

Keeping Our History Alive



© EJH 2020

IN THIS ISSUE

CHATHAM SELECTMAN ~ MONOMOY LIGHTHOUSE ~ KIDS FOR FOOD

FROM THE EDITOR

This issue of our newsletter welcomes a new contributor who takes us on a remarkable journey to Monomoy. Elizabeth Stryewski's fascinating history of Monomoy Lighthouse is the first installment in a series we will publish based on her research for a forthcoming exhibition. We are so grateful to have this trove of stories and images to share with you. Thanks as well to John Whelan for his feature on the Chatham Selectmen, Nancy Koerner and Lisa Green who spearhead Kids For Food, and Joan Horrocks for her uplifting photographs.

Those of us fortunate to be in the Old Village this summer find solace in our daily walks, swims, and boat rides. It is a special pleasure to savor this season's subdued but heartfelt camaraderie, the beauty of our beaches, overgrown paths and cheery gardens, and of course the sense of place our neighborhood's architecture affords us.

Wishing you a safe and happy summer,

Jennifer Longworth
newsletter@oldvillagechatham.org

PRESIDENT'S LETTER

Dear Villagers,

Until Memorial Day Chatham's Main Street was reminiscent of the 1950s and 1960s when , with a few exceptions, shops and restaurants were closed Labor Day and didn't reopen until late in June. I'm happy to see the many families who have returned despite the pandemic and I am pleased that the social distancing and mask wearing guidelines are being taken seriously. It has certainly been a dramatically different June and July with no parade, no band concerts, and no Cape League baseball, but know that town officials consider residents' and visitors' safety of upmost importance.

The board of the OVA has made the following decisions.

Kids for Food: Food will not be collected but financial donations are welcome.

The Porches: Our usual get together is not scheduled. The Avis Chase Cottages are closed.

Annual Meeting: There will be no annual meeting. The slate of officers and directors will be voted on via email or mail.

You will soon receive a letter of explanation concerning these changes.

Please let me know if you have any questions or concerns or suggestions concerning life in the Old Village. I look forward to hearing from you and hope you enjoy the summer of 2020!

Warmly,

Winnie Lear, President

directors@oldvillagechatham.org



A LOOK AT CHATHAM'S SELECTMEN

The Town of Chatham was incorporated in 1712, but even before Chatham officially became a town it had Selectmen. The first three started in 1696, setting a precedent that continues today. Two more were added in 1697. And, of course, Chatham's first Selectman was named William Nickerson. Since the first William, there have been nineteen other Nickersons. In case you were wondering, as I was, there have been sixteen Eldredges, if you count current Selectman Shareen Davis who is married to Ernie Eldredge. Traditional Chatham names dominate the list: Taylor (11), Howes (9), Atkins (8), Smith (7), Doane and Ryder (6 each).

In fact, the first Selectman with a non-traditional Chatham name was Edwin Kidder, who was elected in 1936.

For many years, Chatham had a three-person full-time Select Board. But in 1987, the Town voted to install a professional town manager and go to a five-member, part-time Board. Chatham was a very traditional town and only men could serve until 1950. After then, women ran from time to time, but it was not until Josephine Ives was elected in 1988 that Chatham had a female Select Person. Josephine Ives once told me that the day after her election she drove to the Town Office to be sworn in and was not greeted with open arms by the incumbent Selectmen. Josephine persevered and I believe we have gotten past that today. We have had six women selectmen since, and our current board is made up of Chair Shareen Davis, and four men: Peter Cocolis, Vice Chair, and members Jeffrey Dykens and Dean Nicastro.

The Selectmen are paid a pittance compared to the work they do. In reality they make the important policy decisions for Chatham, and it is the Town Manager's job to carry out these policies as best as possible. Some decisions are very difficult and some are quite controversial. I know we all have opinions on how Chatham should be run and, if you feel strongly enough you should voice that opinion to your representatives, the Selectmen. Of course, if you have really strong feelings and beliefs, perhaps you ought to consider throwing your hat in the ring and running for selectman. Why not? Your opinion is as worthy as anyone else's and the Town of Chatham could benefit from your service.

-John Whelan

History of the Monomoy Lighthouse

I am an avid lighthouse lover and have visited many over the years, but I have always been particularly intrigued, perhaps because of the lack of accessibility, by the Monomoy Point Lighthouse. In order to get the chance to tour it, I signed up several years in a row to join the lighthouse tours led by the Fish and Wildlife Service on Chatham History Weekend but every

year the weather would cancel the initial trip and I couldn't make the reschedule. Finally, last year I was delighted when the weather and schedules aligned and I was able to make it out there.

