

Journal of History of Martha's Vineyard and the Elizabeth Islands



THE DUKES COUNTY INTELLIGENCER

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Warren Chappell's version of Robinson's happy fish (and of three Barn Housers). See page 34.

Artists and Other Free Spirits At Chilmark's Barn House

by ARTHUR R. RAILTON

The Natural Ice Industry On Martha's Vineyard

by CLYDE L. MacKENZIE Jr.

**In Memoriam
Hilda (Norton) Gilluly
1908 -- 1995**

There's no way of knowing how many persons there are who carry in their minds tales of Island history they learned from Hilda Gilluly. They must total in the thousands. For a quarter-century, she was the Society's most faithful and knowledgeable Cooke House guide. When other guides were stumped by a question, they turned to Hilda for the answer.

Hilda knew her Vineyard history. She learned much from books in the Society library, but she had lived it as well. Her father was Edgartown's blacksmith, the famed Orin Norton, whose smithy stood on the corner of Mayhew Lane and Dock Street. In front of the smithy was a row of scalloper's shacks. Nearby was Arnold's Fish Market (later Eldridge's) and the Captain's Diner. Across Mayhew Lane from the smithy were a couple of garages, Sibley's and Colter's, each with a gas pump. Dominating the waterfront was Chadwick's Coal Wharf with scalloper's shacks along its water side.

Being a regular visitor there gave Hilda a headstart on Island history. That's where it was talked over. But she never stopped learning from books as well. And she never stopped sharing what she knew with summer visitors. She knew a story, some true, some fanciful, about nearly every artifact in the old Thomas Cooke House.

For many years, each winter she was a house mother in a women's college. There's no telling how many young women learned to love Vineyard history from her.

A very small woman, she was easily recognized by her red hair, which no doubt was a flaming red when she graduated from Edgartown High School in 1925, the first class to graduate from the new building (now a private home) on School Street. She drove a ancient Volkswagen beetle. Somehow it matched her style: reliable, small and happy.

During World War II she was a night operator in the telephone exchange in the building now housing Edgartown Hardware on Main Street. "You wouldn't believe what we knew back then," she told an interviewer in 1990, something that Ma Bell wouldn't like to have on the record. What she learned wasn't history, but no doubt she filed it with the thousands of historical facts that were carefully organized in her mind.

Although she hadn't been a guide for a few years, many Society members still miss her. In her last working years, she tended the gatehouse and it's hard to walk through it these days without looking to see how Hilda's doing.

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**Editor: Arthur R. Railton
Founding Editor: Gale Huntington (1902-1993)**

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The Society operates The Vineyard Museum on its grounds at School and Cooke Street, Edgartown. The Museum includes the Thomas Cooke House, circa 1765, a house museum of Island history, open from mid-June to mid-September. Also on the grounds are the Francis Foster Gallery, the Capt. Francis Pease House and the Gale Huntington Library of History, open all year, as are the Gay Head Light exhibit with its 1854 Fresnel lens and the Carriage Shed containing boats, wagons, an 1854 Button hand-pumper fire engine and many other examples of Vineyard memorabilia, including the gravestones of Nancy Luce's favorite hens, circa 1860.

All buildings are open free to members. Non-members are charged a nominal entrance fee. Research assistance is provided in the Huntington Library.

You are invited to join the Society. You will receive this journal four times a year with your membership.

Artists and Other Free Spirits At Chilmark's Barn House

by ARTHUR R. RAILTON

IN AN ERA of lavish summer houses with jacuzzis, hot tubs and swimming pools, there survives in Chilmark a pastoral summer place that has changed only slightly since it began in 1919.¹ It is called Barn House, a family cooperative owned by an eclectic group of individuals. The official name, The Chilmark Associates, is used only in legal documents. Members always call it Barn House, without an article: never "the Barn House."

Barn House is truly a family place, welcoming children of all ages. Yet it has no television set. Children must survive without Sesame Street, Ghost Writer, MTV and Saturday morning cartoons. Boom boxes are forbidden. There's no high-fi, not even any radios (except a few clock radios, used, members say, only for wake-up purposes). A single telephone serves all and sometimes there are as many as thirty in residence. Obviously, long-winded telephone conversations are discouraged.²

The central building of the complex is a farmhouse built in the 17th century. The gathering place for members, however, is not the house. It is an old barn a hundred yards away, hence the name.³ The barn is where meals are served and socializing takes place. It has no electricity. There is a huge field-stone fireplace to warm members on damp, foggy Chilmark days. Candles provide illumination as needed.

¹After years of glacial change, this past winter brought many "improvements," including a new bathhouse and a tennis court.

²Such problems may vanish now that cellular phones are here.

³The name Barn House, obvious as it now seems, was not arrived at easily. See *Intelligencer*, August 1990, pp.32-33, for details. Also in same issue see Jonathan Scott's excellent history of the old homestead, pp.12-31.



Barn House as it looked from the barn area about 15 years ago.

Attached to the western end of the barn and accessible through a door is a one-story ell, probably built as an implement shed. It has electric lights, a hot plate, a refrigerator and a water heater.

The barn's original hay mow and animal stalls were removed years ago to create a undivided, high-ceilinged "family" room. It is a comfortable, relaxing place, cooled even on the hottest days by ocean breezes that waft through the mammoth sliding doors on each side of the building. For practical purposes, a few shelves and closets have been added, but it remains a barn, through the huge doors of which for more than a century hay ricks were hauled to be pitched into the mow.

The house is much older, built in 1690 as the homestead of Nathan Skiffe, one of Chilmark's earliest settlers. It has electricity, a concession to good health, as that is where the cooking is done and the food is stored. Meals must be carried 100 yards from kitchen to barn, rain or shine! There are five bedrooms in the house, but its principal room is the huge kitchen with a restaurant-size stove and refrigerators.

Only a few members stay in the house. Most stay in "coops," a name derived from a Barn House tradition that the oldest, which is called "Chicken Coop," was originally a working hen house. But that may be fable. Whether fact or fiction, the description persists. All nine cabins, new and old, are called "coops." They are widely separated over the 40-acre property, giving each the feeling of a Walden Pond



The barn with its large sliding door; shed is no longer open as here.

camp. But they are even more spartan than Thoreau's, intended only for sleeping, reading and resting. Places to escape to, not to live in. Until about ten years ago, none had running water or electricity. Today, all have power (the last to be "modernized" was Hilltop, which was upgraded this past winter). All now have running water, which Barn House founders would consider an unthinkable concession to creature comfort. Two of the coops now have their own toilets and showers (one shower is outdoors). Equally unthinkable! Most residents still must walk to the communal bathhouse near the barn to shower and toilet – a long trudge on a dark, damp Chilmark night.

Alice Doyle, daughter of founding member Valentine Pulsifer, recalls when under every bed there was a potty and each morning members lined up, potties in hand, awaiting their turn to empty them into the bathhouse toilets.

A traditional entertainment each evening is informal group singing in the barn while members wash and wipe the dinner dishes. After the songfest, members usually retire to the coops to read, a major evening recreation. Because of this, coops were wired for electric lights in the early 1960s, shortly after power came to Chilmark.

The cooperative, now 76 years old, is a genuine up-Island institution. It is, no doubt, the oldest and perhaps the only place of its kind on the Vineyard. One can't imagine such an institution in Edgartown or Tisbury. Years ago, Barn House members looked down on folks who preferred those "civilized" spots. A photograph taken in the 1920s and preserved in a Barn House scrapbook is of a man looking very proper in a blazer and necktie. Some member, years ago, wrote under it: "Unidentified. Must be from Edgartown."

Such a place, and such a life style, inevitably attracted "free spirits." There have been (and still are) many among the membership. But even for free spirits, membership isn't free. There is an initiation fee, plus annual dues whether the member vacations there or not. When a member does come (and most do), a per-diem charge is levied to pay for out-of-pocket costs, principally for food and staff. For this, members experience a life style which, some outsiders suggest, is at best a spartan adult summer camp with kids underfoot.

However, the camaraderie and intimacy such an atmosphere generates builds strong friendships and a feeling of family. There's much conversation, much sharing of experiences, during meals and outings, but especially during the hour before dinner when members gather in the barn for libations. Members provide their own spirits (liquid and mental) as they gather in a relaxed, informal fashion that puts more civilized cocktail parties to shame. It's just family fun. Promptly at 7 p.m., in response to a clanging bell, they all sit down at long tables in candlelight to eat family style. There are no decisions to be made, no menus to struggle over. Just eat what's on your plate, as mother used to say! Meals are on a strict schedule: 8 a.m., 1 p.m., and 7 p.m. The clanging of the old bell that hangs outside the kitchen door summons any member still in a coop.⁴

⁴The bell came from a destroyer that sank in the Pacific, donated by member Stan Kenyon.

Barn House photo



This, the oldest coop, was once a working chicken coop. It is where Mike and Sally Robinson stayed while vacationing at Barn House.

This may be vacation, but there are obligations. Members don't merely loll around enjoying the pastoral beauty of the Chilmark moors. They are assigned chores, such as painting, lawn mowing, carpentry and minor repairs. Assignments are based on individual talents. Being "all thumbs" is an advantage at Barn House. Years ago, when life was simpler, they even had communal haying parties, as old photographs attest. During the 1920s, in perhaps the most ambitious project ever undertaken, members erected a water tower to provide water under pressure for the communal shower and toilets. A windmill-driven pump kept the tank filled with well water. No such major engineering projects are undertaken by members these days, but there's still work to be done. Members do all their own housekeeping and must leave their coop clean, ready for the next occupants.

But most labor is done by paid employees: a chore boy and girl, a cook and a cook's helper. Usually, the first two are college students, recruited by academic members. This staff is supervised by a choremaster and a housekeeper, chosen from among the members. For many years, these two unpaid positions were filled by Mary Hopkins and her husband, Larry, both fondly remembered by old-time members. Mary, a strict disciplinarian, took charge of the kitchen, the food buying and the menu. The more easy-

going Larry controlled the finances. His most enjoyable duty was custodian of the "treasure chest," the repository of the liquor supply. One former chore boy recalls that at 5 o'clock each afternoon Larry, with great ceremony, would unlock the chest and, as the contents were poured, would carefully record each member's consumption to be charged for it when leaving. But, one long-time member adds,

Larry Hopkins, a banker, did much more than monitor the booze. He was a close-to-the-vest treasurer for many years. While he took charge of the money, Mary took over operations. An unbeatable combination for maintaining the benevolent dictatorship that kept the place running smoothly and happily for many years.

Since 1919, there have been many chore boys and girls, some of whom became members later. One of the early chore boys was a Hawaiian, who worked for Valentine Pulsifer, Mrs. Doyle's father. He went back to Hawaii and became an important civic leader. Another chore boy who went on to fame was Russel Wright, Harvard student and chore boy in 1922. He became a nationally known designer of china and furniture. One of his tableware designs, according to *Time* magazine, was the "most popular mass-produced china pattern ever sold," totally more than 80 million pieces. For many years, Barn House cupboards contained some of his designs, "obtained through his good offices - at a discount," the scrapbook recorded.⁵

As comes through very clearly in the aging scrapbooks, Barn House never took itself very seriously, despite the fact that providing so many with food and shelter was serious business. Mrs. Lydia Chappell, widow of artist and free-spirit Warren Chappell (and a free spirit herself), remembers it that way. She and Warren became members in 1948. Now a *Member Emerita*, she has not vacationed there for nearly a decade because of a disabling stroke. But she happily recalls the place during what old-timers might call its "golden age":

It wasn't a place for everybody. Certainly not for a pompous,

⁵Russel Wright tableware was not china. It was pottery, far less durable than china. Its simple, graceful lines, especially on the teapot, sugar and creamer, were a breakthrough in modern design.

stuffy person. You had to be able to "rough it," to be willing to surrender some privacy.

Houston Kenyon, whose sister Dorothy is sometimes called the "founding mother," tells of the time in the 1930s when he introduced his bride to the place. He had been vacationing there since 1928 as his sister's guest and loved its laid-back atmosphere. He was concerned about how his bride, Mildred Adams, would take to it. He had reason to worry. Mildred, later to become the New York correspondent for the *London Economist*, found it less than the paradise her husband had claimed. Houston, now 96 years old and no longer able to come to Chilmark, described his bride's reaction:

We were assigned the Hilltop Coop, a lovely spot from which you could see the ocean. But Mildred didn't like it. The coop was tiny, about 8 feet by 12 feet, barely large enough for the beds and a chair or two. And primitive. She stated emphatically, "Never another summer in this place. We've got to have more space."

