

Chapter 25: Cape Cod (1982-1988)

At length we ... entered what had appeared at a distance an upland marsh, but proved to be dry sand covered with Beach-grass, the Bearberry, Bayberry, Shrub-oaks, and Beach-plum, slightly ascending as we approached the shore; then, crossing over a belt of sand on which nothing grew, though the roar of the sea sounded scarcely louder than before, and we were prepared to go half a mile farther, we suddenly stood on the edge of a bluff overlooking the Atlantic. * * * There was nothing but that savage ocean between us and Europe.

Henry David Thoreau, *Cape Cod* (1865)

A. Background

Cape Cod is a peninsula in eastern Massachusetts (actually an island now since the canal was opened in 1914, separating it from the mainland). It was a summer retreat for Boston people and later people from New York too. In the 1950s my family began spending parts of the summer in Truro (founded 1709) (**red** arrow), the last town before Provincetown (founded 1686) (**blue** arrow) at the tip of the Cape. Map VI shows places in Truro mentioned in the text; Map VII does the same for Provincetown.



At first we used summer rentals. I remember being up in Cape Cod in 1954 when Hurricane Carol hit – that was quite a show. Our friends the Levys had the roof torn off their house, so they bunked in with us. The next year, 1955, we flew back to New York from Provincetown via Boston, when my father's sister (my Aunt Louise) was near death from cancer.

Sometime soon after that my father bought a house in Truro, on North Pamet Road. The house had huge windows and terrific light, and had belonged to the noted illustrator Edward Wilson (1886-1970). It sat on high ground above the Pamet River, a small stream that runs from Cape Cod Bay on the western shore of the Lower Cape almost to the Atlantic Ocean.¹ The land was heavily wooded with pine and oak and other trees, and brush. Originally we had 30 acres, but sold one to a neighbor, leaving 29. Then in 1961 the Cape Cod National Seashore was established by President Kennedy, whose family summered in Hyannisport further up-Cape. It was later expanded through the influence

¹ *Lower Cape* or *down-Cape* meant, counterintuitively, the end of the Cape, higher up on a north-oriented map than *up-Cape*. It made sense if you looked at the Cape from Boston, just as *Middle East* makes sense from London but not from Israel or Iran.

of Senator Edward Kennedy. In the late 1960s the government condemned all but 5.9 acres of our land. This number was chosen because 3 acres was the minimum lot in our part of Truro, so with less than six acres we could not subdivide. See map at Document 25-1. I recount in Chapter 14 how I gave my father the first legal advice of my career – he asked me if they could do that and I said yes, they could. In fact it worked out well – the government part of the property was never developed, so it stayed just as it was and we had the same access to it we had before, but we didn’t have to pay taxes on it. Other property surrounding ours was also restricted, so it couldn’t be developed either. Plus they paid my father for the land they took. Pre-existing property owners like us, whose land was within the National Seashore boundaries, did very well.

- “At the entrance of this valley the sand has gathered, so that at present a little climbing is necessary. Passing over several fences and taking heed not to enter the wood on the right hand, at the distance of three quarters of a mile a house is to be found. This house stands on the south side of the road, and not far from it on the south is Pamet river, which runs from east to west through a body of salt marsh.”

James Freeman, *Description of the Eastern Coast of the County of Barnstable* (1802), quoted in Henry David Thoreau, *Cape Cod* (1865).

That wasn’t our later-built house Freeman was talking about, but it could have been. There were two houses on our property, which we called the Big House and the Little House. The Big House was an imposing structure. See the floor plan in Document 25-2, which also has pictures of the buildings from the outside; interiors are shown in Document 25-7. The main room was something like 40 feet long, with a high cathedral ceiling, a large fireplace, and lots of tall windows. There was an alcove at one side, and a kitchen and a bathroom, and a dormer bedroom upstairs. Added to the original house were a small wing with another bedroom, which my parents used as theirs, and another wing with three guest bedrooms and another bathroom. My father added this second wing, a separate structure he had had moved to our property. The smaller wing might have been added by him or by Wilson. There was also a cellar, reached from a door set near the ground outside the front door. The back door served as a front door, leading from the end of the driveway onto the corridor of the guest wing and then into the kitchen. The official front door opened onto what we thought of as the back – a small clearing in the woods – and was almost never used.

The Little House was located down the hill, near the Pamet River. This house is pictured in Document 25-2 also. It had a living room, two small bedrooms, a bathroom, kitchen facilities, and an attic reached by an ingenious staircase which folded down from the ceiling on a spring. My father had had this house built in the early 60s as a place for my grandmother, Ida Rubinstein, to stay when she visited us. It was an odd choice for her, being down a steepish hill, and she never used it because she died soon after it was built. Perhaps plans for easier access to the Little House were abandoned when she died.

The river lay just beyond the Little House and was reached through some brush – my father kept a red Fiberglas canoe here, called the *Swamp Swallow*. The mosquitoes were intense near the river. Turtles laid eggs on the path leading down to the Little House. From behind the Big House on the high portion of the property we could see houses across the river on South Pamet Road – those were the only other structures we could see from our land.

