none for houses on a "coastal dune". The determination between the two was by core testing the land for glacial remains. Fortunately, my land was identified as coastal bank and I would be allowed to protect my home. Unfortunately the Galanti, Wilson and Rolfe houses were on coastal dune and therefore at the mercy of the sea. The homeowners were confused and frightened and moved slowly.

As the power of the ocean washing through the break increased, I started losing beach. Gradually at first and then more and more. Low tide came closer and closer to my banking, and then all the sand had eroded away and one morning my ladder was gone. By then, the water was getting close to the Galanti house. It also threatened the Rolfe house and the Wilson house. 81 Holway Street was higher and I felt my house was safe from danger.



JANUARY 1988: The Galanti House Goes Down.

Globe staff photo/David L. Ryan

Supplement - Page 4

Devastation after the storm photo originally published OV News Winter 2002

I could not have been more wrong. In under a month, my banking began to erode. Small pieces of bank would appear at the base and wash away on the next high tide. Small pieces, then bigger pieces, and the threat to the house was now real. High tide meant that water was flowing around the Galanti house. Slowly it was being undermined and it became clear it would be lost. As time went on, the land directly in front of the house started to erode. Chunks of land would fall into the water. On the worst of days, the bank was twelve feet from the southeast corner of the porch.

As a last resort, I went to court and asked to create a “windrow” of large rocks on the beach to lessen the erosion. I offered to put a sum of money in escrow to insure the removal of the rocks if I never got a permit to protect the house. Alice Hiscock argued against my plan, but the judge ruled in favor and the windrow was created the following day. It did afford some protection and I received a permit from the Army Corps Of Engineers sometime later - and my house was saved.

I remember many tears and lots of arguments in the process. The nine-plus houses that were lost are gone forever. Tim Wood, editor of the Cape Cod Chronicle wrote a fine book about the break and those who want to learn more can find it in *Breakthrough: The Story of Chatham's North Beach* (Hyora Pub, 2002).

Inquire at Yellow Umbrella Books about Tim Wood's book and they'll be glad to help you!

A Christmas Tale: The Wreck of the Harry Messer ~ Elizabeth Stryjewski



The Harry Messer as portrayed by William Stubbs ca 1880s

It was Christmas Eve 1908 and like most people in Chatham, the crew of the Monomoy Point lifesaving station was decorating their Christmas tree. Even on this festive night, the watch still had to be maintained, so a crewman was in the tower above the living room scanning the ocean for ships in trouble. Suddenly, he spotted the Harry Messer, a three-masted schooner fully loaded with coal bound for Boston from Baltimore, foundering on a bar that had been the cause of so many other ships' demise, the dreaded Handkerchief shoal. He bolted down the stairs to alert his fellow surfman. Captain Joseph Kelley, a veteran of the lifesaving service, was the station keeper and he phoned the crew at the boathouse and ordered them to launch the rescue boat. On the beach, the surfman pushed the rescue boat through pounding surf and set out into the frigid night.

Gale force winds were whipping up the seas causing the small boat to disappear as it descended into the trough of each wave. Ice clung to the sides of the vessel and across the cork life vests each surfman wore. When



Surfman of the Monomoy Point Lifesaving Station

the rescue boat peaked on a wave, its passengers could see the devastating surf breaking over the deck of the suffering ship about a half mile away. One of the masts came down as the thrashing waves pounded the schooner against the shoal. Through a tangle of rigging the surfman could see a tremendous wave hit the schooner's deckhouse, it splintered and was washed overboard.

The men in the rescue boat knew the schooner itself would soon break up. They approached the ship from the leeward side and after just two attempts, the skillful lifesaving crew maneuvered their rescue boat close enough to the doomed ship for the men aboard to jump one by one into the rescue boat. Once all the sailors were aboard, they turned the rescue boat back against the numbing wind and toward the shore.