Eager to continue his Barn House summers, "Houtie" got permission to enlarge Hilltop, the most remote of the coops, hiring a New York architect to draw the plans. It was, no doubt, the first and only time the man was ever commissioned to upgrade a "coop." His design, which some members at the time called a misplaced Standard Oil station, was the butt of many jokes.

The Pulsifer family, including daughters Alice and Harriet, always stayed upstairs in the main house. Pulsifer and his wife, Ethel, had designed and finished the addition of two dormers to the front of the house and the two rooms became "theirs" when they vacationed.

Founding member Dorothy Kenyon built a coop for herself shortly after Barn House opened. It is still called the DK coop. Today, when Stanwood Kenyon, her nephew, comes, he stays there. Other coops carry names of members who contributed to their construction and their family members usually stay in them.

The idea for Barn House (the name came later) was born in 1918 when Dorothy Kenyon, a Manhattan attorney, spent

a weekend in Chilmark as a house guest. It was her first Vineyard visit and she fell in love with the up-Island landscape and life style.

That winter, she persuaded some friends to form a vacation cooperative. The following spring, a "committee" went to Chilmark, to examine available properties. Within a few weeks they purchased what they called the "Mayhew place."⁶ In the next couple of months, the place was quickly refurbished to make it livable (it was in considerable disrepair). Dorothy and others made several trips that spring, their cars loaded with second-hand "camp" furniture.

Then in August 1919, the other founding members visited it for the first time and loved it. Every summer since, members have trekked to Chilmark from various parts of the country to spend their vacations in what some non-romantics might call a by-gone era, living as up-Islanders did in the 1920s, rather than as 1990 vacationers. Until recently, amenities were few. For the first 75 years, at least, time stood still at Barn House.

That old-fashioned life style, plus the natural beauty of the moors, attracted imaginative, sensitive men and women, persons who sought naturalness and simplicity more than creature comforts. Modern-day Thoreaus, one might call them, at least for a few weeks each year. This desire to sample, however briefly, the simple life was a basic requirement, especially in those first years (recently, there has been a slow, but continuous, upgrading of amenities). It's still not a trendy condominium -- not even slightly. But "improvements" have been creeping in. That was not the case in 1971, when Roger Baldwin, founder of the American Civil Liberties Union and a frequent Barn House guest, said this about the place:

. . . [it is] the oldest commune around. . . It has a number of small cottages, most without water or plumbing. . . Most

⁶After the Skiffes, three generations of Mayhews owned the property until 1834 when it was sold to Herman Vincent. The Mayhew name lingered.



Barn House photo

Free-spirited Mike Robinson cavorting in his Barn House persona.

[members] are the children and grandchildren of the founders. . . There haven't been any improvements, not because we couldn't make them, but because nobody wanted them. Whenever there was an idea to modernize or get something new, they'd always say, "No, it's good enough the way it is." . . I've heard some say it's the ultimate in snobbery to live this simple. Maybe it is. It can be attractive when you have the choice.⁷

Although Baldwin spoke as though a dues-paying member, he never was. He was always a guest, until some years before his death when he was given an honorary membership. Lydia Chappell liked Roger, who, she said, had a fine sense of humor. About Mrs. Baldwin, her opinion is different. "He could have been a member," she remarked. "She, never!" The place suited his personality. His wife, a wealthy woman, didn't take to it. Anyway, there was no

⁷Flora Lewis, syndicated column, *The Washington Post*, September 18, 1971.

reason for them to be members, they lived on an estate only a mile or so away.

As one would anticipate, not all the free spirits at Barn House were lawyers like Dorothy (patent lawyer Houtie, by his own admission, is not very humorous). More likely, they were artists with brush or pen. The first and, it turned out, the most famous artist at Barn House was one of its founding members, Boardman Robinson.⁸ In that first year, 1919, he and his wife, Sally, were living in Manhattan, where he was teaching at the Art Students League. A fine-arts student in France and Italy from 1898 to 1904, he had met Sally in Paris. She was a sculpture student at Ecole des Beaux-Arts and later studied under the French master Rodin.

They were married in Paris and in 1904 returned to New York where Mike became art editor of *Vogue* magazine. Being more political than chic, he soon left to become editorial cartoonist on the *New York Morning Telegraph*, later joining *The New York Tribune*. In 1912, he began contributing to *The Masses*, the most radical publication of the period. Max Eastman was its editor and artist John Sloan was art editor. Eastman, who became a Gay Head property owner, said about Robinson:

The art of drawing rarely rose higher in my opinion than in Boardman Robinson's cartoons of this period. If America has pride of culture, they will never be lost.⁹

Famed artist John Sloan, who also taught at the Art Students League, was another Robinson admirer, calling him "a master of creative graphic design."¹⁰

In 1935, many years later, Warren Chappell became an assistant to Robinson at the Colorado Springs Fine Arts

⁸Boardman Robinson (1876-1952) was born in Somerset, Nova Scotia, son of a sea captain. His biography, *Boardman Robinson*, by Albert Christ-Janer, U of Chi., 1946, was designed by his friend and associate, Barn Houser Warren Chappell (1904-1991).

⁹From a Robinson biographical sketch by William P. Starr Jr., summer resident of Gay Head and a Robinson devotee. Much of this account of Robinson is based on research by him and his wife, Suzanne. See *Intelligencer*, May 1995, p.171, for a 1912 Robinson cartoon.

¹⁰Many fine artists of these years were teachers. "I had to teach and do illustrations to pay the rent," John Sloan said. Robinson had the same problem.



Robinson's World War I cartoons were bold, dramatic and anti-war.

Center. He assessed Boardman's influence on the editorial cartoon:

Both as a pictorial reporter and as a political cartoonist, he changed the face of American newspaper drawing. He was, perhaps, the first American illustrator to believe strongly that any drawing is to be dealt with as a composition just as seriously as a painting is.¹¹

When World War I broke out in 1914, Boardman was sent by *Metropolitan* magazine to the Balkans and Russia

¹¹*Pikes Peak Vision: The Broadmoor Art Academy, 1919-1945*, Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center, CO, 1989, p.54. Before Robinson, political cartoons had been primitively drawn and dependent upon balloons filled with words to make the point. Robinson drew them as an artist, not a cartoonist.

with radical journalist John Reed to report on the fighting.¹² After the report was published, Mike began working for Max Eastman full-time. When the United States entered the war in 1917, the U.S. Postal Service declared *The Masses* in violation of the Espionage Act because it opposed America's involvement. The magazine was banned from the mails, a death blow.¹³ When it was discontinued, Eastman became editor of *The Liberator*, another left-wing magazine, and Robinson began drawing for it. Crystal Eastman, Max's sister, was an editor on *The Liberator* and vacationed at Barn House as Mike's guest several times during the 1920s. A strong feminist and free spirit, she enthusiastically took part in Barn House frolics.

How it was that Boardman, who drew powerful editorial cartoons for those openly Communistic publications, was accepted as a founding member of Barn House is not recorded. Probably it was through friendship with Dorothy Kenyon, a strong feminist and one of a handful of female lawyers in Manhattan. She may have been eager to mix some non-establishment ideas into what was clearly developing into her summer "house party." Robinson certainly was not "establishment." The rest of the Kenyon family was. Dorothy's father was founder of a Wall Street law firm in which her brothers, Houston and Theodore, were partners.¹⁴

Robinson's anti-capitalist and pro-union views, having become well known from his *Morning Telegraph* cartoons, must have been an anathema to some Barn House founders. Business executive Valentine Pulsifer, his daughter recalls, was a strong conservative and almost refused to join when he learned Robinson was to be a member. He was sure he wouldn't enjoy vacationing each year, family style, with

¹²Robinson illustrated Reed's book, *The War in Eastern Europe*.

¹³The magazine advocated "free love, divorce, birth control, toleration for homosexuals and sexual satisfaction for women. . . complete racial equality. . . and federal income taxes." It also apparently advocated working for the love of it: artists were not paid for their work. (From monograph by William Starr Jr., 1995.)

¹⁴Stanwood Kenyon, nephew of Houston and a Barn House member, told the author: "We're all a little crazy here. At home, I'm a perfectly conventional fellow, but for some strange reason when I get here, something happens!"



Riding on ox carts over Gay Head moors. Mike's sketch is called "The Great Trek," 1920.

someone he called a "Bolshevik." But the first time the two men met, Alice Doyle states, "they loved each other," and became close friends for the rest of their lives. Stanley King, a very conservative Boston lawyer and later president of Amherst College, was another who must have wondered about Robinson's membership. His wife, Gertrude, an early feminist and poet, was more radical than her husband. She enjoyed dancing and performing in Robinson's theatricals. A regular guest in the early years, Harry Kendall, was also a very conservative "man of means" who, like any self-respecting capitalist, even owned a yacht. Yet, despite their political differences, they became dear friends.¹⁵

Boardman (often called "Red" for his hair color, not his politics) and Sally stayed in the original coop, Chicken Coop, the one that, as mentioned above, may have once been a hen house. Alice Doyle, then a child, "adored Mike,"

¹⁵Many sidelights about Barn House members were kindly provided by Houston Kenyon and Alice Pulsifer Doyle during telephone conversations with the author.



More of Mike's fun, showing Barn Housers driving across the field.

she recalls. When a theatrical was to be organized, and they often were, Mike could be counted on to put one together quickly. Sally, like her husband, was a free spirit who enlivened many evenings with her interpretive dancing. These theatricals were usually staged in the Barn, the group's family room, but sometimes on the beach.

Barn House owned a stretch of beach to the east, which members called "Vincent Cliffs beach." However, they preferred to use a beach owned by Lucy Vincent, which was closer. Every year, a member recalls, a ceremonial visit was made by the Trustees to Miss Lucy, requesting permission to use her beach. Each year, she graciously granted it and it became, in effect, a private beach for Barn House members.

To get to it, members walked across a pasture owned by Roger Allen, their neighbor to the east and caretaker of Barn House in the off-season. After crossing his land, the path went through a bog which was often so wet that a



Tom Benton, left, and Boardman Robinson at "Vincent Cliffs" beach.

crude walkway was assembled from driftwood and planks for members to walk over. In later years, a more stable set of "bog boards" was built. The path then reached higher ground atop a cliff so steep that wooden steps, almost a ladder, were needed to get to the beach.

Ralph Brown, a long-time member, recalls an interesting sidelight about the path and the beach:

Barn House used to have a mailbox that was painted blue and stood next to our path across Roger Allen's pasture. As a result, the beach we used came to be known as the "Blue Mailbox beach." It was mentioned by that name in a *New Yorker* magazine profile of the head of the Metropolitan Museum, then an Edgartown summer person.¹⁶

The blue mailbox address became so well known that strangers began using the path to the beach. Shortly, according to Alice Doyle, the box was removed. The beach was becoming too public.

The theatricals performed on the beach were, as befitted the setting, light-hearted and frivolous. Although they were often scripted by "Bolshevik" Mike Robinson, they carried no heavy political treatises, no serious messages. Almost every member played a part. It was humorous family entertainment.

Robinson may have been a carefree playwright at Barn

¹⁶Information provided by Ralph Brown, courtesy John Herzan. Much later, the beach and adjacent land were purchased by Robert MacNamara who generously transferred part of it (with some restrictions) to the town of Chilmark. Today it is part of Lucy Vincent Beach.