The Big House was reached from the road by a dirt driveway, which had to be plowed in the winter because of the snow. It was quite a long driveway as the house was very secluded. The driveway led to North Pamet Road – see Map VI. North Pamet Road and South Pamet Road were once a loop which led from the town and the highway (U.S. 6), along one side of the Pamet River to the ocean at Ballston Beach and back along the other side of the river to the place of beginning. Years later the roads were blocked off near the ocean, as the dunes were eroding and the ocean threatened to break through and contaminate the freshwater Pamet (this actually happened one year). So each road became a dead end.

There was an old barn at the house end of the driveway, which had also been brought to the property, and which was used for storage – I think my father kept his red Jeep there when we weren't on the Cape. The Jeep had four-wheel drive and could be driven on sand – Christopher learned to drive on that car.

My mother and we children were probably there more than my father was. Mary came with us. Our main pleasures were swimming and shellfish. Swimming was usually in the ocean (Ballston Beach is shown at right), rarely in Cape Cod Bay, and on Long Pond in Wellfleet, the next town south (the pond had a float). I was a good swimmer – an exception to my non-athletic attitude – and loved the beach. We went to the ocean (about a mile from the house) nearly every day. I can still feel the cold and taste the salt, and feel the rushing water.



I swam all the way down Long Pond once, my parents following in a rowboat. I had a bicycle and used it to explore around. My mother liked to dig Cape Cod ocean clams, called *quahogs*, which were large and of unsurpassed deliciousness. She had a license for this from the town clam warden. On the Bay side you could dig mussels, which she also did. We bought lobsters rather than catch them ourselves, and they were plentiful.

My parents had a circle of friends in Truro, including Tom Kane, who lived on South Pamet Road. His “My Pamet” columns (1951-1988), written for the *Provincetown Advocate* under the name “Town Father,” were later collected in a book named after the column. My parents were sometimes mentioned in his column. Also important to my parents was Horace Snow, Jr., called Snowie, a man of almost theatrically masculine good looks, who was part of a prominent local family and a jack-of-all-trades. We used him for various tasks, such as building things and moving the barn to our property. I think my mother was in love with him, although whether anything ever came of that I don’t know. One summer (I think 1958) I had a sort of “job” with Snowie, very briefly, as a general helper in his odd job business. I’m sure my father paid Snowie for my wages, but even so I didn’t last long.

There were five classes of people in Truro, at that time and later. There were two kinds of natives: Yankees and Portuguese. Natives lived there and always had. People who weren’t natives were tourists or summer people or washashores. Tourists came for brief visits but stayed in cabins or other transient accommodations and left again fairly soon. Summer people came, as the name suggests, for the summer and either rented or owned houses there. In my childhood we were summer people even after we had bought a year-round house. So were people who came for the month of August, notably for some reason large numbers of psychiatrists in Truro and Wellfleet. Washashores lived there permanently but had come from somewhere else – when I moved to Truro in 1982 I became a washashore.

My parents were friendly with some of the other summer people, some of whom were their friends in New York. There was a colony of these people in a part of Truro near the Bay, called Sladesville. Sladesville people seemed like a fast crowd to us – if I had known of the scandalous going-on in Provincetown, a center of artistic and homosexual activity, Sladesville would not have seemed so fast.

I had a summer job one year as a stockboy in a Wellfleet supermarket called Grand Union. I commuted by moped from Truro, the next town; my parents weren’t there, and I took my meals with Tom Kane’s family.² I enjoyed this glimpse into the proletarian backroom of the supermarket, mainly I think for its novelty, and didn’t even mind the work (a job was itself a novelty for me back then). But I was soon fired. A French-Canadian tourist came in and asked in French about our hours. I was sweeping in front of the registers, and when no one understood his question I answered him in French. This was just too much.

² A moped (two syllables: MO-ped, combining *motor* and *pedal*) is a bicycle with a small motor attached to power the back wheel. The motor can be disengaged and the moped powered by the pedals like an ordinary bicycle. It is not a motorcycle and (at least then, in Massachusetts) a license was not required.

After 1959 I did not go up to Truro again, except on one visit in the mid-60s with my college friend Tom Jones, who had a car (I didn't even have a license). I remember him driving at recklessly high speeds on North Pamet Road. In the late 1960s I asked my father if I could go up there with my girlfriend of the time, but was refused on moral grounds. I never saw the place again until 1981.

B. Washed ashore

As recounted in Chapter 23, my mother died in 1980, and my siblings and I inherited the Truro property among other assets. I wanted to sell it, but my siblings would not hear of it, and after an acid trip in San Francisco where I wanted some nature but couldn't find any I thought: why not move to Truro and live rent-free? Plenty of nature there! I flew East in the fall of 1981 and visited the property again to see the house and decide whether this was a workable plan. It was an odd feeling sniffing my way down North Pamet Road to the front door. But it seemed like it could work, and without rent to pay I could retire on my new income – it was tiny but my needs would be few out in the sticks. So in August 1982 Makiko and Les Wisner spent a long weekend with me at the Lake Tahoe house I had the use of (see Chapter 23), and I left from there for the long drive back to Truro, arriving on Labor Day. Highway 6 was packed with summer people and tourists leaving the Cape, while I was almost alone going the other way, washing ashore.

