



SPRING/SUMMER NEWS
JULY 2026

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Keeping Our History Alive



Chatham Light's Illuminating History *plus* a celebration selection from our archives from the 1600s to the present - Monomoyick Land, Old Village Houses, Historic Preservation Restrictions and Avis Chase's Legacy, Eldredge Garage Memories, *Imagine* - The Little Studio That Art Built

FROM THE EDITOR

In this special time of celebration and reflection on the past 250 years, it seems appropriate to turn to the life and words of John Adams, our 2nd president and an eminent founder of our country. Throughout his life and career as a farmer, lawyer and statesman, Adams lived in every manner of house - homestead, grand official apartments in Europe, a simple five-room farmhouse, the President's House (under construction, just as now) in Washington. These homes however did not seem to occupy much of his attention; instead his writings focus on the people and their activities that swirled in and around them. He avidly recalled a childhood "making

and sailing sailboats... swimming, skating, flying kites and shooting marbles, bat and ball, football ... wrestling and sometimes boxing ... shooting ... and attending frolics and dances among the boys and girls... like a fairy tale". The community of Braintree likely helped foster his deep sense of loyalty, as he said, "Friendship, is one of the distinguishing glories of man From this I expect to receive the chief happiness of my future life." His moral compass was guided by his strong ethics, and his abiding passion for the betterment of humanity. In contemplating how best to structure government he wrote, "There is one thing... that must be attempted and most sacredly observed or we are all undone. There must be decency and respect and veneration ... or we are undone in popular government, this is our only way." Adams and his wife Abigail extended respect to every person in their personal circle as well, no matter their perceived "rank". Their homes hosted political and diplomatic meetings, classes, social gatherings. To me, the measure of any home, no matter it's construction, size or location, is only as useful and good as the people who fill it, just as an elegant, decorative glass or cup realizes its potential when it is filled with a drink that nourishes and refreshes. On that note, let's raise our glass to our country, our community, and most of all, to civility.

Many thanks to Bill Horrocks, Joan Horrocks, David MacAdam, Ann Vick-Westgate, Bob Staae, Elizabeth Stryjewski and John Whelan for their older and new contributions.

Happy Summer!

Jennifer Longworth
newsletter@oldvillagechatham.org

PRESIDENT'S LETTER

Dear Villagers,

I encourage you to take advantage of three membership events this summer. There are two receptions where you will see old friends and meet new neighbors. Our Annual Meeting speaker is Tim Smith, owner of Minglewood Homes, who will share his building and restoration expertise. We always welcome suggestions of how to expand our list of social events - just let us know!

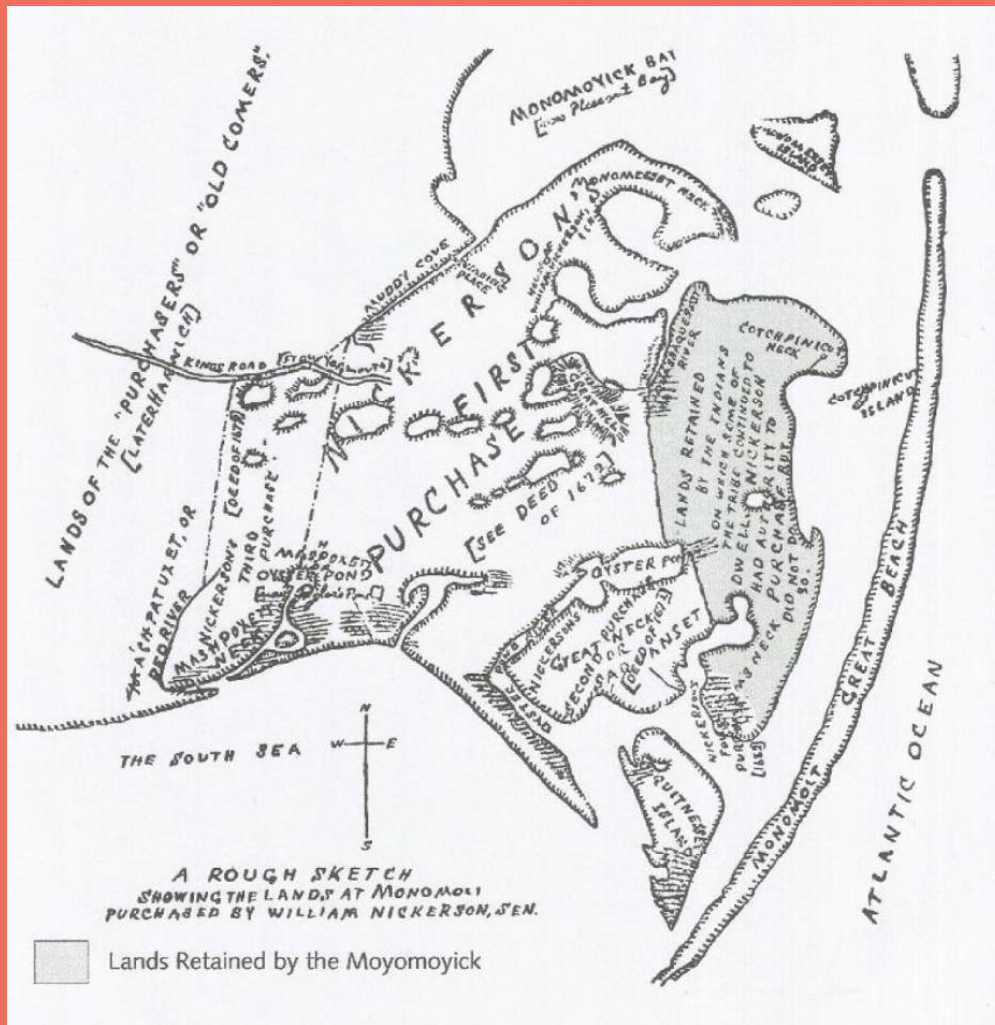
Enjoy this beautiful weather and have a wonderful time in our lovely, historic neighborhood.