House, but his professional art was not frivolous. His cartoons were usually powerful, depressing statements about injustice, drawn with bold strokes and somber tones. In the 1930s, when he began painting murals, there was nothing in them to suggest his free-spirited side. Murals were used to carry the "heavy" messages of history. A major Boardman work, entitled "History of Commerce," was in preparation while he "vacationed" at Barn House. It was for the Kaufmann department store in Pittsburgh. He rented the Mayhew barn next door to Barn House to use as his studio. The mural, consisting of a number of panels, was awarded a gold medal by the Architectural League of New York. Other famous Robinson murals are in the RKO building and Rockefeller Center in New York. Perhaps the best known is an 18-panel mural in the Department of Justice Building in Washington:

[At Justice] in his own forceful style he depicted the great law makers of history, from Constantine through Moses, Menes, Hammurabi, Christ and others down to Oliver Wendell Holmes. Besides this he . . . completed perhaps his best job of book illustrations, *Spoon River Anthology*. Three of his great limited editions included *King Lear*, *The Brothers Karamazoff* and *Moby-Dick*.¹⁷

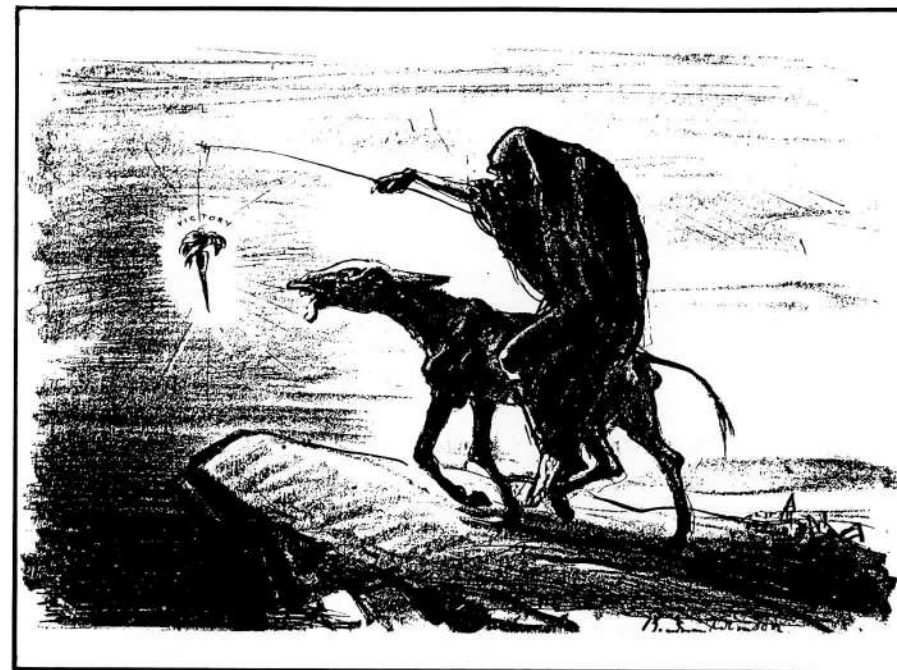
George Biddle, who, along with other fine American artists, assisted Robinson in some work on the Justice Department mural, wrote of Mike's accomplishments:

These murals rather than the mass of his black-and-white will be considered his finest creation. The mural theme, though restrained in dramatic episode, offers this warm student of humanity the occasion to show himself great.¹⁸

Robinson was "the first to break with the mythological subjects of the *Beaux Arts* school, traditionally considered the only ones suitable for public buildings," according to Laurence B. Field. In this regard, Mike led the way for Tom Benton. They had much in common. Martha Cheney wrote:

¹⁷ Archie Musick, *Musick Medley, Intimate Memories of a Rocky Mountain Art Colony*, Creative Press, Colorado Springs, 1971, pp.77-8. Musick places the mural in the RKO building. Suzanne Starr thinks it may have been in the Radio City Music Hall.

¹⁸ From Robinson biographical sketch by William Starr Jr.



Robinson's anti-war cartoons, like this, helped get The Masses banned from the mails.

The painting of Boardman Robinson and the propagandizing of Thomas Hart Benton were outstanding in keeping the subject [of mural painting] forward until the Federal Government produced its [New Deal art] program.¹⁹

Robinson was by this time in Colorado Springs (they had moved there partly for Sally's health) where he was art instructor at Fountain Valley School for Boys. In that healthy, but conservative, climate, he may have mellowed politically, but he continued to act the part of an East-coast radical. Former Fountain student Terry Golden described his appearance:

Robinson had a fine, big beard of a non-descript straw color, though I think maybe it had once been red. It jutted defiantly forth from his rather massive head, which still had enough

¹⁹ George Biddle, Mike's sometime associate, wrote to President Roosevelt, a former Harvard classmate, urging him to increase the appropriation of every building PWA put up by one percent to pay for murals. The handwritten letter begins, "Dear Franklin." (From conversation with the Starrs.)

hair on top to spray out in several directions. . . Back in those days beards were rare. . . Anyone with a beard was apt to be viewed with suspicion – probably a Commie, or an anarchist, or some other sort of subversive radical, or at best, a crackpot. . . [Robinson] radiated a confident, strong, authoritative presence. His friends called him Mike. The boys at Fountain Valley School referred to him as Beardy Boardy.²⁰

But that was not how he looked ten years earlier during his first Barn House summer. In photographs that year, 1919, his beard is shorter and neater. Even in yellowed snapshots, he radiates a freedom of spirit, as does his wife, Sally. That August 1919, a theatrical, probably staged on the beach, honored the Trustees of the new Chilmark Associates:

Adam [Haskell] and Gertrude [King] were enthroned as Turk and Lady of the Harem. Val [Pulsifer] and Michael [Robinson] figured as pirates; Sally as a sea nymph with seaweed trimmings. Ethel [Pulsifer] was attired in black mosquito netting, very fetching. Stanley [King] and Nattie [Haskell] wore clowns' costumes. Cliff also was dressed as a clown, a very black and white one. Dorothy Brown was present in a Japanese costume, Margaret ditto.²¹

That theatrical, like many others, contained clues to a charade. It took place in an inn, with much violence. The charade's solution, it is recorded, was "Robinson." The cast was large, the audience small:

Sally danced delightfully, scattering seaweed by the way. A deputation of the Besse family were Audience. Doughnuts after the performance were not the least pleasant feature of the evening.

The delightful dancer, "scattering seaweed by the way," was Mrs. Robinson, who is remembered by a member as being "rather flighty" -- a free spirit. Whatever the theatrical, there was always a spot in it for Sally's dancing.

Each year, the theatricals seemed to grow more light-

²⁰Recollection of Boardman Robinson, Terry Golden, from Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. Copy provided by Suzanne Starr of Colorado Springs and Gay Head.

²¹Clown Stanley, a Boston lawyer, later became President of Amherst College. Gertrude, Lady of the Harem, was his wife. Mike's nickname was given him by his wife because of his admiration for Michelangelo. Occasionally, he was called Michael.



Mike's drawing of their beach dramatizes its steep cliffs and shoreline.

hearted. Robinson reveled in the fresh air and crashing waves at the beach. Splashing in the ocean, he freed himself from his angry, down-with-the-capitalists mood. Years later, at Fountain Valley School, Mike and Sally were still producing theatricals, but these were more serious. It was a school for young boys who came to be educated, not entertained. Student Golden recalled:

Fountain Valley put on a lot of theatrical and musical productions, many of them remarkably good. The Robinsons were very much a part of the process. There were on-going heated debates between Robinson, Alec Campbell, the English teacher, and Ernest Kitson, the music teacher. Robinson involved his art students in the design and construction of the sets.

In 1920, the cooperative's second year, members attended something described in a scrapbook only as "Social Function at Mrs. Brug's." Mrs. Ella Brug ran a summer rooming house on Boston Hill, a few miles west of Barn House. She also rented a remodeled barn and a bungalow. In addition, she operated an occasional "restaurant," serving meals to parties upon request. The scrapbook description, written by member Natalie S.

Haskell, begins mysteriously: "List of sufferers (so to speak) attending above party." Mrs. Haskell names the "sufferers":

Boardman Robinson in his best crash Norfolk suit and red necktie made great hit among the young artists and women.

Sally Robinson – in best society form.

Gertrude King – the backbone of the party.

Ethel Pulsifer – chauffeur.

Natalie Haskell – general utility in conversation.

Luce's peach ice-cream was served. Also Mrs. Brug's tenants of barn and bungalow.²²

Stanley King, our shiniest social light and easy flow-er of talk had to be absent in Oak Bluffs getting his son's infected toe fixed.²³

"Mrs. Brug's tenants" and the "young artists and women" being charmed by Robinson included Tom Benton and his student, Rita Piacenza, the future Mrs. Benton. The scrap book entry seems to suggest that Benton, a struggling Manhattan artist, was not acquainted with the Barn House members. At least, his name was not listed in the scrapbook account, as though Mrs. Haskell did not consider him important. If that was the first time Mike and Tom met, it was the start of a long-time relationship. Also at the "social event" was another of Mrs. Brug's tenants, Benton's best friend, Tom Craven, later to become a well-known New York art critic and Vineyard summer resident.

At the time, Mike was an instructor in the Art Students League in New York. Five years later, with Mike's recommendation, Benton joined the faculty at the League as an instructor at \$110 a month, a salary he considered magnificent. He and Rita had just had their first child, son T.P., and the increased income eased their financial worries. In a tribute to Mike, after his death, Benton wrote:

²²Luce's ice cream was the Island's best, made in Luce's Candy Shop in Vineyard Haven, which also made fine chocolates. It advertised its ice cream as "Packed for all Occasions," an important factor when it had to be carried to Chilmark.

²³It had been a hectic week for the Boston lawyer. His car had been wrecked a few days before: "A high powered automobile owned by Stanley King came to grief last Monday afternoon on the Smith Road near the home of Capt. Stephen Flanders. The axle was damaged and the windshield was completely wrecked. The repair men from Renear's garage towed the damaged car to the garage Tuesday for repairs." *The Vineyard News*, August 5, 1920.

... he had a rare kind of ability to keep his students enthusiastic, and he could help them strengthen their will to use this enthusiasm.²⁴

Student Golden, quoted earlier, remembered his classes at Fountain Valley this way:

Robinson's art classes were fun. His style was quick, bold, sweeping brush strokes rather than a lot of fiddle diddle detail.

Boardman had been teaching in Colorado Springs since 1930 at the Fountain Valley School, under the sponsorship of a school benefactor, the wealthy Mrs. Elizabeth Sage Hare. She was a strong supporter of his and soon was able to have him named director of the reorganized Broadmoor Art Academy (where she was also a financial benefactor). Her boldness in pushing for Mike's appointment was praised by Archie Musick, a Robinson associate:

Putting Robinson in charge was a revolutionary step. Anyone in a lower social bracket than she would probably have been branded communist. . . His first resolve was to take the preciousness out of art and make it an honest trade. . . No more fat salaries for instructors, no more fabulous prices on paintings. The depression was on and everyone should put his shoulder to the wheel for the love of art.²⁵

When the Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center was opened in 1934 (again Mrs. Hare was one of the financial backers), Robinson was appointed director of its art school. Warren Chappell, then in New York, had admired Robinson's artistry as far back as 1915 when his illustrations of the Balkan trip with Jack Reed were published in *Metropolitan* magazine. Learning of a school at the planned Arts Center, Warren wrote to Robinson, asking for a chance to work under him. Mike hired him in 1935, the year it opened, to teach graphic arts and lithography and to be his assistant at the school. Chappell described the position:

In the fall of 1934 [Mike] visited me in New York, told me

²⁴Benton, at the time of Mrs. Brug's social, was teaching at the Chelsea Neighborhood Association where he had met Rita, one of his students. See *Intelligencer*, November 1989 for details.

²⁵Musick, p.46.

about the new Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center that was being built and asked me to come and join him there. When we started west in the spring of 1935 it missed only a few months of being twenty years since I had first been awakened by those illustrations in the *Metropolitan*. I felt that I was finally on the eve of completing my apprenticeship.²⁶

At Colorado, the two artists became good friends, although the Chappells were only there for a year or two. Warren admired Robinson for more than his artistry. He was "the most literate man that I've known and I've known a lot of writers," Warren told Louis M. Starr.²⁷ Despite being in distant Colorado Springs, Mike and Sally were still vacationing at Barn House and one year they invited Warren and Lydia to be their guests. After a few years as guests, the Chappells were invited to become members (the usual procedure). That was in 1941 and, with the initiation of the Chappells, two more free spirits were added to Barn House.