It felt strange to be living there. I had never *lived* in Truro before, but had only visited in the summers. I had been there only once as an adult, for a few days almost 20 years earlier. I was known, but knew almost no one – people remembered my family, and some of my parents' friends were still around – Tom Kane, and Snowie's widow Norma. Adam, who had used the place a lot and moved up there himself the previous year, was in residence when I arrived. So I knew *him*, at least, and some of his friends became my friends too, and I wasn't completely isolated.

On the other hand, I had left behind all my other friends, and the life I knew in San Francisco, mainly for the chance to live without working. But I was living in a small town – actually in the country outside a tiny village – for the first time in my life. I had never lived anywhere smaller than Washington DC. In Truro there wasn't even mail delivery – you had to go to the post office to pick it up.³ Going to the post office became a sort of ritual – it was a chance to interact with people. There was no garbage pickup either – you had to take your garbage to the Town Dump and toss it on the heap, under a cloud of screaming gulls. At the dump useful items were thoughtfully set to one side for scavenging.

³ We used to have Box 8, but that had been allowed to lapse – they gave us Box 88 instead.



Truro (year-round population then about 1200) wasn't much of a town. There was the post office and a very bare-bones convenience store and gas station called Schoonejongen's (there was another called Dutra's in



North Truro). There was a liquor store (called a "package store" in Massachusetts, where liquor was a state monopoly), and Town Hall (right) with a small police station nearby, and some churches and cemeteries. There was a tiny library which was cute from the outside but had very little of interest and was usually closed. There was a school, a lighthouse, a restaurant called the Blacksmith Shop, and an "antique" shop. There was a tiny harbor on the Bay side of the town. And that was about it. The rest of Truro was country roads, sand dunes, swamp, forest and water. Very picturesque, but not much happening. Edward Hopper (1882-1967) painted some great pictures of Truro, such as this one (above left) of Corn Hill. See Map VI.

- "One of the most attractive points for visitors is in the northeast part of Wellfleet, where accommodations (I mean for men and women of tolerable health and habits) could probably be had within half a mile of the sea-shore. It best combines the country and the sea-side." Henry David Thoreau, *Cape Cod* (1865).



Wellfleet to the south, and Provincetown to the north, were more coherent towns, with main streets and visible centers. Wellfleet was a charming New England town with a good library and a better grocery store than Truro, and a café called the Lighthouse and a terrific fish market where you could get quahogs. I would ask for the

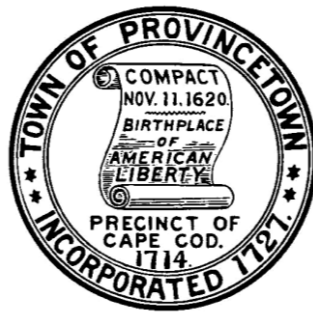


dozen largest ones they had. People thought I was chopping them up for *chowdah* – natives did not eat enormous quahogs on the half shell, but I did. Two or three of these made a full meal. I still have a Cape Cod clam knife. I longed for these clams for years after I came back to San Francisco – that and broadcasting (see Chapter 26) were about all I missed. But I have since found a Chinese market with sea clams of comparable size and succulence – much more expensive, though.

Wellfleet also had famous oysters, which unlike quahogs were difficult to open, and a shop which carried smoked fish – the local bluefish were especially good. It had some restaurants and upscale inns and an amateur theatre and was generally a more interesting

town than Truro, but I didn't spend a lot of time there except for the library. There was a great roadside restaurant on the road to Wellfleet, though, called Moby Dick's.⁴ It had wonderful lobster and corn and other east coast summer food, but it closed for the year when the season was over. I ate there almost every day when I didn't go to Provincetown instead – it was a mournful day every fall when it closed.

Beyond Wellfleet to the south was Eastham (nothing) and Orleans (not much, although they had a year-round movie theatre). Hyannis, in the center of the Upper Cape, was the county seat of Barnstable County and not interesting at all. Indeed, beyond Orleans (except maybe Chatham in the extreme south, where I never went) Cape Cod became much more like the rest of America. The Lower Cape was very different – it felt like an island, much as San Francisco does.