Warmly,
Winnie Lear
President, Old Village Association Board of Directors
directors@oldvillagechatham.org

1600s - Indian History in the Old Village

~ **Ann Vick-Westgate**, Author of *Nunavik: Inuit-Controlled Education in Arctic Quebec*,
Univ of Calgary Press, 2002
originally published Fall//Winter 2012

For thousands of years American Indians inhabited the Chatham shore during the warmer months and moved to less exposed areas in winter. The westward movement of the Atlantic beaches eroded or flooded many of the coastal sites. Their dwellings have disappeared but the landscapes, streams and coves where they fished, the hollows that sheltered them, and the places of their burials remain. As European settlement increased, the Monomoyick, a subgroup of the Wampanoag nation, retained Chatham's Atlantic coast from the south shore of the Massachuset River (Frost Fish Creek) to what is now Morris Island for their own homes. In 1698 at least 14 Indian homesteads were located in this part of Chatham (see map below). James Head, the location of the Chatham Light is named for Little James, an Indian from Orleans who married the daughter of sachem John Quason. Tom's Neck, the area from James Head to Quitmesset (Morris Island) is probably named for "Great Tom," a Monomoyick. The Mill Pond, on the western shore of Tom's Neck, was known as Tom's Cove. In 1910, Francis Leavitt James, a Wampanoag from Martha's Vineyard (Aquinnah), transferred from the Gay Head Lifesaving Station to the Monomoy Point Life Saving Station. The family first lived at the Chatham House on Cross Street then moved to a house at the corner of Main and Shore Road and finally to Holway Street. All of these houses are still standing, as is the village school the children attended. The family later bought a house on Stage Harbor Road. One of Francis James' eight children fought in the North African Campaign and at Anzio during the Second World War, one died leading his platoon into battle in France, and one of the three children who became teachers was the first American Indian to graduate from the New England Conservatory of Music. Their children and grandchildren live in Chatham today.



map showing lands retained by the Monomoyick in 1698 including what is now the Old Village (W.C. Smith History of Chatham, Massachusetts, 4th ed., Chatham Historical Society, 1981)

1700s-early 1800s - A Short Look at Old Village History

~ John Whelan

originally published Fall/Winter 2020

The Research Committee of the Chatham Historical Society published six pamphlets on historic Chatham homes. The first pamphlet was dated 1962 and a new one came out each year until 1967. In the opening paragraph, Dorothea D. Allen wrote that most of the homes dated from 1725 to 1825 and that in 1962 there were probably about one hundred of them still standing. Many are on their original sites, but a good number have been moved through the years. Most had undergone renovations and were becoming more difficult to recognize. As you might imagine, a significant number were located in the Old Village. The first style was the “salt box” type, high in front with the roof in back slanting down to a little over six feet off the ground. You can see an old “salt box” in West Chatham on the south side of Route 28 just past Meservey’s gas station. About 1800, that style gave way to larger square homes, built by the wealthier sea captains, and then the Cape Cod house.