Surfman of the Monomoy Point Lifesaving Station

Ice caked the men's faces, with more accumulating as the thundering surf raked the small boat, but Captain Kelley's men were seasoned rescuers, their hours of practice drills and experience with countless other wrecks had prepared them for this. Their will and courage prevailed that night and all returned safely to the lifesaving station. The surfmen shared their Christmas dinner with the sailors from the ruined ship. After dinner the crew and the wreck survivors finished decorating the Christmas tree and sang Christmas carols. Meanwhile on the shoal, the Harry Messer was crumbling at the hands of monstrous waves. During the night, the ship broke apart and debris was scattered across Nantucket Sound. The crew of the Harry Messer spent Christmas day with the lifesaving crew and the next morning headed for Chatham and a train home.

Learn more about stories like this one and about other events in Monomoy's fascinating history - join a Monomoy Point Lighthouse tour next summer!



Holiday lights beckon. photo © EJH 2024

An Old Neighbor and Friend ~ Tracy Foley

Every passerby stops to stare at the majestic tree that hovers over Water Street. “What kind of tree is that?”, I can hear them saying through the hedge. Others declare their knowledge, boldly stating “look at this copper beech tree!”. Few know the history of this icon of the Old Village. How and when was the copper beech tree planted in the Old Village is up for some debate. The old homestead of Fisher Eldredge, where the copper beech stands today, was constructed in the mid-1800s, so we may assume the tree was planted at about that time.



The majestic Copper Beech - photo © EJH 2024

Copper beeches are not native to Cape Cod – they originated in Europe. They seem to have first appeared in a U.S. nursery catalog in 1820 and it's likely that these trees were planted here well before this (source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fagus_sylvatica). Looking through decades of old photos of Cape Cod you will see the barren landscape of Chatham wiped clean of mature trees because they were needed for use as timber to build homes, boats and ship masts, among other essential items. Images of the old Chatham Hotel, Stage Harbor and the Old Harbor life-saving station are all devoid of trees. The Monomoyick Inn, which is now the Chatham Inn on Main Street, had three trees facing Main Street with a few additional trees surrounding it. The land around the Chatham Bars Inn was essentially treeless at the turn of the 20th century.



The copper beech's ancient and strong trunk - photo © EJH 2024

When our now adult children were young, its branches were a place of refuge if they wanted to hide. Playing games in the tree, seeing how far up you could climb, using branches and leaves as camouflage in a game of manhunt with the neighborhood kids, or simply sitting up in the limbs of the Copper Beech and listening to people's conversations, unbeknownst to them, as they would stroll down Water Street – this was all a part of our children's daily routine. The tree has provided an ideal viewing spot for the annual old homestead volleyball game that still happens over the Fourth of July. You didn't need to live at 135 Main Street to enjoy the tree either. We have many photos of children from the Old Village climbing the tree branches and finding a perfect perch.

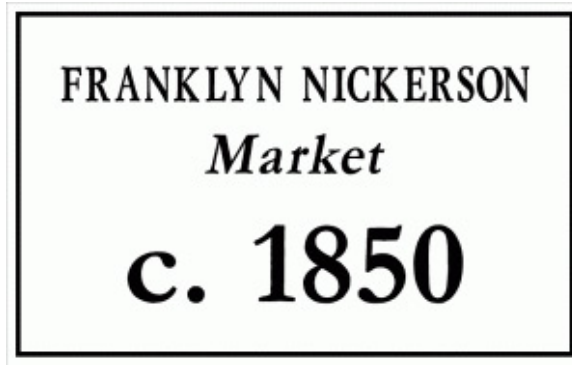


The Phelps and Foley children on their “perfect perch” courtesy the author

The fact that no one has been able to date the tree exactly adds to its mystique, (copper beeches have been known to live for three hundred years), while it endures as a special landmark in the Old Village; the tree’s beauty still gives Old Villagers and visitors pause. The Copper Beech has many stories to tell: several years ago there was even a pop up wedding below the Copper Beech with strangers who had long admired it. From where we sit in our yard, we see the burgundy leaves of the copper beech peeking over the top of our hedge and we enjoy hearing people comment in amazement at the tree’s height and grandeur. Children still climb the outstretched branches, and we hope the Copper Beech will continue to captivate for many years into the future.

In The Old Village

Chatham Historic House Signs - houses 100 years old and over are eligible for signs that highlight the building's early history, as in the example below. Learn more and apply here.



Chatham Walkers Welcomes You!