Free-spirit Warren produced a library of humorous art work and text that has survived, providing valuable insights into the character of Barn House. Pages of the scrapbooks are enlivened with his drawings. Also surviving are his signs and "advisories" in various buildings. To Warren, every happening was an image to be sketched. As his widow, Lydia, told the author,

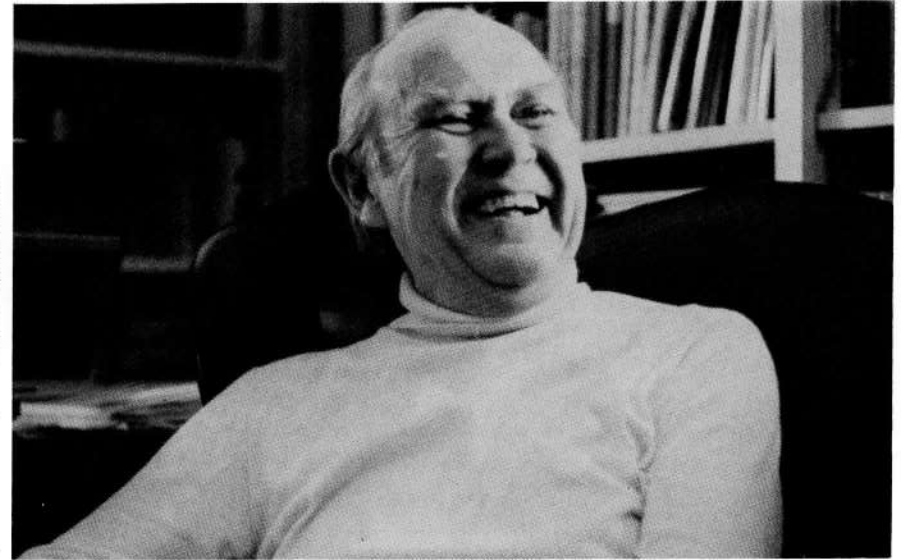
Warren drew as naturally as we breathe. He was always sketching. And he loved words. It was a delight to be around him and there isn't a day goes by that I don't miss him.

By the time he joined Barn House, Chappell had become nationally known as a graphic artist and illustrator. He had been hired by Alfred Knopf the year before as a book designer. He was then named design advisor for The Book of the Month Club. His work brightened scores of books from the country's leading publishers, including such classics as Mark Twain's *Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's*

²⁶Warren Chappell, *Artist and Artificer*, exhibition brochure, U of Va., Charlottesville, 1994, unpag.

²⁷Warren Chappell Interviews by Louis M. Starr, Columbia University Oral History Office, 1977. Quoted in *Pikes Peak Vision*, p.154.

Special Collections, University of Virginia Library.



Warren Chappell enjoyed laughter, a fact that comes through emphatically in this photo.

Court (1942), Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick* (1976), Jonathan Swift's *Tale of a Tub* (1930) and Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones* (1943). With Vineyard summer resident John Updike, he illustrated a number of children's books on music, including *The Magic Flute* (1962) and *The Ring* (1964).

Much of his work was influenced by Lydia's editing and readings. She read to him by the hour while he worked on layouts and sketches:

In the case of Jane Austen, she had read all of Austen to me. . . I knew a hell of a lot about Mark Twain because Lydia had read me *The Mysterious Stranger*. . . *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, *Life on the Mississippi*, *Tom Sawyer*, *Huckleberry Finn*. . . You can't imagine the difference between hearing a novel and seeing it.²⁸

Warren was also an author, writing a number of books on typography: *The Anatomy of Lettering* (1935), *A Short History of the Printed Word* (1970) and *The Living Alphabet* (1975). He designed two typefaces, *Lydian* (named for his wife) and *Trajanus*.

²⁸Warren Chappell, *Artist and Artificer*, unpag.

Chappell's typography was featured in hundreds of magazines and books. He designed scores of movie and television titles. Lydia told the author that she keeps recognizing his work on television reruns. Such an array of accomplishments makes Warren seem more work-oriented, more of a drudge, than he was at Barn House. According to "Houtie" Kenyon, then elder statesman of the place, Warren was the group's leading humorist, as well as an artist. He was always able to come up with a remark, a sketch or a sign that brought smiles.

That part of his personality is vividly exposed in three charming volumes of nonsense that he and Lydia created during their first years at Barn House. Each is beautifully illustrated and bound, with the text hand-lettered by Warren. The publication run was one copy per edition, the original. Each is a delightful souvenir of a man who clearly was a joy to be with. Their titles are *Chilmark's ABC's* (1938), *Chilmark Primer* (1939) and *A Chilmark Miscellany* (1940). (See pp. 28-29.)

These two artists, Boardman Robinson and Warren Chappell, were certainly among the freest of Barn House's spirits. Neither is alive today. Robinson died in 1952 in Stamford, Connecticut, and Chappell in 1991 in Charlottesville, Virginia.

Because Barn House, for reasons of its own, shunned all publicity, many stories were told in Chilmark about what went on there, especially in the early years. After all, in the 1920s, such summer people were expected to be "proper." They were considered "upper class," not ordinary vacationers who roamed Circuit Avenue at the Bluffs, munching on Darling's popcorn. The secrecy that surrounded Barn House caused many local residents to imagine they must be hiding something. Who were those folks who formed a group, who lived together in crude sheds with no running water? They must be Communists, living promiscuously, holding wild beach parties. Because they used a private beach, far from

those used by others, the word spread that they bathed in the nude. Today, nude beaches are of little note, but back then, the idea was shocking.

There was little or no nude bathing, despite the stories. Among the very young, surely, but for adults it was only occasional at most. At an appropriate time, some free spirit like Mike might go skinny dipping, but there was no parading up and down the beach in the raw, such as on nude beaches today. It was a more prudish era, even for skinny dipping. Except for a few members like Robinson, Barn Housers were conservative, dyed-in-the-wool Republicans. They loved good, clean, wholesome fun, but nudity? Never.²⁹

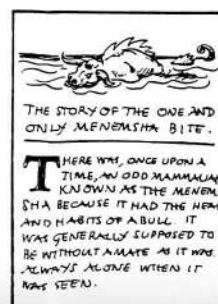
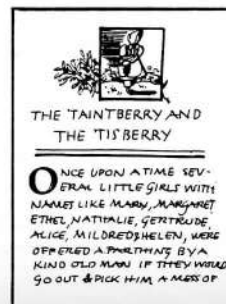
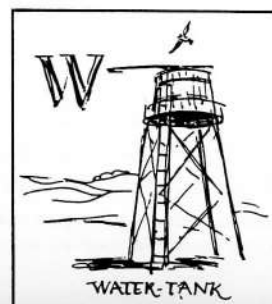
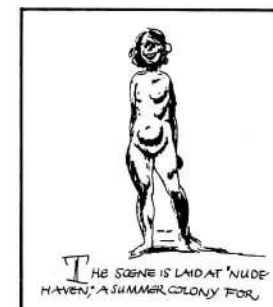
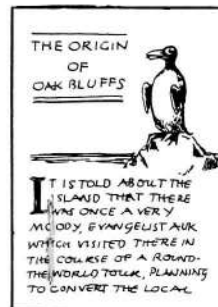
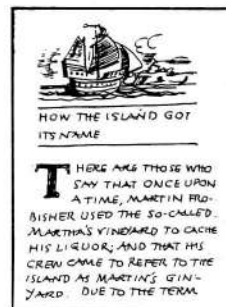
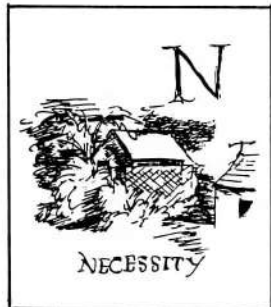
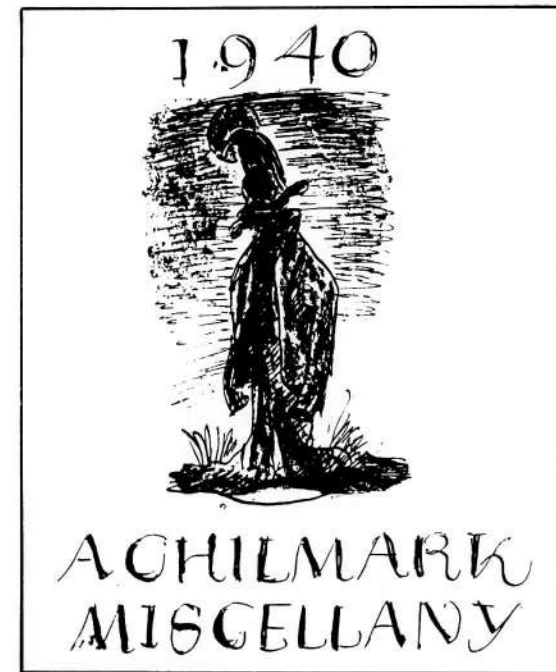
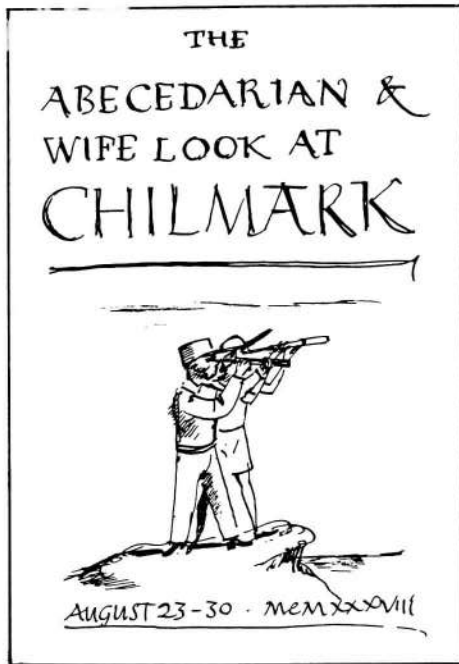
Barn House no longer owns its oceanfront land, having sold it in 1988. The proceeds from the sale were used to buy a house and land in Gay Head on Menemsha Pond with a shallow, safe beach, more suitable for children than the waves at Lucy Vincent. Recently, much of that pond property was sold and the proceeds used for the major rehabilitation and renovations of Barn House.

Before selling their land at Vincent Cliffs, members had been nervously watching it erode. In July 1934, they were concerned enough to organize a "Committee on the Rate of Retrogression." With tape measure in hand, the committee performed an annual ceremony, plotting the distance from the brow of the cliffs back to a stone gatepost in the pasture. The first measurement showed the distance to be 110 feet 9 inches. By July 1953, about 20 years later, the ocean had washed away so much land that the gatepost was only 16 feet 6 inches from the cliff — a loss of 94 feet 3 inches. After 1953, the measuring was done at irregular intervals, but the erosion steadily continued and the gate post was lost to the waves. In August 1972, Peter Colt Josephs, John C. Warren and Roger Baldwin checked the loss again. The cliff edge had moved back another 100 feet, bringing the total loss to nearly 200 feet during the years from 1934 to 1972.

²⁹Houston Kenyon thinks that there might have been nude bathing at Windy Gates beach, the Baldwin estate. But that, too, may be imaginary, inspired by Mrs. Baldwin's radicalism.

Three Barn House Summers (1938--1940) with Free Spirits Lydia and Warren Chappell

After their first visits as guests at Barn House, the Chappells produced three books, each hand-printed by Warren and edited by Lydia. Here are selections of their delightful nonsense.



Roger Baldwin, signing his name to the 1972 measurement, added: "With the regret that this year seems *final!*"³⁰

Despite its eroding, it was still "the most beautiful beach in the world" according to John Roche, then a Barn House member. Roche, an aide to Presidents Kennedy and Johnson, was professor of politics at Brandeis University and a syndicated columnist. While vacationing at Barn House, he could usually be counted on to mention in his column the idyllic life at "our family cooperative." Here are two examples:

Members include physicians, lawyers, teachers and various other occupations — some of the families have belonged to the cooperative since it was founded in 1919. We all enter into a conspiracy to avoid talking shop, anybody's shop. . . From time to time, a visitor has indiscreetly raised the issue of Watergate only to be greeted with a sort of dead hush, broken by some friend who inquires if anyone has seen the marvelous rubbings that a recent guest obtained from some ancient tombstones in the local graveyard. To put it another way, this is a time to charge batteries. . . We have no TV on the premises. It's up at 7:30 when the bell rings, and usually everybody, loaded down with sun and salt air, hits the sandy sack by 10. In short, a vacation. . . I am the chief re-wirer of lamps and have just reconstructed a couple that must have arrived here with the missionaries who brought Christianity to the Indians. . .