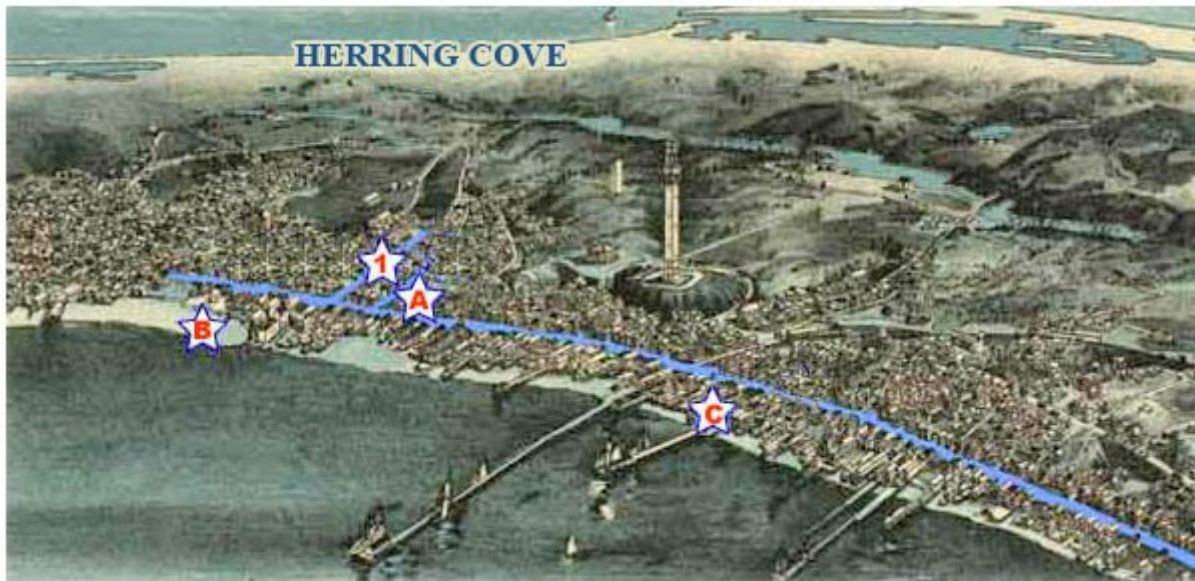
Provincetown was a different story. It was more than just a small town – although it had only about twice the year-round population of Truro, the population was more concentrated. Provincetown had been a noted artists' colony since the beginning of the century – Eugene O'Neill, for example, had worked at the Provincetown Playhouse. Stanley Kunitz, Norman Mailer, Robert Motherwell and Hans Hoffman had houses there. It was also one of the main gay centers of the United States and attracted large numbers of gay residents and visitors. Provincetown had two principal streets: Commercial Street, next to the water, and Bradford Street, running parallel. It was large enough physically to have separate neighborhoods, and had a lot of attractive features including some pleasant restaurants, a decent library, a radio station (see Chapter 26.A), a movie theatre (summers only), and some galleries and small museums. There was also a small airport, a super market, and a Pilgrim Monument bizarrely modeled on the campanile in Siena. On the next page is an oldish panorama of Provincetown – Map VII locates places mentioned in this chapter.⁵

⁴ As related in Melville's unpublished sequel, the great whale did not die, but retired to Wellfleet and opened a restaurant for the summer trade.

⁵ The little stars on the picture-map may be ignored – they came with the map I selected from the Internet to illustrate this chapter.

- “Provincetown was apparently what is called a flourishing town. * * * The outward aspect of the houses and shops frequently suggested a poverty which their interior comfort and even richness disproved.” Henry David Thoreau, *Cape Cod* (1865).

At first I spent some time digging nature in Truro, which was really lovely, walking along North Pamet Road to the ocean, hanging out on the dunes above Ballston Beach, exploring the cranberry bog where the National Seashore had put boardwalks for visitors, watching the sunset from Head of the Meadow Beach in North Truro. This was quite a change from San Francisco and I enjoyed it, although I was in a way forcing myself to



enjoy it because if I didn't there wouldn't have been much here for me. It really could be irresistibly beautiful. I wrote to Peter Miller:

It is very lush up here now in the height of summer. Yellow light in the meadows, and damselflies and turtles crawling around. I saw a fox the other day but had no hounds handy to pursue it with. In a way things are so lush that we can all sort of melt and cease moving, like a dog on a hot day.

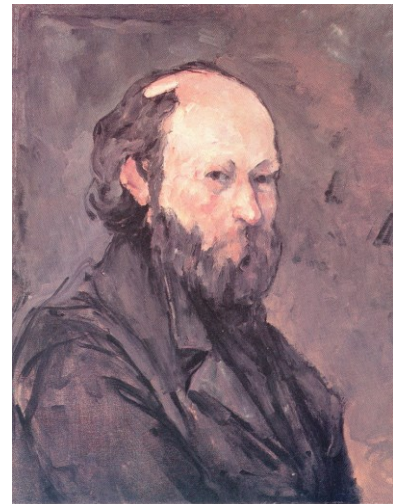
Long Pond in Wellfleet was a favorite spot – there was a bench at the water's edge, and usually no one there but ducks.⁶ After a while, though, all this nature became very tedious, as you can see sights like this just so many times before you have definitively *seen* them. (By contrast, no matter how many times I see San Francisco in the fog, it is still thrilling.) See Document 25-7 for some views of Truro and Provincetown.

⁶ Where do they go in the winter? Holden Caulfield wants to know.