There is a description of the development of the traditional Cape Cod house from quarter Cape to full Cape. Each addition along the way added space and more ease of living for the inhabitants. Sheds were prominent on Cape Cod houses and many were developed into kitchens and pantries, and later some became bathrooms. Original Cape Cod houses did not have many closets because most Cape residents had only one or two changes of clothes. Some house featured bowed roofs which were popular with returning sea captains.

The first Old Village home described is The Jesse Gill House on Sunset Lane. The property had been owned by Bassett Jackson and was left to his daughter, Mercy, who was married to Jesse Gill. The original house was a small salt box and was built between 1800 and 1825. The house is now owned by Priscilla Painton and her husband, Andrew Hayward, and won a Preservation Award in 2015.

The other Old Village house in Booklet 1 is on Silver Leaf Avenue and was owned for many years by the Fitz family. This house has been recently renovated and was sold in September. It is known as the Josiah Hardy House and was built about 1825. There were two Josiah Hardys at that time. One was the keeper at Chatham's second set of twin lights and the other was his cousin, also Josiah, and owner of this house. An interesting fact about the Josiah Hardy House was that Mr. Hardy's estate sold the house at auction for \$44 in 1878, which doesn't buy a good lunch for two these days, but in 1878 it went a long way.

The remaining booklets include more Old Village houses. Most are still standing. One exception is the Alpheus Hammond House, formerly of Andrew Harding's Lane. That house, built in 1807, originally belonged to Richard Gould. After a number of sales and additions, the house was purchased by Alpheus Hammond in 1856. The most recent owners were Dr. and Mrs. Elwyn Perry. The house was lost to erosion in about 1989 after the break in North Beach in early 1987.

I encourage you to take a look at the booklets. I believe they will be of interest and will increase your appreciation of the Old Village. The "Houses Built in Chatham" series is available at the Atwood House and at the Eldredge Public Library.



Porches' welcoming verandah

Mid-late 1800s - Preserving the Avis Chase Legacy

~ **Bill Horrocks**

originally published Fall/Winter 2012

The Porches (c. 1858) is the visual centerpiece of the Avis Chase estate, which also includes Pond House (c. 1880) and Mother's House (c. 1858) on Water Street. The Avis Chase legacy enables members of the Avis Chase Women's Association to enjoy a week of Cape Cod's beautiful summer weather and scenery. - Ed.

On March 13, 2010, the Board of Directors of the Young Women's Christian Association of Philadelphia approved having Historic Preservation Restrictions (HPRs) applied to the legacy properties of the late Avis Chase. The preparation, approval process, and filing of the documents for the Water Street properties were overseen by Joan Horrocks, a Director of the Association. The process concluded with the final filing in the Courthouse at Barnstable on May 30, 2012.

An HPR is a document which a property owner can cause to be attached to the deed of a property of architectural or historic merit which will preserve the property in perpetuity from future modifications. Such a restriction document can preserve both buildings and landscapes from future changes except for allowed modifications which are incorporated in the document by the property owner. It can prevent any

future development or subdivision of the property except as specified in the document. A property encumbered by an HPR can be sold or bequeathed, but the new owner is bound by the conditions of the document. In the case of the three Water Street properties, the Chatham Historical Commission as agent for the Town of Chatham, agreed to be the Grantee.



Pond House

The document was reviewed by the Chatham Historical Commission, by the Town Attorney, then approved by the Board of Selectmen and finally by the Massachusetts Historical Commission. The HPR documents are lengthy and detailed (the three above-mentioned documents are about 30 pages each). They are generally prepared by a preservation specialist who is familiar with the applicable law, in the present case, Eric Dray Esq. of Provincetown. Extensive documentation must be included in HPR documents including current photographs and historic photographs when the latter are available. Copies of the deeds to the property must be included along with the Massachusetts Historical Commission Inventory form B which describes the contributing structures in the Historic District. The property owner must also agree in the HPR to maintain the property in good condition and to subscribe to continuous insurance with full replacement coverage against all common perils and to stay current in the payment of real estate taxes.