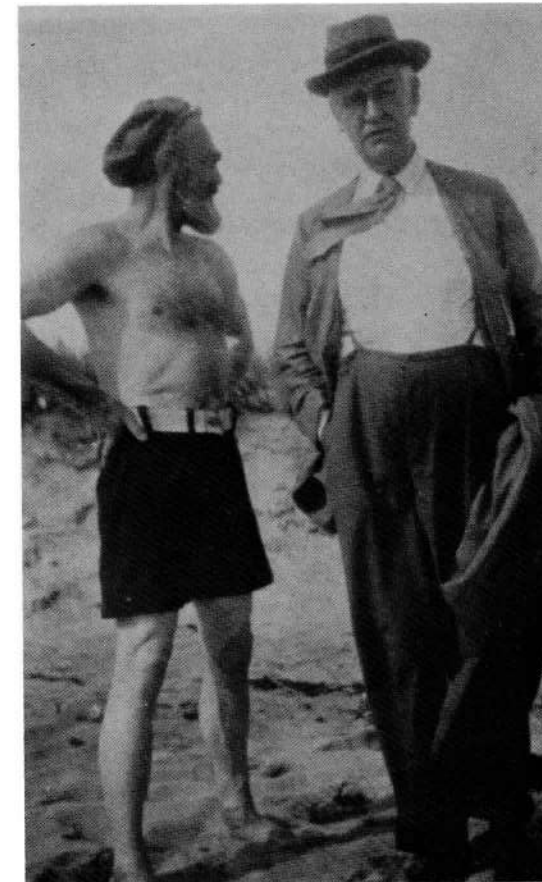
In another column, this one in the summer of 1974, he looked back at a futile campaign to ban jet planes from the Vineyard:

Was it five years ago? Was it seven? . . . somewhere back then we launched a great "No Jets!" crusade. Bumper stickers flourished to such a degree that they became recognition signals all over the country for summer Vineyarders.³¹

Guests at Barn House were often distinguished in their fields. One of Mike Robinson's guests in the 1920s was

³⁰Peter Colt Josephs measured it again in 1976 and in those four years the cliff had eroded another 10 feet.

³¹The sticker read: "Ban the Jets!" The present author had one on his car in New Jersey and one day his wife was challenged by an irate man in a parking lot, demanding to know "What's wrong with the Jets?" meaning the New York football team. (Roche resigned from membership a few years ago due to ill health.)



Mike takes a rather "proper" Graham Wallas to the beach.

Graham Wallas, eminent English political scientist at the University of London and member of the Fabian Society. He advocated government by a group of specially trained persons, none of the "any man can be president" theory for him. Another occasional guest was the very radical Max Eastman, who liked the Vineyard so much that he soon built a house atop a Gay Head hill, becoming one of the town's summer residents. His sister, Crystal, had been the Robinsons' guest at Barn House even earlier, as mentioned.

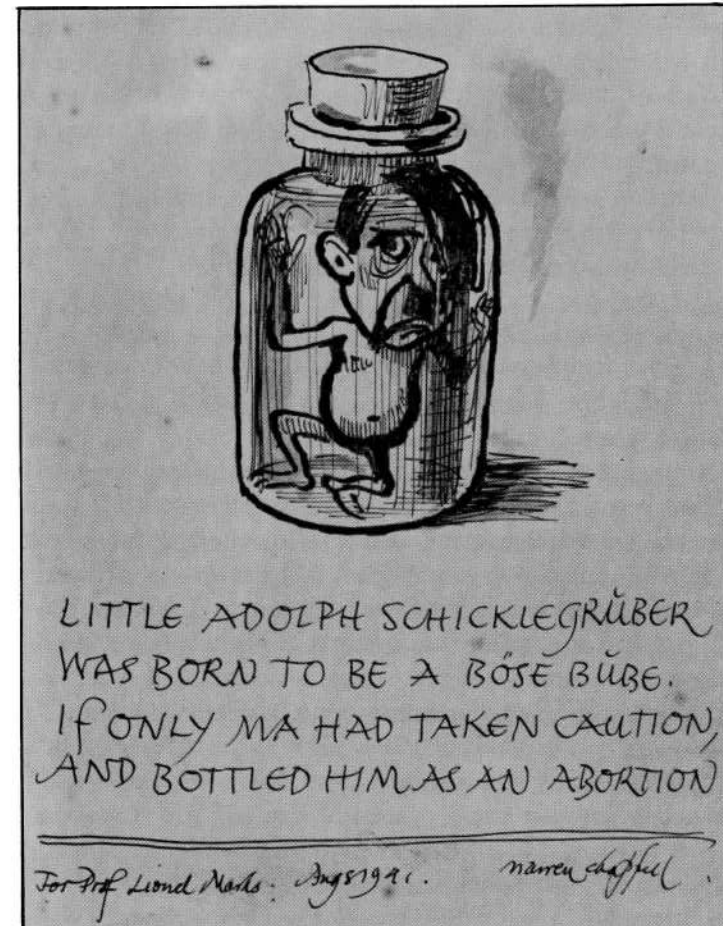
During the 1940s and 1950s Tom and Rita Benton, who had been first exposed to the Barn House spirit at Mrs.

Brug's in 1920, renewed their acquaintance, becoming frequent guests for cocktails and dinner. By this time, Tom had become a well-known artist and he and Rita, like the Baldwins, had their own house in Chilmark, having bought a camp and land from Mrs. Brug. They were never members. It may be that they wouldn't have wanted to, even if asked. Tom enjoyed his privacy. But over cocktails, he and Mike could be counted on to spark the conversation, both having strong opinions about almost everything.

Lydia Chappell remembers the Bentons. "Tom was a little man," she said, "with a big wife. He was interesting, but not as interesting as he thought he was." Rita played to him during the conversation, Lydia added, always making him feel more entertaining than he was.

Of course, there were other members and guests who never reached the free-spirit level of the Robinsons and Chappells.³² But they must have had a touch of it in their makeup or they wouldn't have come to such a place and wouldn't have been accepted by such a group. Long-time member, Prof. Lionel S. Marks of Massachusetts Institute of Technology, author of the highly regarded *Mechanical Engineer's Handbook*, may fit that category. We know little about him, except that his book is called the mechanical engineer's bible. That's hardly a recipe for a free spirit, but he surely must have been sprinkled with some of its seasoning. One guest who, one would think, could never be listed among the ranks of free spirits was the rather pontifical confidant of the world's leaders, political columnist Walter Lippmann. In Barn House photos, he is usually the most "properly" dressed. He and his wife, Faye, were guests at Barn House on more than one occasion. A note in one scrapbook, written by Faye, says: "With our

³²It would be a gross error to leave the impression that Mike Robinson and Warren Chappell were only light-hearted, flighty individuals. That was their Barn House persona, their vacation-time release. In their professional work they were hard workers, intensely serious and highly successful. Among Robinson's students and colleagues at the Fine Arts Center, which he built into one of America's treasures, were such outstanding artists as Jackson Pollock, Tom Benton, Vaclav Vitvyl, Alexander Calder and Doris Lee. Chappell's work and documents are now preserved in a special collection at the Alderman Library, University of Virginia.



Chappell drew this cartoon for member Lionel S. Marks in 1941.

thanks for the best time, with the nicest people, in the nicest place on record!" They, too, must have had, despite Walter's ponderous prose, a strain of free spirit.

All these free spirits who flew around under the rafters at Barn House were doing so in the tradition of founding member Dorothy Kenyon. Soon after being named to a judgeship by New York's Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia, she was appointed to the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women. Never one to let such an important Barn House

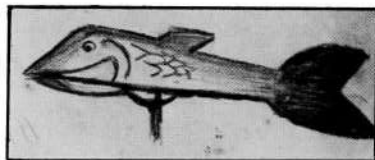
happening pass unnoticed, Warren Chappell wrote of her appointment in *The Key Reporter*, the publication of Phi Beta Kappa (Judge Kenyon was a member of the PBK Senate at the time). Warren illustrated his report with a cartoon entitled "The Flying Judge" and there she was, a winged justice in robes, flying above two Middle Eastern men held in the custody of a veiled woman.

In his humorist manner, Warren wrote:

[Dorothy Kenyon is] bringing equality to the women of the East through her proposal for male harems, or he-rams as they are to be called.

But Judge Kenyon reached her highest level as a free spirit when she did battle with Senator Joe McCarthy after his highly publicized speech in Wheeling, West Virginia. It was there he opened his campaign to expose the "traitors" in the State Department. Waving a sheaf of papers, he told the nation in his sinister fashion: "I have here in my hand a list of 205 persons in the State Department that were known . . . to be members of the Communist Party." Judge Kenyon, perhaps assuming that her name was on the list, testified forcefully in Senate hearings against McCarthy. A Herblock cartoon in *The Washington Post* shows a man coming out of the hearing room carrying a newspaper with the headline "Judge Kenyon testifies against McCarthy." He is passing a coat rack and McCarthy, who is hiding behind it, peeks out between the garments and hisses: "Has she left yet?"

Founder Dorothy had not left. She was still testifying in the tradition of Barn House -- a true free spirit.³³



Robinson proposed this as a symbol for Barn House -- a very happy fish!

³³Brother Houtie was opposed to her testifying. As it turned out she was not included on McCarthy's list.

The Natural Ice Industry On Martha's Vineyard

by CLYDE L. MacKENZIE Jr.

IN THE mid-1800s, the use of natural ice to refrigerate and preserve food was initiated, soon becoming common on Martha's Vineyard and throughout the northern United States. Harvested in mid-winter from the Island's freshwater ponds and stored in special-purpose buildings, ice was sold to homes, hotels and other businesses during the summer. Before ice came into use, food preservation was complex. Meat was preserved by drying or salting, milk had to be made into butter and cheese, fruits and vegetables were dried. "Fresh" vegetables were available only during summer harvesting periods and in places fairly close to the farms. Food spoiled quickly in summer. Putrid meat and sour milk were common. "Without refrigerated transport and storage, the spoilage and contamination of milk, meat, fish and vegetables, particularly during torrid American summers, became a chronic problem."¹ The natural-ice industry changed that drastically.

Early Food Preservation

During summer, Vineyard families kept perishable food such as butter, cream, milk and meat in a bucket at the bottom of their water well where the temperature stayed at about 45 degrees Fahrenheit, if the well was 30-foot deep. Most Vineyard wells were shallower than that, some only eight feet deep, and their summer temperatures were higher, but still cool enough to preserve food for short periods. Up-Island families often used a nearby spring to preserve food. Springs, bringing colder water out of the ground, usually

¹Jack Larkin, *The Reshaping of Everyday Life, 1790-1840*, Harper & Row, N.Y., 1988, p.176.

CLYDE L. MacKENZIE Jr., is a Vineyard native and a frequent contributor to these pages. He has done much research into the history of fishing. The subject of natural ice, important to the fishing industry, was suggested by Basil Welch of West Tisbury.

flowed along a natural trench and into a brook or swamp. By deepening and widening the trench and fitting it with a covered bottomless box, up-Islanders built a "refrigerator" of sorts. Foods placed in the box were kept cool enough by the flowing water to prevent spoilage. There was usually a drinking cup on the box for dipping out refreshing cold water.

Vegetables such as potatoes, carrots, turnips and cabbages were stored in the cooler cellars. Certain foods were dried and hung in attics:

The garret, which was of huge dimensions. . . displayed a labyrinth of dried pumpkins, peaches and apples hung in festoons upon the rafter, amid bunches of summer savory, boneset, fennel, and other herbs.²

During the winter, food, sometimes including meat, was kept chilled in unheated kitchen pantries and also in sheds or attics.

Natural Ice Industry

This changed about 1830 when the use of natural ice to preserve food became common. People were able to add more fresh meat, milk, fruit and vegetables to their diets. Making this possible was the formation of an ice-harvesting "industry" that provided ice at affordable prices. The "industry" depended upon a house-to-house delivery system and mass-produced iceboxes based on the newly discovered refrigeration principles of insulation and air circulation.³

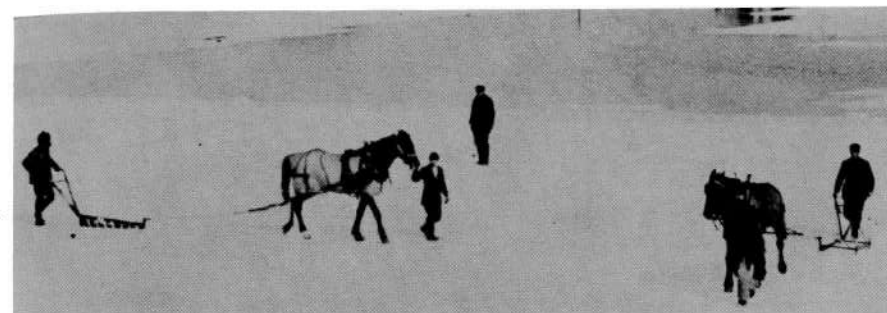
The industry's product was natural ice, the supply of which depended on the severity of the winters. This was particularly the case on the Vineyard where mild winters are common. Such winters produced no ice thick enough to harvest. During cold winters, ice was harvested from many of the small fresh-water ponds on the Island and stored in simple, windowless buildings roughly the shape and size of barns.