I began spending a lot of time in Provincetown. I went up there nearly every day (by car of course – it was 12 miles) and hung out at a local Portuguese greasy spoon. At first it was a diner called the Donut Shop, but then I switched to another, larger place on Shank Painter Road called Dairyland. This may once have been an ice cream parlor, but in my day it was a Portuguese restaurant – they had leek soup and *linguiça* (spicy Portuguese sausage) and fried clams and lobster roll and clam chowder and iced tea. Lips and Cheeks (of freshly caught codfish) was a specialty – these were very good fried. It was all formica tables and built-in benches, strictly counter service, very plain, and very open and spacious and well-lighted with high picture windows on all sides. I found it quite comfortable. I would go there in the late morning and eat lunch and read the *New York Times*, and when I had to have a meeting for some reason, for example about my television show, I set it for my corner table. I spent a lot of the day there, just about every day – I used to joke that it was my law office.

Other reasons to go to Provincetown had to do with my radio show on WOMR on Centre Street, and my television show at Channel 8 on Shank Painter Road, which took up a lot of time and gave me an occupation. Chapter 26 is about these projects. I did an exhibit on Portuguese heraldry for the Provincetown Library. When I was trying to be a year-rounder, my first winter in town, I hung out some evenings at the Governor Bradford bar on Commercial Street, playing backgammon.

I had some artistic and Bohemian friends I met through Adam, especially Peter and Diana Stander and Arne Manos. Others like Judy Given and Bonnie Fuoco I met in other ways. I grew friendly with Whitney Smith, the flag scholar, who lived near Boston, and with Annette Barbasch (who had gone to Nightingale, a private girls' school in New York, with Victoria) when she came up to visit Adam. Other friends like Joel Solkoff came to visit also. Steve Nelson, a famous figure in American radical history, called me up while I was on the radio and invited me for a chicken dinner, and we became friends too.⁷ Through Judy Given I remet Rosemary Woodruff-Leary, known in those days as Sarah Woodruff – she became my closest friend in Truro and remained one of my closest friends for the rest of her life. (For more on her see Chapter 19.A). Peter Stander (also dead now) and I stayed close too – there are a lot of letters to and from him in the supplementary correspondence files I will be send up to Yale. Above is a portrait one of



⁷ For more about this fascinating figure see his *Steve Nelson, American Radical* (1981) (with James R. Barrett and Rob Ruck). I read some of his other memoirs also, about the Spanish Civil War (in which he was wounded) and other adventures. His papers are now in the Tamiment Library/Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives at New York University.

my Provincetown artist friends painted of me in 1986 – it shows how I looked before my beard started going gray.⁸

I knew a lot more people in a casual way. For example, I was known for playing Indian classical music on my radio show, and so became friendly with a group of American musicians who played Indian instruments. I even emceed an Indian music concert in Provincetown Town Hall, and hosted some concerts at my house. Adam and I gave parties from time to time, which were fun, and there were occasional beach parties too. I remember one beach party especially, given by Peter and Diana Stander, where people danced naked around a bonfire, and another when unusual weather conditions created a spectacular display of northern lights.

When I got to Truro in 1982 the house was rather neglected. My father had died in 1973 and my mother had not gone up there since, or if she had she didn't go much, and now she was dead too. Also, during the time my parents went there they decorated the house in a very unfortunate way. The floors were painted dark, dark green. The pine walls were stained dark, dark brown. This gave a very gloomy appearance to the place. The walls were hung with fishing nets and glass floats and old oars and other marine kitsch, which were no longer amusing if indeed they ever had been. And the furniture was equally depressing and hopelessly clapped out – there was an armchair, for example, so unsprung that you could not sit upright in it, but ended up reclining almost flat on its faded chintz slipcover. Trying to live in this environment was exceedingly depressing for Adam and me. Adam retreated to the Little House, and I was almost to the point of giving it up and leaving.

Finally we decided to redecorate. We got rid of almost all the old furniture and assorted junk, including an old pump organ that no one could have played even if it had worked, and a floor-model music box that had belonged to my grandmother. We sold what we could, junked what we could not sell, and used the money to redecorate. We hired Peter and Diana Stander to paint the walls white and the floors a lovely rich cream color. We got some new furniture, and a lot less of it than we had had. I had a sleeping loft built in the master bedroom and put up bookshelves there. We made the place a lot brighter and airier and more pleasant to live in. We also did some work on the Little House.

The basic expenses of maintaining the property, as opposed to the redecoration, were paid out of what we called the Truro Housefund. This was established with the money Christopher got as an executor's fee as a co-executor of my mother's estate. We felt it was not right that he should keep this money himself, but that he should put it to common use. He saw the justice of this, and all the running expenses, the real estate taxes, and eventually the fix-up before sale, were paid from this fund, so living there really was free.

⁸ Just kidding. It's a self-portrait by Cézanne, dated around 1879.

I forget if there was a surplus at the end or a deficit – I think it came out more or less even because the pre-sale fix-up was so expensive.

In 1983 Adam moved from the Big House to the Little House. This was good as we had not always been the most harmonious of roommates, and it gave us both more privacy and a chance to make our homes reflect our own personal styles, which are quite different. He covered his walls with religious images and hippie stuff, and I tacked up hundreds of royal portraits on postcards. I made the bedroom into an office and moved my bed into the alcove room, which had good cross-ventilation.