Many properties in the Old Village of Chatham contain significant examples of 19th century architecture that embody the aesthetics of craftsmanship and setting of the time, and are contributing resources to the Old Village Historic District that were

listed in the State and National Registers of Historic Places in 2001. Most such properties are candidates for HPR protection.



Mother's House - street facing



the seldom seen back of Mother's House

1900s - Memories of Eldredge's Garage 1958-1961

~ **David MacAdam**

originally published Spring/Summer 2017

This past spring saw the demolition of all the buildings of the 100 year old Eldredge Garage complex save the gas station building. There was a time 50 or more years ago when this business thrived, serving the year-round residents and summer visitors of the Old Village and much of Chatham. But in those days Eldredge's (as it was then known) wasn't just a business, it served also as a central meeting place for much of Chatham. When the locals came in, maybe to make a purchase or maybe not, they would stay long enough to spread the news and gossip of the moment, and sometimes stay longer to spin yarns of the previous century. No one ever seemed in a hurry to leave.

During my college years, I worked summers at Eldredge's, for then proprietors Madeline "Mad" and Clement "Clem" Eldredge. The business consisted of gasoline sales, taxi (both local and long distance) and limousine service, tires and repairs (the last remaining set of Model A tools in town), washing, waxing, and storage. Last but not least was a 1950's version of what today might be called a mini-mart, with an old-fashioned Nemasket soda pop cooler by the door and candy, cigarettes, chewing tobacco, you name it, displayed behind a distinctive antique (even for those days), curved glass show case.



"Uncle Zene" and Keith set to watch the 4th of July parade. 1960 courtesy the author

For 45 cents an hour I was kept busy much of the time. However, there were always slow days, and later, evenings, when I got to stand, wide-eyed, listening to the stories of olden times in the Old Village. The stories were of fishing, the sea, ship wrecks, the life savers, farming, commercial activity, and most importantly, about village characters both current and historic - not that those telling these stories weren't themselves characters. There were men like Zenus "Uncle Zene" Kendrick, "Uncle Ben" Eldridge, Luther Edwards (the oldest man I'd ever known), John Caton, Mert Rogers, Ritchie "Captain Paintbrush" Hamilton, Millard "Aunt Milly" Eldredge, Frankie Dill, Robbie Tuttle, Captain Sweeny (one of the few bona fide captains), and countless others. Two would make for a good time. Three would be critical mass and the old stories would pour forth.

In recent years Eldredge's has stood as a derelict reminder of the once living and vibrant Old Village community. For most, the demolition of the physical plant was long anticipated. The truly grievous loss had occurred decades earlier with the disappearance of the extended multi-generational community of working folks from the Old Village and much of central Chatham. They were the ultimate heirs of the old stories of the Old Village, and of Chatham more generally. The old timers who kept these stories alive within the grimy Tydol green walls of the gas station building, were the curators.



The handsome livery stable, image courtesy M. Fairbanks

2000s - The Little Studio That Art Built

~ Bob Staake

originally published Fall/Winter 2014

'Nemo Saltat Sobrius' has never been carved into a quarter board and probably for good reason. I mean, let's face it. Unless you're a Benedictine monk distilling bootleg cognac on some water-logged rock off the coast of Normandy, who the Inferno reads Latin anymore? 'Nobody Dances Sober'—that's the literal English translation—so the idea of subversively emblazoning those three enigmatic words in gold leaf on Main Street for all of Chatham to see sure was tempting. But before carving any quarterboards, my wife Paulette and I had bigger and more crumbling things to deal with -- like a building slightly more dead than Latin itself.

Anyone could see that the little, nasty looking garage on our property was a rotting eyesore, so when we decided in 2003 to make our summer residence (The Old Lumbert Nickerson Sr House c. 1800) in the Old Village our full-time home, we knew we'd have to deal with the building. Living year round in Chatham I would need a place to write and draw anyway, so I proposed leveling the unsalvageable building and in its place design a new structure -- one that wouldn't be one inch bigger than the last-gasping garage's listing, termite-infested wood foundation.