Ice harvesting involved several steps: measuring the ice

²Samuel G. Goodrich, *Recollections of a Lifetime*, Arundel, N.Y., 1856, quoted in Jane C. Nylander, *Our Own Snug Fireside*, Yale U. Press, 1994, p.208.

³Joseph J. Jones, *America's Icemen*, Jobeco, Humble, Texas, 1984.

Photo courtesy Basil Welch.



Ernest Pease and crew prepare ice for cutting at Crystal Lake, East Chop, circa 1910.

thickness; preparing the ice by removing snow and debris, especially animal droppings; laying out a grid by marking or grooving the ice to guide the cutters; then cutting, poling, breaking and raising the cakes into the storage house.

Before the ice was placed in the house, its floor was covered with a layer of sawdust or salt hay. The cakes were pushed up a chute into the icehouse where they were carefully stacked in layers. Sawdust sprinkled between the layers prevented the cakes from freezing into one solid block. The sawdust also made it easier to separate the cakes for removal. About a foot of sawdust or salt hay was tamped between the ice and the wooden walls of the icehouse and another thick layer insulated the top of the stack.⁴

The ice business did best in the far northern states such as Maine, especially along the Kennebec River, although other rivers such as the Penobscot were also important. At one time, there were 244 icehouses along the Maine coast. Only twice during the 25 years from 1870 to 1895 did the ice harvest fall below one million tons. In 1880, 1.5 million tons were harvested and in 1890 the harvest hit 3 million tons. During the 3-million-ton year, at least 25,000 men and 1000 horses were employed in the harvest. It was a major employer.

Beginning about May first, three and four-masted ice schooners and barges went up the Maine rivers to be loaded with ice for southern New England as well as for states

⁴Ibid.



Drawing, Scribner's Monthly, 1875, shows early method of cutting ice. farther south. Some even went as far as the Caribbean.⁵ One ice schooner was the *John Touhy*, captained by Henry Stevenson, father of Mrs. Alice Burt of Vineyard Haven. The *John Touhy* picked up ice in Maine, took it to Norfolk, Virginia, unloaded it, put aboard a load of coal to be delivered to Maine. Such trips were made all through the summer. Captain Stevenson never delivered ice to Martha's Vineyard, but others did in summers after mild winters that curtailed the local harvest. According to Edwin Athearn, formerly of the Vineyard, the Maine ice unloaded in Vineyard Haven in the 1920s was at least 15 inches thick, much thicker than the local ice.

Uses of Ice

The first Vineyarders to harvest ice probably were fishermen. Catching codfish and haddock off the south side of the Island with long lines and hand lines, they needed ice to preserve those shipped fresh to Boston and New York City. Ice also was required to keep bait fresh. Island markets needed ice to preserve their fish, but did not use it when delivering fish from door to door, a common method of retailing.

Large quantities of ice were purchased by the 100 or more

⁵William Hutchinson Rowe, *The Maritime History of Maine*, Harpswell Press, Gardiner, Maine, 1948.



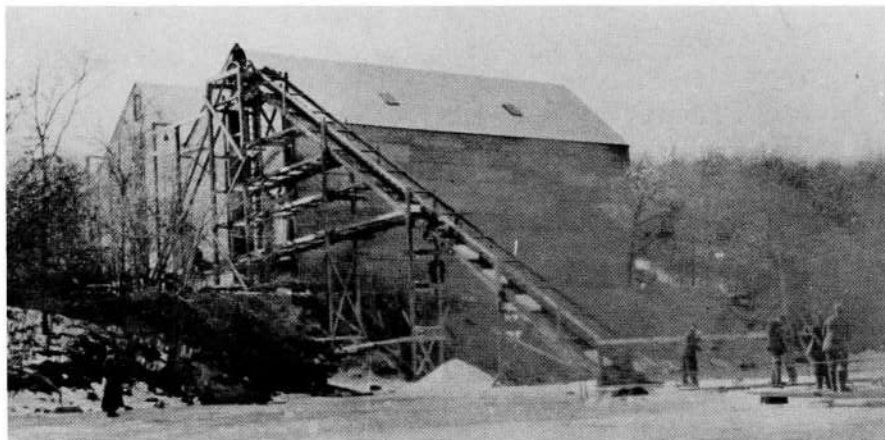
Poling cakes along channel at Old House Pond. Ice close to ice house is last to be cut.

New England schooners fishing on Georges Bank in the 1870s. Though halibut packed in ice would keep well for several weeks, most of the fish were salted in those days. Only the fish caught near the end of each trip were iced and sold as fresh. Each schooner carried about 3 or 4 tons of ice in the winter and 10 or 12 tons in the summer when it was needed to preserve bait as well as the catch.⁶

About mid-1800, iceboxes became common in Vineyard towns, opening a new market for ice. With iceboxes, food could be kept inside the house or on the piazza, much more convenient places than a well or spring. However, if the family lived outside town, delivery was a problem. Many up-Island families, away from the villages, still depended on the cold spring water for refrigeration long after ice had become standard in towns.

Depending on its size and the air temperature, a block of ice could last up to 3 days in an ice box during normal summer weather. The higher the temperature, the faster the ice melted. Some housewives, for economical reasons,

⁶George B. Goode, (Editor) *The Fisheries and Fishery Industries of the United States*, U.S.Gov't. Printing Office, 1887, v.1, pp.123-234.



Ice house at Old House Pond, West Tisbury, as ice cakes are poled onto the conveyor.

wrapped it in newspapers so it would melt more slowly. Of course, slower melting meant that it was cooling the food less, a risky economy during hot weather. Ice deliveries were made daily in the villages. Each ice company provided a cardboard sign to be displayed in a front window, on the porch or on a tree near the road to indicate that ice was needed. The square signs had numbers on the four edges indicating the amount wanted, in pounds or pennies. The housewife placed the card with the appropriate number on top so the iceman did not have to make an extra trip into the house. He would cut the block with an ice pick, weigh it on a spring scale suspended at the rear of his wagon, and with his tongs, sling the ice on his shoulder and carry it into the house. His shoulder and back were protected from the drippings and the cold by a thick rubber apron, the bottom edge of which was hemmed to create a deep pocket which caught the dripping water so as not to wet the kitchen floor.

At many stops, neighborhood boys and girls ran out to the wagon to pick up the ice chips that scattered when the blocks were chopped with the ice pick. They provided a cool treat in the days before ice-cold drinks were common.

Iceboxes

Iceboxes had two levels, each with its own door. In some



View of bottom of conveyor at Old House Pond with ice cakes being carried upward.

boxes the upper door was on the top of the box, in others, it was hinged on the front side like the lower door. The upper compartment held a cake of ice of up to 100 pounds. The lower one, with several shelves, was where the food was kept. Usually, bottles of milk or other beverages were placed in the top with the ice so they would be as cold as possible. The compartments were lined with zinc, slate, porcelain, galvanized metal or wood and their walls insulated with charcoal, cork, flax-straw fiber or mineral wool. The icebox itself was made of oak, pine or ash. Some were very plain, some were ostentatious with elegant brass hardware.

An ice box had no moving parts. It chilled food because the air in the top compartment, being cooler, descended and forced the lower, warmer air up, causing it to pass across the ice. When the warmer air flowed over the ice, it cooled and descended to the lower half of the box, causing a slow, continuous circulation of air. The cooler air took with it heat from the food on the lower level. This efficient thermal circulation continued as long as the door was closed and as long as the ice supply lasted.

As the warm air melted the ice, water dripped down a

pipe into a pan on the floor. The pan was accessible behind a hinged flap and had to be emptied at least once a day to prevent overflowing. To eliminate this emptying chore, many families placed their iceboxes on a shaded porch or cool entryway where a hole could be drilled in the floor beneath the box. A funnel was placed in the hole and the water dripped through it to the ground below. That ingenious system made the icebox "automatic" as far as the housewife was concerned. All it required was ice, which was "automatically" provided by the iceman.⁷

In 1896, an icebox, 25 inches wide, 17 deep and 41 inches high sold for about \$9.50, more than a week's wages for a laborer. In 1915, boxes were selling for \$11.35 to \$21.95, depending on size. The more expensive ones were lined with white enamel or porcelain while the economy models used galvanized iron. All had wire shelves on which to place the food.⁸

Icebox temperatures never were as cold as those in today's refrigerators and some old timers still believe that the food tasted better because of that. Even with an icebox, families purchased only enough meat to last two to three days in summer, because it might spoil after that.

The availability of ice in summer had other advantages. Families made pitchers of lemonade, cooled by chunks of ice. By sprinkling chipped ice with rock salt to speed the melting (and hence lower the temperature), they made ice cream. A memorable treat on a July afternoon!

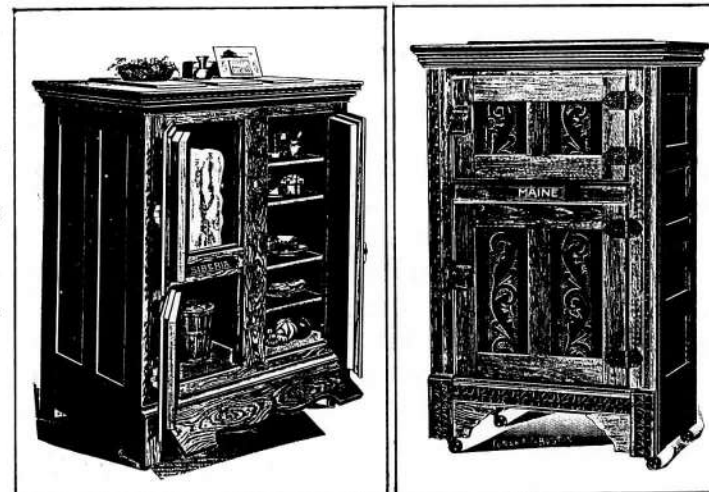
Icehouse Locations and Owners

Ice usually was harvested in February on the Vineyard as it was rarely cold enough before then to make ice that was sufficiently thick. Ponds (with their owners) where ice was harvested included Frank Tilton's Pond (Frank Tilton) in Menemsha; Old House Pond (Harry L. Peakes) in West Tisbury; Fresh Pond, also called Wigglesworth's Pond (Rollo Wigglesworth); Crystal Lake (C.C. Hamblen and Richard

⁷Many suggestive stories were told during these years about intimacies between housewives and icemen.

⁸Jones.

The Maine Manufacturing Co., catalog, courtesy A.M. Norton, Jr.



Two ice boxes used in the early 1900s. The three-door model, left, was for well-to-do families. Two-door versions were the most common.

L.[Buddy] Pease); Ice House Pond (sometimes called Hamblen Pond) (unknown) in Oak Bluffs; Sheriff's Meadow Pond (Louis H. Pease; later, Grace Pease Ward, his daughter); Trapp's Pond (R. E. Norton in the 1870s and early 1880s);⁹ Baylies Pond (William C. Norton and after 1920 Philip Perry and Ralph Taylor); Edgartown Great Pond (Louis H. Pease, W. C. Norton, and in the 1920s and 1930s, P. Perry); and Witch Pond (Sally Jeffers) on Chappaquiddick. At times, ice was also harvested on Uncle Seth's Pond on Lambert's Cove Road. In addition, ice may have been harvested in the early years at James Pond and also at Tashmoo Lake when it was fresh water.

C.C. Hamblen's icehouse at Crystal Lake held 2000 tons of ice¹⁰, while Pease's icehouse at Sheriff's Meadow held 1000 tons of ice.¹¹ The two icehouses belonging to Richard Pease at Crystal Lake were each about 100 feet long, 60 feet wide and 45 feet high.¹² The "Wid" Norton icehouse at Edgartown Great Pond in the "Turkey Land" area, southeast

⁹Vineyard Gazette, October 27, 1882.

¹⁰Gazette, March 29, 1935.

¹¹Gazette, January 5, 1940.

¹²Mark Allen Lovewell, Gazette, August 5, 1983.