One trouble with digging nature in Truro was the mosquito problem. The winters were long, and although I had a great hammock I had carried back from Nicaragua in 1985, you couldn't really sit outside until April or May – it was too cold. Then there were about two weeks of glorious weather, great for enjoying the piney woods and the birds and the sky and the fresh salty breezes, and then the mosquitoes came and you couldn't sit outside again until the fall. Then there would be another two glorious weeks, and after that it was too cold again.

Another problem with the summers was the tourists. It wasn't too bad in Truro, but in Provincetown toward the end of the summer you could hardly walk on Commercial Street, the crowds were so thick. This is not an exaggeration. It was worse on weekends and special gay events. August was the worst month of all – that's when the psychiatrists were thickest and the weather was hottest – and so I spent every August with Les and Makiko Wisner in chilly San Francisco. This was the apex of the season, and in theory I should have wanted to be there the most then, but I didn't.

We tried to keep ourselves amused. We had a Tarot study group, which met weekly at my house. Peter and Diana Stander were the ones who



got us interested – they had a gallery in Provincetown called Zingara (meaning *Gypsy* – it was Diana's pen name) where they did Tarot readings for tourists. I studied Tarot pretty deeply – I had the background of the *I Ching* so I could recognize the Tarot's use not for divination (although it had that element) but as a vehicle for projection and discovery of the unconscious. My studies in symbolism and iconography were also helpful in



understanding the imagery. We used the Rider deck (above left), backed up with Aleister Crowley's creepy Thoth deck (above right). The Standers and I also got familiar with lots of other decks, but Rider was the clearest and by far the best for reading.

The *minor arcana* of the Tarot – the 56 suit cards, corresponding to our playing cards – represent slices of life in somewhat the way the 64 hexagrams of the *I Ching* do. The *major arcana* – the 22 trumps, such as the Magician and the Hermit shown here, are something else again, and represent archetypes. I use the Eight of Pentacles, and the Tower (a trump) to illustrate Chapter 27B. The interplay of the cards and the various methods of reading were all of intense interest. In the Tarot group we studied a card a week – in addition to the Standers, Judy Given was part of the group, and Rosemary, and an astrologer from Provincetown called Marilyn Miller, and sometimes other people sat in. It was all very interesting. I got good enough at readings that I even filled a shift at the Zingara Gallery one afternoon, ready to read for the public. I got no business that day – but I was ready!

Winters were horrible. I had not endured an Eastern winter for some time, and it was a shock to me how bad it was. Not only was it cold and wet and dark and bleak, it was long.⁹ One winter (the first, 1982-3) was enough for me. I never stayed the whole winter in Truro again. Instead I traveled – one of the advantages of living rent-free and job-free was that I could travel at will – and I always arranged to be away during most of the worst part of the winter. Rosemary was living in the guest wing for many of these years and she sent me this picture of the Big House with icicles hanging off the eaves. I shudder just looking at it.



Here's what I wrote to a friend about Cape Cod winters.

This is the time of year on Cape Cod where everybody sort of melts. You know what it's like to unwrap a Tootsie Roll and then leave it in your jacket pocket in a hot locked car and when you get it back it's all a sticky, lint-covered blob of brown sludge?¹⁰ Well, that's what I feel like sometimes in this house after the sun goes down, banging around from room to room like a loose screw inside a cheap radio,

⁹ Speaking about this to a native during my first winter, I pointed out that February at least was a short month. Not on Cape Cod it isn't, he said.

¹⁰ Future researchers: a Tootsie Roll was a kind of chewy chocolate candy.

half-finished projects littered everywhere, bones from day-before-yesterday's dinner, table heaped with unread correspondence, TV on mute unheeded in the corner, more than one four-foot stack of old newspapers (no trash pickup here), me wandering around in an old flannel bathrobe, dazed expression on my face, looking for my little red notebook. It is not healthy. But this happens every winter, when it gets too cold to spend any serious time outside, and I am cooped up inside, air stale from having storm windows up, endlessly rearranging piles of papers into other piles. The only solution is to LEAVE for a while.

Rosemary and I invented a game called Pamet Backgammon. It was a variant of Russian backgammon, the rules for which I found in *Hoyle's Book of Games* after we got bored with double solitaire and found regular (English) backgammon unsatisfying. It was perhaps the most perfect game ever devised, exquisitely balanced and offering many karmic lessons. The rules of Pamet backgammon are set out in Document 25-5.

Sometimes in the winter the Holiday Inn in Provincetown would show movies to a small cold depressed audience, and I would go with Peter and Diana Stander – what mournful evenings those were. The Outer Cape in the wintertime is very lonesome and isolated. Did I mention cold and dark and wet? That too. Horrible – I shiver at the memory. I remember the highlight of the winter season – just at the start of winter – was the lighting of the Christmas lights on the Pilgrim Monument in Provincetown. What a pathetic little event that was, in dark cold December. I traveled in the summertime too – in 1983 we rented the house, as an experiment, and I *couldn't* go home. I never allowed that to happen again.