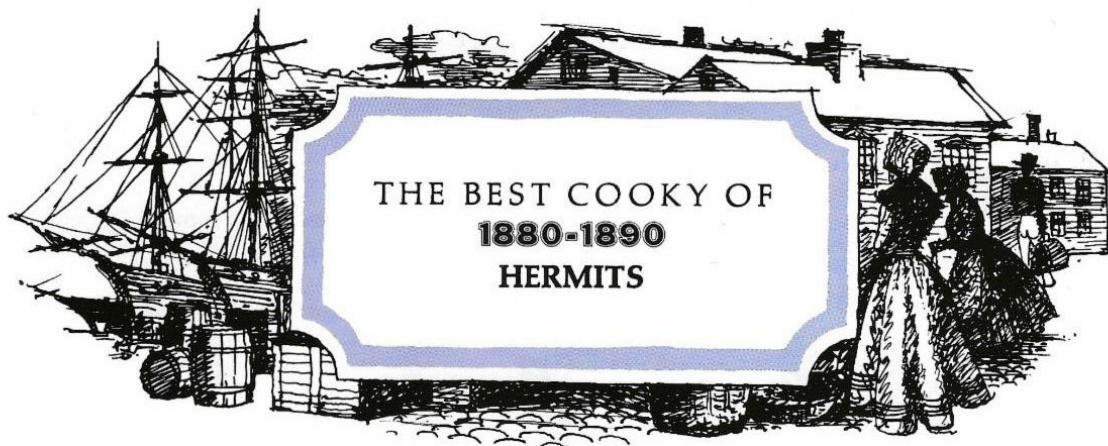
We invite all Old Village residents and visitors to join the Chatham Walkers, motto: "For fun and fitness", for 2-3 mile walks starting at 7am at the Oyster Pond bathing beach parking area on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday mornings. All ages and walking rates are welcome!



photo © EJH 2024

Holiday Recipe

138 BETTY CROCKER'S BEST COOKIES 1880-1890



ONE OF OUR EARLIEST FAVORITES—Rich with spices from the Indies, plump with fruits and nuts, Hermits originated in Cape Cod in Clipper Ship days. They went to sea on many a voyage, packed in canisters and tucked in sea chests.

MINCEMEAT COOKIES

Make Hermits (left)—except omit nuts and add 2 cups well-drained mincemeat to the dough in place of raisins.



HERMITS

Spicy, fruity, satisfying.

1 cup shortening	1 tsp. soda
2 cups brown sugar (packed)	1 tsp. salt
2 eggs	1 tsp. nutmeg
½ cup cold coffee	1 tsp. cinnamon
3½ cups Gold Medal Flour	2½ cups seeded raisins
	1¼ cups broken nuts

Mix shortening, sugar, and eggs thoroughly. Stir in coffee. Measure flour by dipping method (p. 5) or by sifting. Stir dry ingredients together; blend into shortening mixture. Mix in raisins and nuts. Chill dough at least 1 hr.

Heat oven to 400° (mod. hot). Drop rounded teaspoonfuls of dough about 2" apart on lightly greased baking sheet. Bake 8 to 10 min., or until almost no imprint remains when touched lightly in center. *Makes 7 to 8 doz. 2½" cookies.*

Note: *If you use Gold Medal Self-Rising Flour, omit soda and salt.*

NOTES ON NUTMEG

Nutmeg, a popular spice in cooky baking, is one of two spices yielded by the fruit of a certain species of evergreen tree grown in the Molucca Islands. Just under the fruit husk is a red covering that is sun-dried, ground, and sold as the spice, mace. The heart of the fruit is the nutmeg kernel; the larger ones are sold whole, the smaller ones are ground. For freshest flavor, buy whole nutmeg and grate it yourself.

Historical Highlights

- 1880—*Miss Parloa's New Cook Book*, published and distributed with the compliments of Washburn Crosby Company, forerunner of General Mills.
- 1883—Brooklyn Bridge, sometimes called the eighth wonder of the world, opened.
- 1886—The lady with the lamp, Statue of Liberty, dedicated at Bedloe's Island, New York.

HAPPY HOLIDAYS!

Old Village Association

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