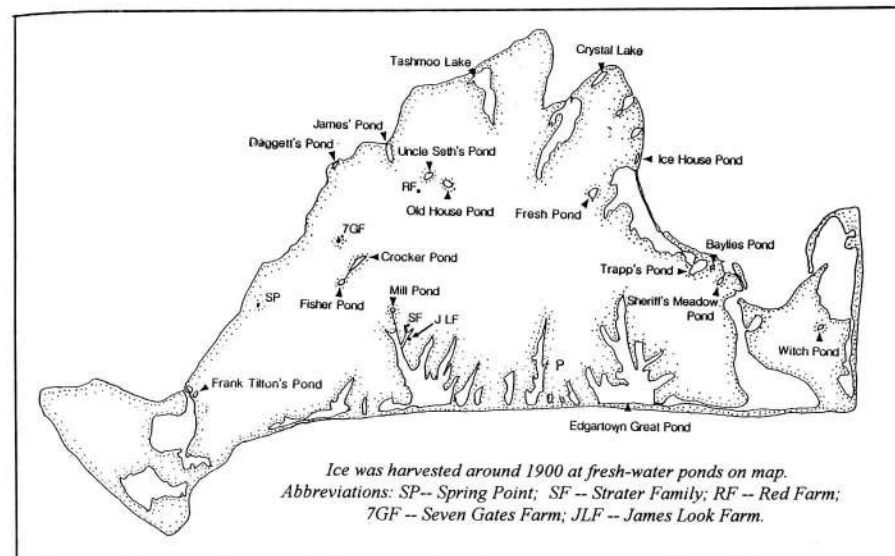
of the present town landing, held 600 tons. His icehouse at Baylies Pond held 200 tons. "Wid" had several small icehouses in Edgartown, including some shacks on Daggett Street, where he stored the ice needed to pack fish for shipment to the mainland, another business he had. He also packed fish in a shack at the Norton family pier at what is now 91 North Water Street, Edgartown.

Some ponds produced clearer, better quality ice than others. Ice merchants advertised "Fine Quality Ice", indicating that some ice was more desirable than others. Some of the best ice was cut on Old House Pond, which was at least 15 feet deep. In shallower ponds during windy winter days, bits of vegetation and silt were stirred up and embedded in the ice. Crystal Lake, which was about 5 feet deep, sometimes produced "dirty" ice. In 1918, C.C. Hamblen, whose Crystal Lake icehouse was built in 1885, had several tons of "dirty" ice stored there in January 1918. He removed it and replaced it with thicker, cleaner ice that formed in February.

Snowfalls were unwelcome to the ice industry. A blanket of snow severely slowed the thickening of ice by insulating it. Without snow cover, the lower the air temperature, the faster ice formed.

Some farms had their own icehouse. Among them were Red Farm owned by William Butler on Lambert's Cove Road, the Flynn farm at Pohogonot,¹³ Seven Gates Farm had two icehouses to supply ice for its large creamery in the early 1900s, and the James Look Farm on Tisbury Great Pond. Smaller farms did not need an icehouse as they delivered their milk to nearby customers on the same day they milked so it was not necessary to chill it, but those with more distant deliveries had to have ice to keep the milk from souring.

Some non-farm homes that had a pond on their property had their own icehouse, especially if they were too far from town to have ice deliveries. Sometimes, two or three families



got together and built a common icehouse. These were small, usually about 15 x 15 feet, but some ranged up to 20 x 24 feet. Such houses were at Crocker Pond, Fisher Pond, Muddy Cove off West Tisbury Pond (where the Strater family in 1910 to 1915 dammed off the end of the cove so it would be fresh water), Mill Pond (where an icehouse was owned by Charlie West around 1900) and the Putam property (now Spring Point).

Frequency of Harvesting

Ice harvests on the Vineyard could not be made every year because some winters the ice was not thick enough. While it had to be at least 7 inches thick to be worth cutting, a thickness of 10 to 12 inches was most desirable. During the years from 1936 to 1942, for example, ice was cut only in 1936, 1940 and 1942.¹⁴ In the late 1800s and early 1900s, after a winter when ice could not be harvested, Island ice companies purchased their supply from Maine in schooner loads, storing it in their icehouses. Profits those years were negligible. Early in the 1900s, manufactured ice became available, shipped from Cape Cod in 300-pound cakes. One

¹³Gazette, February 6, 1908.

¹⁴Gazette, January 5, 1940, February 6, 1942.

such manufacturer was Sam Cahoon of Woods Hole who was in business from 1915 to 1966. The ice was brought to Vineyard Haven on the *Eban A. Thatcher*, Capt. Henry Stevenson. Later its master was Joseph Pinto. The boat was a workhorse, hauling all sorts of freight to the Vineyard, including coal, grain, lumber, calves, bottled gas and hay. During various ferry strikes, it carried automobiles, two at a time. She eventually lost her freight business to the steamboat line and is now an oyster boat in Norwalk, Connecticut.

In mild winters, owners of icehouses anxiously measured the ice every day once it neared minimum thickness. Weather reports were watched religiously to be sure to harvest before a thaw. Once the decision to harvest was made, it was done quickly. The crews often worked from before dawn into the night cutting and storing the ice. Owners provided food and coffee at the ponds so the men would not lose working time. Gasoline lanterns were set up to illuminate the pond after dark.

An account from the *Vineyard Gazette*, February 6, 1908, describes the uncertainty of ice harvesting:

The ice dealers got in their work somewhat this week. Louis H. Pease, who gathered a very large crop last winter and has 160 tons left over, ploughed snow yesterday at Sheriff's Meadow Pond and was to put in 8-inch ice today. W.C. Norton has filled his Baylies Pond house near town and yesterday noon transferred his gang to Great Pond, where he was at work harvesting 9-inch ice for his icehouse there. The easterly and southerly storm of snow followed by rain which began this morning and prevails as we go to press, has put a stop to operations.

In the 1930s and early 1940s, radio weather forecasters came into prominence and owners would often telephone them for predictions. The *Vineyard Gazette*, January 5, 1940, tells of such a call made by Grace Pease Ward:

Her decision to begin cutting came after a telephone conversation with E. B. Rideout, Boston weather forecaster, at 10:30 p.m. Monday. Mr. Rideout advised Mrs. Ward to begin cutting at once. As weather indications had changed during



Ernest (Chug) Pease owned this ice house on Crystal Lake, East Chop, 1906--1928.

the day, and although he expected the temperature to be low Tuesday night, it would rise during the day, fall at night, and on Wednesday begin a gradual but steady rise. He saw no more severe weather in sight for two weeks, Mr. Rideout said.

With this advice in mind, Mr.[Louis H.] Pease and Mrs. Ward laid their plans with expedition. Mr. Pease began sweeping snow from the pond at midnight Monday, the sweeping continuing until 11 a.m. Tuesday, when cutting began. Mrs. Ward had a crew at work at 4:30 a.m. Tuesday, and cutting began soon after daylight. The weather favored the work, remaining just below freezing, and dropping sharply during the night, to a low of about 10 [degrees Fahrenheit] in the early morning.

Harvesting Ice

Each icehouse owner usually hired about 20 men for three days to harvest and pack the ice. In Vineyard towns, word spread around quickly when ice was ready to be cut because it meant money for men in the winter when little work was available.

In advance of the cutting, the owners stockpiled sawdust and salt hay or straw in their icehouses. In the 1800s and early 1900s, there were no gasoline or electric-powered devices and ice cutting and storing had to be done by the muscles of men and animals. In the 1920s and 1930s, men were paid 50 cents an hour; those who provided horses were

paid \$4 to \$5 a day extra. Once in a while, a horse would break through the ice and fall into the water. When that happened, it was a chore to get it up on the ice and dried off. It did no more work that day.

The first operation in the harvest was scoring cutting marks. A horse towed a sharp-toothed device which gouged lines about an inch deep into the ice. Similar lines were scored perpendicular to the first, dividing the ice into rectangles. These rectangles marked ice cakes that would weigh about 300 pounds each. The next step was to drill a series of holes in the ice so that a 6 or 7-foot hand saw could be slipped through the ice. Starting at the loading chute directly in front of the icehouse, the men sawed the ice into cakes by hand. An inclined loading chute, about 50 feet long and 3 feet wide, raised the cakes into the icehouse. During the early part of the harvesting, the chute was nearly horizontal, the ice being stacked at ground level. Later, as the house filled, the on-shore end of the chute was raised by block and tackle and the incline became steeper, making the task of moving the cakes harder.

When the first cakes had been cut and moved into the house, an open-water channel became available along which the rest of the pond's ice would be floated to the chute.

Large sections of ice, each containing from 10 to 15 cakes, were then sawed free. Two men pulled and pushed these floating chunks with ice pikes (long sticks with hooks and points at their ends) along the open water to the chute entrance. There, a worker used a chipping bar to break off the individual cakes along the scored marks that had been cut earlier. The cakes were poled to the chute and into a container that was dragged up the chute and into the icehouse by a horse-drawn cable.

The load was so heavy that alternate horses were sometimes used. In the 1920s and early 1930s, at the Wigglesworth icehouse on Fresh Pond, Ham Luce, whose family owned a farm bordering on the pond, and another Oak Bluffs resident, whose name is lost in memory, alternated pulling the heavy containers of ice up the chute with

Photo courtesy Basil Welch.



With the gasoline engine came power saws for cutting ice. Here with one are, from left, Tad Athearn, Howard Chadwick, Emory Flanders, Joe Borges and Arnold Fischer.

their horses. Luce's horse pulled up one load and the other horse pulled up the next. This continued all day and into the evening, sometimes finishing as late as 11 p.m.

Inside the dark and dank icehouse, about a dozen men received the cakes as they came up the chute and slid them into place, keeping straight rows and spreading sawdust, salt hay, or straw between the layers. Salt hay was used because field hay composted when wet, producing undesirable heat.

Layer by layer, the heavy cakes were stacked until the house was filled. In years when the ice was thick, the house might be filled, leaving more than half the pond's ice still uncut.

With the arrival of the internal-combustion engine in the 1920s, icehouse owners mechanized the operation. Instead of the hand saw, they used a power cutter, consisting of a circular saw blade 30 inches in diameter driven by a Ford Model T engine bolted to a platform on runners. Once the machine was started, it required little pushing as the

rotating blade pulled the rig forward. Horses were no longer used to haul the cakes up the chute as owners installed a motor-driven conveyor belt with cross cleats to carry the cakes up the incline. The engine powering the belt usually was a Fairbanks-Morse. The motor age also changed the method of delivery. Instead of a horse-drawn wagon, gasoline-powered trucks delivered the ice.¹⁵

Despite the sawdust and hay insulation in the icehouse, there was some melting during the summer. The loss of ice volume by melting was about 30 percent over that period.¹⁶ If not sold, the ice usually lasted through October.

Icehouse Owners

Three of the owners of Vineyard icehouses came into the business as fishermen. Louis H. Pease was a former lobsterman who started a retail fish store and founded the Edgartown Market in 1876 at the age of 26. The ice business began as a sideline to his store in the summer of 1888, beginning with 26 delivery customers. By 1926, he had at least 300 home and business customers in Edgartown and as far away as Menemsha. He designed and built much of his cutting and loading equipment himself.¹⁷ His daughter, Mrs. Grace Pease Ward, worked with him and took over when he retired.

Another former Edgartown fisherman who entered the business was Capt. "Wid" Norton, who bought into the ice business around 1900. In mild winters, when there was no Vineyard ice to harvest, Capt. Norton commissioned a coastal schooner to transport ice from Maine. Capt. Norton sold the ice business to Philip Perry and Ralph Taylor about 1920.

Harry L. Peakes of Vineyard Haven also began his ice business while a fisherman. He ran it during the off-season. In 1908, at the age of 25, he and Capt. Benjamin C. Cromwell established a cold-storage facility and ice plant on the Beach

¹⁵Lovewell.

¹⁶Kenneth Wadja, "New Jersey's Winter Crop: Harvesting Ice," *New Jersey Outdoors*, Winter, 1995, pp.29-35.

¹⁷Lovewell.

Road in Vineyard Haven. The two men also owned three icehouses covered by a single roof on Old House Pond. They called their business the Vineyard Ice Company. In the 1930s, ice was manufactured at Old House Pond (it was sometimes called "artificial ice," but of course it was real). The plant included a freezer locker in which people could store their meats. Peakes later bought out Cromwell and operated the business by himself until World War II. A prominent Island businessman, he was co-founder and president of the Martha's Vineyard Cooperative Bank.¹⁸

Richard Pease came into the business through his father, Ernest. Early in this century, young Richard began delivering ice for his father, who had an icehouse on Crystal Lake, East Chop. He also owned the Ritz Cafe and the Vineyard Cordial Shop.¹⁹ Rollo Wigglesworth, another ice merchant, did many other things around Oak Bluffs, including putting in cesspools, moving buildings and general trucking. He was deaf and was known for his exceptional strength.