Joel Solkoff contacted me in Stockholm in the summer of 1983, when I had been in Europe for almost four months, and asked me to come to Washington and help him do a media tour through the Delmarva Peninsula for his book *Learning to Live Again*. I did this and learned a lot from it, among other things that publishers often don't market their books, that a media tour does no good unless you arrange with the distributors to have books available in the markets you visit, and that it is really easy to get on local radio and television because the producers are hungry for free content.

One great benefit of living on the Cape was that I got to go to New York a lot. I had not been back there for nearly 10 years. I went often and stayed at the Hotel Belleclaire (below) on West 77th Street between Broadway and West End Avenue, just across the street from Collegiate School.¹¹ The Belleclaire was by this time a very run-down fleabag, but rooms were really cheap (I think less than \$20 a night on a weekly basis)

¹¹ When I was a student at Collegiate (see Chapter 3C.10) they always warned us never to go into the Belleclaire. That gave it an added attraction both at the time, and later when I stayed there in the 1980s. Actually Collegiate was the place I should never have gone into.

and the location was among the very best in the city. One time I remember there was no heat, but there was hot water, so I ran a hot shower all night to stay warm, and water condensed on the ceiling and the whole room became a retort. But usually it was OK – Christopher stayed with me at the Belleclaire one time. Now it is all gentrified condos and grotesquely expensive. When I stayed there I started almost every day with an hour at the American Museum of Natural History a few blocks down West 77th Street (now when I stay with Christopher on the East Side I do the same with the Metropolitan Museum of Art). Sometimes I stayed at the YMCA at 5 West 63rd Street. Very basic but very cheap.



Often, even in the winter, I went to Boston to see movies – there were few movies shown on the Cape in the winter, and even in the summer most of the interesting ones didn't make it out there. So I would go to Provincetown and fly to Boston in one of PBA's little planes – either a DC-3 or a five-seater.¹² The little airport had no security – you just walked onto the field, as in the old days. There was a little structure between the terminal and the field that a family of skunks lived in – we were always careful about that. They let me sit in the co-pilot's seat in the 5-seater, and I practically learned to fly on those trips across Cape Cod Bay and Boston Harbor. Pictured is a Cessna five-seater – if the small PBA plane wasn't this model it was close.



Once I got to Boston, I checked into the to the seedy crumbling Cambridge YMCA at 820 Massachusetts Avenue (left), opposite City Hall. I got a *Boston Globe* and planned my routes. I would go to four or five movies a day, according to a schedule I worked out with the list of films I wanted to see, the show times, the theatre locations and a map of the city with public transportation routes. If two films I

wanted to see were showing in one theatre I saw them back to back. One day was for Cambridge, another for Boston on the T (the Boston subway), and then Brookline. These

¹² PBA stood for *Provincetown-Boston Airline*.

trips sometimes lasted four or five days, four or five movies a day. I also went to museums, of which Boston and Cambridge had a lot, and bought books and second-hand records for my radio show, all on public transit.

My radio and TV shows helped me settle into living in Truro, because I had something to do and a place in the community. Otherwise I spent my time traveling, and reading a lot from the Wellfleet and Provincetown libraries – Wellfleet borrowed for me on inter-library loan if I needed something they didn't have. I began a more or less systematic study of history with James Bryce's *The Holy Roman Empire* (1862), methodically filling in the blanks in my knowledge, a practice I have continued to this day. I attended Town Meeting every year – the famous direct democracy of New England town government – but found all the details about sewer repairs and snow removal quite boring. Someone approached me informally about standing for Town Selectman, but I declined – I never thought, when I was in college plotting a political career, that I would ever refuse a public office. But I didn't want to spend my time with the details of town administration.

- At one Town Meeting someone got up and started a Christian prayer. I had about one second to decide whether it was wise for me, as a Jew and a newcomer, to object to this. When my second passed I stood up, interrupted the speaker, and objected as a point of order to a religious invocation in a governmental meeting. The chair sustained my objection.

Victoria came up two weeks a year, and I made a point of leaving it to her exclusive use when this happened. This was only fair – she had a right to use the house but almost never did, so I let her have it to herself when she did come. She usually came in August, when I was in San Francisco anyway.

I seriously considered moving to London in 1986 – I had long wanted to live there, and thought I could just manage to do it without working. I couldn't work in England – not only would I not qualify for a work visa, but what was I qualified to do there except work for an international law firm, which was out of the question? I have detailed plans for the move in my notebooks of the time, and my letters are full of this plan. I thought I had just enough money to qualify for a visa as a “person of independent means.” But the money to live on in England without working just wasn't there, and the stars were never quite right, so it did not happen. When I learned to give up regretting things, this was one of the last regrets to go. It is quite gone now, and if I had the chance to move to England now I wouldn't do it.