The quaint new building would become my studio, but we wanted our neighbors to feel good about it as well—and appreciate its traditional, understated aesthetics as appropriate within the architectural context of the Historic Old Village. But even as I carefully drew up my modest plans, I could hear the confused back room chatter from all three town boards I'd be subjected to: "He wants to build on the exact same

footprint? You mean he doesn't want a building 4 times the size of the old one? Are we sure this washashore isn't completely nutzoid?!"

Artists. Yeah, we're a little crazy, and apparently I'm one of those adaptable creators who can just as easily draw a New Yorker cover, illustrate an article for The Washington Post or write a children's book for Random House in an elbow room-challenged phone booth as I can ensconced within a convalescent home-sized McMansion on Shore Road.

When the bulldozer arrived on that cold day in November of 2006 it only had to sneeze -- and the dusty old garage collapsed. The new building went up in no time, and after 50 years of coaxing dining room tables to double as drawing boards, converting bedrooms into home offices and retrofitting leaky basements as moldy workspaces, I had finally built my dream studio. Best of all, within that modest 12' x 20' footprint I was able to essentially get a three-story building; a first floor work area, attic/loft for storage, a basement nestled into the knoll for everything else—and once I crammed my library of 4000+ books into the studio, there was even a little room for me. Finishing touches were needed here and there, but none more essential in my mind than adding a cupola—that architectural exclamation point that is to a studio as a cherry is to an ice cream sundae. Yet once I discovered the going rate for respectable cupolas, I decided I might as well put that new basement full of power tools to work by designing and building my own cherry. Perched atop the studio and covered by a pyramid hip roof clad in copper, I topped the cupola with an aluminum finial that resembled a giant game board player piece—an odd yet somehow perfect object I stumbled upon when searching the term "weird metal" on Ebay.

But when it came to writing that ideal, witty phrase for the studio's quarterboard, I was at a loss. While I still loved the idea of emblazoning it with a clever Latin phrase in gold leaf, how many passersby would be able to translate it? I even considered using "Si Hoc Legere Scis Nimium Eruditionis Habes" ("If You Can Read This You're Overeducated"), but when your wood carver charges you by the letter, an inside joke like that quickly becomes surprisingly pricey. At the end of the day, I chose a single word that seemed to work on a few levels: It alluded to what the guy within the little cupola-topped building did in there all day, it quietly alluded to the poetic mystique of the Old Village itself, and a wooden sign comprised of a mere seven letters never broke anyone's bank.



photo courtesy the author

Years later, rarely a day goes by in which I don't spy a pair of tourists strolling along Main Street to the Lighthouse only to suddenly stop to snap a picture of the building, and in a neighborhood filled with more than its share of awe-inspiring photo ops, it's nice that they judge the outside of my little studio as camera-worthy. Me, I always seem to be happily inside - drawing, writing, creating - and doing my best to imagine.

An Illuminating History of our Chatham Light

~ Elizabeth Stryjewski

I once spent a summer in the annex of the Hawes House on Water Street, and the best part of staying at the old inn wasn't that I was right on the beach (although that was certainly a close second). The most memorable aspect of my time there happened every night after the sun went down, and the sweep from the lighthouse would come through my window. That double sweep, wait for it, and then another double sweep. Something so silent and comforting that remains with me still. Until recently, I never thought much about the source of that sweep, or that it may have looked different in the past. Further still from my mind was that it might look different in the future.



The old Fresnel lens on the grounds of the Atwood House - courtesy the author



Ascending the watchroom ladder to the turret of the Chatham Lighthouse - courtesy the author

This sweep which enters our old village homes, that we feel is so much a part of Chatham, has had many iterations over the years, and although we think of it as a constant, it is instead continuously changing. When the first twin towers were built in 1808, the people of the Old Village would have seen two lights that did not rotate, just two constant beams, one on each tower. The light itself came from arrays of oil-burning lamps, six in each tower, in front of eight-inch convex reflectors. One Coast Guard report mentions green lenses in front of these flames, so the beam may have originally been green! When the deteriorated wooden towers that housed them had to be removed in 1841, these arrays were installed in new brick towers. They remained there until 1857 when the arrays were replaced by a single lamp inside a 4th order Fresnel lens.