During the tour Matt Hillman, director of the Monomoy National Wildlife Refuge, asked all participants if they had a skill they could share to help maintain the lighthouse. I jumped at the chance to participate but not having any trade skills, I offered the only thing I could think of that I was capable of doing with any proficiency: I offered to paint the walls. Luckily, I was the only one to volunteer this skill. So last fall, I accompanied a group of professional plumbers, electricians and carpenters, out to the lighthouse and spent a couple of days painting. Our group included James Fortier, Roger Chandler, Bill Starke, Bob Springfield, Joe Geyster, Cory Shannon, and Mike Morgan . In the evenings, after a hard day's work, we would sit around the kitchen table talking about the progress of the refurbishment and I began to realize how little I knew about the lighthouse. Information was scattered, some books were available but many sources often had conflicting information. For instance, when was the lighthouse built? Such a simple question, but some at the table said construction started in 1823, while others had heard it was 1849. I became more curious as time went on. Once all the work was done, Matt and his crew stood admiring the incredible job they had done. I stood appreciating all the freshly painted, white walls but thought how empty they looked.



The work crew getting ready to leave Monomoy after the refurbishment was completed last fall - author photo

I asked Matt if it might be a good idea to hang a presentation of the history of the lighthouse on these walls. He had mentioned earlier that he would like to eventually bring regular tours out to the lighthouse (like the one that had first brought me here during Chatham History Weekend), so this would fit right in. He agreed that something like that might be useful so I set out over this past winter to research the subject and put together a presentation to fill the walls of this wonderful, historic landmark. What an opportunity! As I researched the project I began to see the varied and interesting history not only of the lighthouse but of the island itself. I broadened the scope of the project to include this unique history and I have now completed seven posters, which are going to be installed at the lighthouse soon.



Monomoy's first lighthouse was probably very similar to this one built on Race Point in Provincetown in 1822 -courtesy Chatham Historical Society

First, I will begin with the lighthouse. I mentioned earlier that there seemed to me more than one date for its construction. This mystery was solved when I discovered that there were actually two lighthouses that had been built out on the southern tip of Monomoy. The first one was built in 1823. This keeper's house consisted of a three-room L-shaped brick structure. The light was housed in an iron lantern room, which sat atop a short, octagonal wooden tower on the roof of the house. The tower was accessed using stairs in the dwelling's attic and a scuttle door. The lantern room was 25 feet above sea level and boasted 8 Winslow-Lewis lamps. Each lamp was backed by a 13-inch reflector, and these reflectors were arranged in a circle and fixed, showing a continuous beam that was first illuminated on November 1st, 1823. Winslow Lewis (a native of Wellfleet) had developed this lighting technology and was able to secure a government contract in 1812 to put his lamps in all of our country's lighthouses. He was also contracted to build many of the structures to house them. Funds were inadequate and Lewis did not have experience in architectural design, so the houses were poorly constructed and often too short to allow the beacon to be seen very far offshore.

In addition, the environmental conditions of Monomoy's remote location were particularly challenging. Shifting sands often undermined the structure and the fierce high winds would shake the tower and lantern room, causing the walls to crack and the glass to shatter. Keeper Solomon Doane reported in 1842 that even the walls of the rooms in the keeper's house below were cracking. In the same report, I. P. W. Lewis (Winslow's nephew) recommends that the entire structure be rebuilt. He describes Monomoy as "one of the most important locations on the coast of the United States with thousands of vessels passing annually."



Monomoy Lighthouse circa 1850:
both the tower and dwelling were painted white and bracing
helped stabilize the tower
-courtesy Chatham Historical Society

In 1849 the 40-foot separate tower and keeper's house that stand today replaced the decaying structure. It was thought that the cylindrical shape of the new tower would better withstand the winds and be less likely to be undermined by shifting sands. The lighthouse and keeper's dwelling were continually upgraded and modernized over the years. Vibration continued to be an issue with the tower and to combat this, an inner brick lining was added to the tower in 1857. That same year, the lantern room received a 4th order Fresnel lens. This newly developed technology used glass prisms to focus the light from a single lamp into a beam that was far stronger, and used considerably less oil, than the 8-lamp reflector system. In the 1880s the Lighthouse Commission decided that all lighthouses should have a unique daytime signature so they could be distinguished from one another from the sea during the day. From then on, Monomoy's tower was painted red. In 1884 the lamp was converted from whale oil to kerosene. The whale oil had been stored in the keeper's house or in the base of the tower, but this new fuel was far too volatile to be kept near the lighthouse or living quarters, so a separate brick oil house was built to store the new fuel. Originally, the only source of potable water for the keeper and his family came from what fell from the sky. Gutters channeled rain water from the roof of the house into two brick cisterns in the basement.



Circa 1890: tower upgrades included red paint, guy wires, and a sand fence. Note the gutters used to channel rain water from the roof of the house to the basement cisterns.

-courtesy Chatham Historical Society

In 1890, a well was drilled and a hand pump installed in the kitchen brought in fresh water. It seems unlikely for a remote island location to have an underground source of freshwater. However, rain filters through the sand and comes to rest above the salt water where pockets remain steadily in place and reserves are replenished by subsequent rainfall. Vibration during high winds continued to be an issue for the tower and in 1892 guy wires were installed. The wood burning fireplaces in the keeper's house were replaced with coal stoves in 1899. The coal was stored in the house's basement; the sand surrounding the building is still discolored today by coal that slipped from deliveries.