Delivering Ice

A century ago, at about 5:30 on summer mornings, the icemen began loading their horse-drawn wagons at Island icehouses. They covered the loads with heavy canvas and began making the rounds of home deliveries. In later years, they switched to small trucks, such as the Ford Model T, Model A, Reo, and later to Chevrolets and Dodges. The Reo had a platform at the back with solid sideboards, a canvas cover, an open cab (a windshield and roof but no doors or windows), a four-cylinder engine and solid-rubber tires. Its top speed was slow. Harry L. Peakes had three Reo trucks, two for deliveries in Vineyard Haven and West Tisbury, and one for Oak Bluffs. Each truck delivered ice to 60 or 70 customers during the summer. On the rear of the truck was a hand-powered ice crusher for producing the fine ice required by hotels and restaurants.

Account books for Capt. "Wid" Norton's ice business show that in July and August 1901 he paid Ed Luce, his

¹⁸Lovewell.

¹⁹Lovewell.

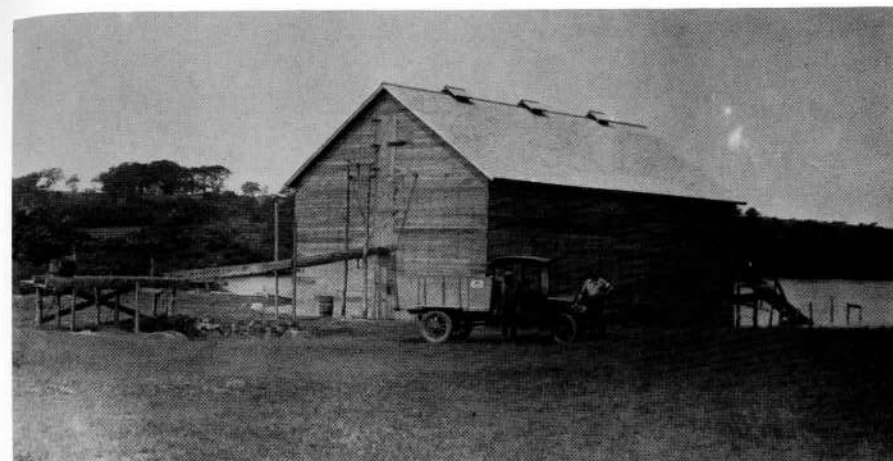
delivery man, \$9 a week. In June 1900, 500 pounds of ice were delivered to Chester Pease who paid 30 cents for each 100 pounds. In August that same year, the price had increased to 40 cents per 100 pounds. In 1901, between June 12 and July 4, a Mr. Kennan had 13 deliveries totalling 640 pounds of ice, for which he paid \$2.56, or 40 cents per 100 pounds. Thus, he was paying about 10 cents a day for ice. That would be a half-hour's wages for Ed Luce. Ice was not cheap, a 25-pound piece costing 10 cents.²⁰

In the 1930s, ice had increased to 25 or 30 cents for a 50-pound cake, almost double the 1901 price. Icemen were now earning 50 cents an hour and working nine hours a day, six days a week. Their wages had increased, but it still took about a half-hour's wages to keep the icebox cool. By the early 1940s, the price of ice had increased to one cent a pound.

During these years, Henry Konrad "Connie" Burgess and Joe Rogers delivered ice around Vineyard Haven for Harry L. Peakes. With a heavy load of ice on an unpaved road at West Chop, Peake's Reo, with its solid-rubber tires, vibrated the ground to such an extent some claimed (jokingly, no doubt) that it cracked the plaster in their homes. Mr. Burgess hung a bucket off the rear of the truck to catch the water from the melting ice. In the bucket he kept a bottle of beer that he drank at the end of the day.

Richard Pease and Rollo Wigglesworth delivered ice to homes in Oak Bluffs along with Peter Hansen and Peter Regan who drove for Harry L. Peakes. Tony Silva delivered ice by himself in a blue and white Chevrolet truck and later in a Reo truck for Grace Pease Ward in Edgartown and around the Island. Phil Perry also delivered in Edgartown, using his own truck. One summer, John Ferriera and Philip Andrews of Oak Bluffs were icemen up-Island for Grace Pease Ward. Some icemen, like Richard Pease and Rollo

²⁰ Deliveryman Ed Luce earned \$1.50 a day (less than 20 cents an hour). To provide his family with ice at the same rate as Kennan would take a half hour's wages each day, equal to more than \$3 a day today. The modern electric refrigerator cools food for about \$1 a day and provides ice cubes and long-term storage in addition.



Unidentified ice house, with delivery truck waiting for ice to come down the rear ramp.

Wigglesworth, collected money at the time of delivery. Grace Ward billed customers monthly. "Wid" Norton billed some customers monthly, others paid on delivery. Sally Jeffers, noted for the wonderful supper she put on for the Edgartown firemen every fall, hired Gladys and Till Jeffers as well as Edward Frame to deliver ice on Chappaquiddick in a Model-A beach wagon until the mid-1930s.

The End of the Industry

The ice harvesting, the icehouses and home deliveries were part of Vineyard life for more than 100 years. The most recent record of ice being cut and stored on the Island was in 1942.²¹ Fred Alley of West Tisbury was perhaps the last person to peddle ice on the Vineyard, continuing into the 1940s. The tradition ended with the arrival of electricity and soon the electric refrigerator.

In the 1920s, electricity became available in most down-Island towns. By 1930, the lines had been run as far west as West Tisbury. But it was not until twenty years later that electricity got to Gay Head. Power was provided in the early years by a generating station on Beach Road, Vineyard Haven (on the site of today's Packer Oil Company). In 1941, an underwater cable was laid from the mainland to the Island and the Vineyard Haven plant served only as an aux-

²¹ *Gazette*, February 6, 1942.

iliary provider in the summer when the demand exceeded the cable capacity.

Long after down-Islanders had electric refrigerators, residents of Gay Head, Chilmark and parts of West Tisbury still depended on the iceman. Until the 1950s, when the entire Island finally had electricity, there were ice companies delivering cake ice to homes. Their ice came from two manufacturing plants. Even today, many who grew up in the 1920s and 1930s refer to their electric refrigerators as ice boxes.

The arrival of the electric refrigerator changed eating habits markedly. According to the *Vineyard Gazette* (February 2, 1940), it was not until the electric refrigerator that Vineyard families began eating fresh salads.

The manufacture of the compact electric refrigerator was made possible by the development of smaller and more efficient compressors and motors, as well as safer refrigerants. The changeover was delayed by World War II. Many returning servicemen continued to rely on the old-fashioned icebox as their parents had done because electric refrigerators were in such short supply. It took several years before refrigerator production was able to meet the built-up demand.

George W. Walter, in an article entitled "The Ice Harvest", described his experiences as a farm boy living near New Hartford, N.Y.:

Looking back, I cannot see any romantic side to the ice harvest. It was just cold, hard work that was necessary to protect milk and food during the hot summer months. . . The ice harvest, like hog-raising, has gone . . . but it is one industry that is not missed.²²

Certainly, that is true for the Vineyard. But nonetheless for several generations Islanders and summer residents lived more comfortably and enjoyed safer foods and better diets because of the Island's "non-romantic" natural ice industry.



About 1910, Louis Pease, ice and fish dealer, lined up his delivery vehicles in front of his Edgartown store for a photo, even a man with bike. Deliveries were common then.

Acknowledgements

The author is grateful to the following persons who shared with him their personal experiences and recollections about the natural ice industry: Leonard Athearn, Franklin Benson, Alice Burt, Henry Burt, Roy Campbell, Charlie Conroy, John Correia, Eric Cottle, Ken Deitz, John Ferriera, Arnold Fisher, Hilda Gilluly, Milton Jeffers, Ed Landers, Ham Luce, George W. Manter, Cyrus Norton, John Warren Norton, Harold Rogers, Carrie Secord, Cornelius Silva, Alfred Vanderhoop and Basil Welch; also George Andrews of Nantucket and Robert Eigenrauch of Middletown, N.J.

Thanks to S. Bailey Norton who donated a number of ledgers and daybooks related to the ice and fish-packing business of his grandparents, William "Wid" C. and Malvina B. Norton of Edgartown. Thanks also to Basil Welch for the use of various photographs from his collection.

²²Jones.

Books

Saltwater Foodways *New Englanders and their food, at sea and* *ashore, in the nineteenth century*

By Sandra L. Oliver
Mystic Seaport Museum, Mystic, Connecticut
1995

This is not a cookbook, not a volume to keep next to the sink to be handled by sticky fingers and sprinkled with floor. It is a book for perusing, for reading. And even for the coffee table. Its illustrations are beautiful, its text fascinating. Not being a cook I can only assume its recipes are delicious. They certainly look good enough to eat.

But this book is more than recipes. In it Sandra Oliver provides a history of how cooking was done in the 1800s on and near the sea.

The chapter headings are intriguing: "Eating Forward and Dining Aft," "The Life-Saving Service: Messroom Meals," "Not as Nutritious as Flesh: Fish-Eating in New England," "Meals Ashore for All Hands." These are a sampling of the book's 16 chapter

titles.

Author Oliver taught early 19th Century fireplace cooking at Mystic Seaport and it was there she began her intensive research into what she calls "Foodways," a term, she says, that "makes some people's skin crawl." But she sticks with it because it envelops the "wide-ranging, interdisciplinary study of food."

Despite those fancy words, that's what this is - a fascinating, down-to-the-sea account of how men and women, years ago, used the bounty of the ocean to feed themselves, their families and the crews on their ships.

It's early to think of Christmas, but this is an ideal present for that person who loves the sea and the kitchen, or should it be the "galley"?

To Henry Baylies Readers:

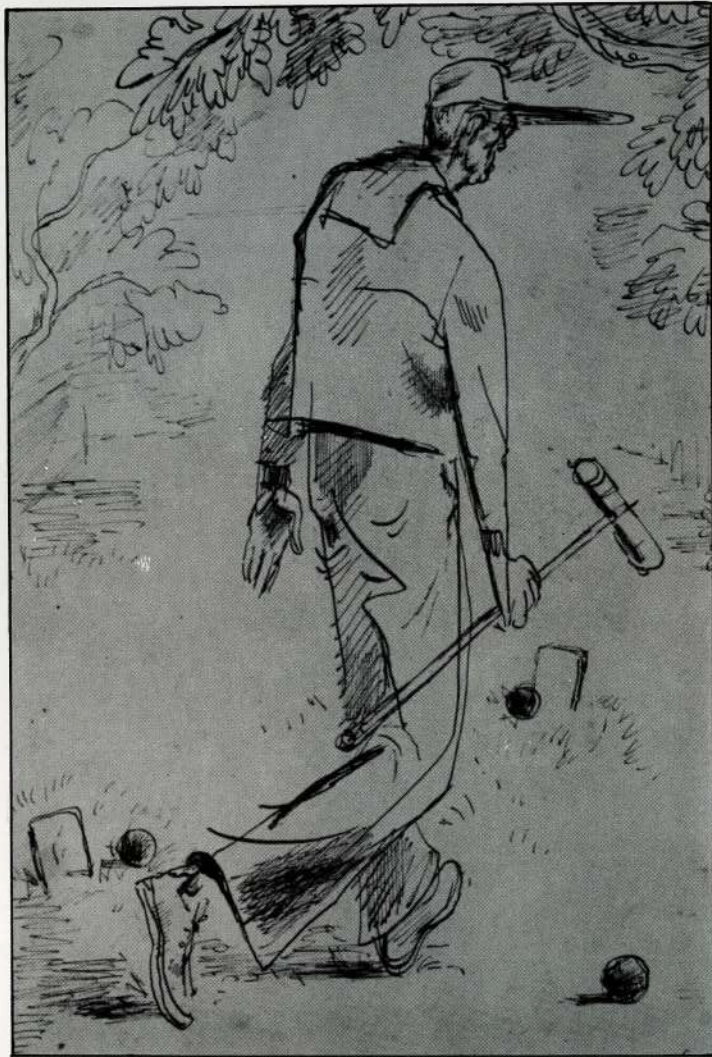
Because of space limitations (despite eight extra pages in this issue), we regret that there is no room for the Henry Baylies journal, "A Running Account of Matter & Things." His diary, which some members call a 19th-century "soap opera," will return in November.

Barn House Culture, as Warren Chappell Imagined It



There's dispute as to whether Yehudi Kenyuin (a parody on Houtie Kenyon, early Barn House member) ever played in concert. Warren's humor was like that. Houtie claims it was pure Chappell mythology.

Fun & Games at Barn House, courtesy Warren Chappell



Warren first visited Barn House as a guest of Boardman Robinson. He was an immediate favorite. No wonder, with sketches like this one.