This new configuration concentrated 95% of the light from a single flame into a much brighter beam, significantly reducing the amount of oil that needed to be carried up the towers each night. Although much brighter, residents would still have seen two fixed lights. These lights were transferred to new cast iron towers after erosion of the bluff led to the demise of the brick towers in 1877. It wasn't until 1923 that we first saw the beam sweep across the sea and into our rooms. To accomplish this sweeping effect, a new Fresnel lens was installed in the south tower and was made to rotate. Much like a grandfather clock, the mechanism would be wound, and a

weight would descend, causing the platform the light was sitting on to turn. This was the first time we would see the double flash that we are so familiar with today. This new characteristic negated the need for a second tower, and the north tower was moved to Nauset that same year.



The old lights before deinstallation, and preparing to install the new lighting system
Matt Provost photos

Changes continued to come when in 1939, electricity came to the Lighthouse, and an electric motor replaced the clockwork mechanism. There is still a hole in the floor of the lantern room where the weights and chains supporting them used to descend. Although the Fresnel lens was a significant upgrade to the beam itself, the glass structure was delicate and expensive to maintain. Soot needed to be scrubbed from the prisms daily. Damage was inevitable and repairs costly. In the 1940s, although originally made for airports, aerobeacons began to replace Fresnel lights. These were far less expensive to build, much more durable and easier to maintain. In 1969, Chatham's light was replaced.

The new aerobeacon drums were much larger than the Fresnel lens, so much so that the entire lantern room had to be removed and replaced with a much larger one. I remember my family and I were horrified at the sight of this massive new turret that seemed to make the tower look top-heavy, and saddened that our graceful lantern room and its intricately beautiful Fresnel lens were relegated to the grounds of the Atwood house, to become a relic among other relics. That new aerobeacon eventually became a relic itself and was replaced in 1993 with a model DCB-224, a high-power spotlight. It was this beam that I was watching and waiting for from my room at the Hawes House so many years ago.



The team seats the new lighting system on its post, the new light ready to shine
Matt Provost photos

Things don't remain the same for long, and yet another change is now in our midst. During a recent visit to the station, **Senior Chief Ross Comstock, Officer in Charge - USCG Station Chatham**, informed me that the second aerobeacon, like all innovations before it, has now become obsolete. He put me in touch with Aids to Navigation Team Woods Hole (a federal agency that maintains many of the lighthouse beacons on Cape Cod). Officer in Charge, Chief Petty Officer Matt Provost explained that replacement parts for our deteriorating aerobeacon are now impossible to obtain, and its bulbs need to be changed far too often. As a result, he and the Lighthouse Maintenance Team, Electrician's Mate First Class Petty Officer Ryan Halloran and Second Class Petty Officer Seth Crenshaw have disassembled the old beacons, taking each piece through the small access port in the lantern room floor, down a ladder to the watch room and down the tower stairs.

Once all the pieces were removed, the team installed the new, much smaller, single LED lantern. Our lighthouse has once again received the latest technology, which is more cost effective and easier to maintain than the old machinery. These new LED lights will still revolve and project the same two-sweep characteristic of the beams they are replacing: the double beam that we love so much will still shine into our homes. The only differences are that the new beams will appear whiter than the old yellow/gold incandescent ones and they will not be active during daylight hours, although they will be triggered during inclement weather or fog. Interestingly, the new LED lights and their housing will take up much less room in the turret, even less than the old Fresnel lens did.

Always averse to change, it makes me think of that beautiful old turret on the grounds of the Atwood house and the possibility of it once again gracing the south

tower but with cost efficiency being the instigator of change at the lighthouse, I might be waiting a long time for this particular return to the past!

In The Old Village

OVA Member Events - become a member today! It's easy and quick to join on our [membership page](#).

Monday, July 13, 4-6 pm - Wine, Cheese and Conversation at the Porches, Water Street overlooking the beautiful Mill Pond. Bring your own chair if you wish.



Monday, August 17th, Annual Meeting at the Chatham Beach and Tennis Club
5-6 pm Refreshments and conversation
6-6:45 pm Program and business meeting

Tim Smith, owner of [Minglewood Homes Inc](#), will speak about *Preservation and Restoration of Chatham's Historic Homes*



Monday, August 31, 4-6pm Lawn Party - Keep an eye on your email inbox for member invitations! Event info Lisa Edge 856-795-3286 + Lisa Green 617-680-1166

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](#).

FRANKLYN NICKERSON
Market
c. 1850

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!

Happy Birthday America!



logo © Bob Staake
photography © E. Joan Horrocks

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