In 1923 the twin lighthouses in Chatham received far more powerful lights and the lighthouse at Monomoy was no longer needed as an aid to navigation. After 100 years of service, the lighthouse was decommissioned and the light was removed from the tower. The tower and keeper's house were subsequently sold into private hands. Several owners occupied the house and used it as a hunting and fishing lodge through the 1920s and 1930s. Eventually it was abandoned and fell into disrepair until it was purchased by the Audubon Society, and later by the Fish and Wildlife Service.

Today the lighthouse hosts scientists researching the bird populations on the island. Major renovations have been underway and culminated in last year's modernization of the kitchen (complete with an oven and stove), a bathroom (including a shower and hot water) and a house full of white walls ready for a presentation of the island's history!



Monomoy Lighthouse last fall - author photo

My original intention was to include information about the keepers of the Monomoy light. I've been able to find a list of all the keepers and pictures of Asa Jones (keeper from 1875-1886) and John Tuttle (keeper from 1865-1875) but have not found information about any others.

I'm greatly indebted to Sherrie Burson at the Atwood House for her assistance with images for this article. I hope some readers of this article might be a relative of one of the keepers, or may have known a keeper's family and be aware of a story or have a picture they would like to share. If so, I'd love to hear from you!

-Elizabeth Stryjewski



Old Village Association Officers 2019-2020

President: Winnie Lear
Vice President: Debbie Aikman
Treasurer: Nancy Koerner
Clerk: Bill Horrocks

Term ending 2020

Nancy Phelps
Jennifer Longworth
Lisa Edge
George Olmsted

Term ending 2021

Winnie Lear
Carol Pacun
Bill Horrocks

Term ending 2022

Debbie Aikman
Nancy Koerner
David MacAdam
Lisa Green

Village News

KIDS FOR FOOD

It wouldn't be summer in the Old Village without our Annual Food Drive! The 9th Annual Old Village Association Kids for Food Drive to benefit the Chatham Food Pantry WILL GO ON!

Look for more details about this and about event participation soon! Packaged foods are not accepted at this time so we will limit our donations to monetary contributions.

We thank the many enthusiastic kids, parents and neighbors who have helped us make our collections such huge successes in the past. We'll miss seeing all of you this year and hope our modified Drive lets us still enjoy the sense of community that the event has generated in the past. We look forward to being together next year for the 10th Annual Food Drive! In the meantime, stay well and wave your greetings.

Lisa Green tel 617-680-1166 *or* Nancy Koerner tel 508-572-2702

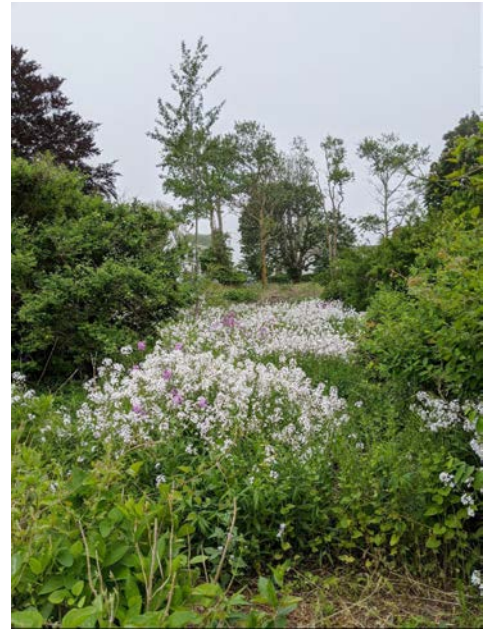


FOLLOW KIDS FOR FOOD!

CALLING ALL AUTHORS

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

If so, please send us your title(s), author name, publisher and date, and where to find the book locally and online. We'll include this on our website's upcoming library page. Please email to: newsletter@oldvillagechatham.org



© EJH 2020

The Cape Abilities Farm Market in Chatham is open for outdoor shopping Wednesday to Sunday 12pm to 4pm, for organic and local fruit and vegetables. Also shop online for all of your farm favorites from locally-raised meat and poultry to ice cream at CapeAbilitiesFarm.org for curbside pickup in Chatham. Online orders must be placed the day before desired pickup.

Like so much else in this time of Covid-19, all meetings and activities of the Chatham Alliance For Preservation and Conservation are suspended until further notice.

For more information please email David MacAdam , OVA representative.



Historical Signs for Pre-1914 Houses Houses 100 years or older are eligible for the white rectangular signs that summarize the early history of pre-1914 buildings, e.g.

Name of first owner - FRANKLYN NICKERSON

Function of building - Market

The date - c. 1850

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. Questions?

Emailhousesignquery@gmail.com

Get better connected! Help us conserve resources and funds by subscribing to our e-newsletters - please email newsletter@oldvillagechatham.org . Your email address will be used only for OVA communications. We welcome new contributors as well!



© EJH 2020

WISHING YOU A SAFE AND HAPPY SUMMER!

Old Village Association
P.O. Box 188 Chatham, MA 02633
newsletter@oldvillagechatham.org
directors@oldvillagechatham.org