If I couldn't move to England, I planned to stay in Truro, and thought I might earn some money on the side by taking an occasional law case or appeal. To do this I needed to become a member of the Massachusetts bar, and to do that I needed a local sponsor, so I went to see a lawyer in Provincetown whom I knew slightly, and she agreed to sign my papers. As I was already admitted in California I didn't need to take the full bar

examination, just something called the Attorneys' Bar. This examined applicants on certain state-specific subjects like Massachusetts civil procedure, criminal law, and evidence, which weren't much different from the same subjects in California. I also had to take the Multi-State Professional Responsibility Examination (legal ethics) because I had never taken it – when I took the California bar examination in 1971 it was not required. I signed up for a cram course but didn't bother to go to the classes – I knew from my California experience that the classes were unnecessary, and that all I needed were the study materials. I approached the Massachusetts bar as I had the California bar, very seriously, memorizing the materials by reducing them to lists which I recalled with the help of mnemonics. I spent the last few days before the test at the Copley Plaza Hotel in Boston, studying hard. It was the week Marcos fell in the Philippines.

I passed the Attorney's Bar in 1986 with no trouble, and was admitted. But I never did practice there, not even once. I didn't want to – it was just a fallback for extra money if I *really* needed it. Before 1986 I used to deflect requests for legal advice by saying I wasn't admitted – now I couldn't even do that.

Here's a picture of me dated April 1987 (aged 42). I wore contact lenses in those days. I am sitting in the window seat in the living room of the Big House.



C. Leaving the Cape

By 1987 I was pretty sick of living in the country, although I didn't realize it. What happened next was the reverse of what had happened in 1982. Then I was living far away from Truro and wanted to sell, but some of my siblings would not hear of it – not the dear old house! Victoria and I think Adam were strong on this point – Christopher did not much care. Now I was established there but some of my siblings now were eager to sell – Christopher, and perhaps Adam even though he was fonder of the place than I was. I forget the exact alignment. But anyway now they wanted to sell and I was the one saying: not the dear old house!

But they were stronger than I was on this point, and after fighting it for a while I thought: suppose I lose, what will I do? I had a number of strategies for what I would do – find another house in Truro, move to Provincetown and practice law, move to England. But when I thought deeply enough about it I realized that moving back to San Francisco was the obvious plan, and that I would probably like it a lot better than staying in Sticksville, Massachusetts. Once I settled on that idea I stopped struggling.

Stopped struggling, but then as usual began worrying. Was I doing the right thing? Here's an extract from a letter to my college classmate Peter Miller, dated August 1987:

As I knew I would, I am feeling melancholy about leaving Truro for good, all my friends and the broad band of *camaraderie* that country life permits. What if I can't get on the cable in SF?¹³ What if I can't buy a nice house? What if I find myself sniveling in some bare concrete *barrio*, banished forever from the lush natural world of the countryside, too late to go back, trapped, alienated [music up here], a tragic ruin, forsaken, forlorn, who brought it on himself? But then I remind myself that *everything* is not likely to go wrong all at once, that I will probably achieve a *few* of my goals anyway, that lush nature is none too much fun in January, that I need to make something in the world to have and to hold, etc. etc. You are right – I need to inherit more \$. Failing that I need to stiffen my upper lip and jump. Indeed, I'd better jump, because I have set fire to the ledge I'm standing on.

And then, typically, I change positions and argue the other side.

There is a life after Truro, somewhere where if I need a new pair of eyeglass frames I won't have to travel 20 miles to a solitary no-discount low-selection outlet, where the movies go a step beyond *Porky's XVI*, and where I can make a bit of mazuma and maybe even make a nest I can really keep. Behind a lot of this moving business is the emerging understanding that I am not getting any younger and I need some *real* roots, not shared with any roommates, not in a derelict parental house, not somewhere "for a few years," but real for life. San Francisco is the only place I could imagine feeling that way about, so it's time to build things there rather than here.

That turned out to be the better argument.

Preparing the house to sell was a huge project, which fell pretty much to me to manage as I was on site. My notebooks of the time are full of lists of things to do. One of the main projects was repairing the damage from termites and dry rot. This was extensive – the more siding and shingles we took off, the more damage we found. The driveway needed regrading. We cleared some trees to enhance the view, and some more to facilitate access to the Pamet River. The gutters needed replacing, and so did the oil tank, and the screens, and the electrical panel, and the sashweights in the windows. There was work for painters and plasterers and carpenters and electricians and artisans of every kind. I even pulled some of the shingles off myself – it was a very satisfying work of destruction. Michael Jerace was my general contractor for this project, and it took a long, long time, and cost vastly more money than we had ever imagined. See Document 25-3.

But finally it was ready to list, and we listed it. Part of the publicity work for the listing was aerial photographs, which I commissioned from a pilot whose plane I had used for a TV show. I was going to come with him if I could, and we agreed that if I appeared at

¹³ Meaning get a television show on local access cable TV, as I had done in Provincetown.

the Provincetown airport by a certain time that day I could ride along. But something came up, and I didn't go, and a good thing too, because he crashed and burned to death in that little plane that very afternoon. If I had been aboard I would have burned to death too.

Anyway we listed the property and showed it around, using the brochure reprinted as Document 24-4, but got no takers for quite a while. Finally Anne and Marty Peretz, who lived in Cambridge but whose country place was a few houses down on North Pamet Road, offered us \$600,000, less than we were asking but by that time they were our only prospects, and we took it. This was an odd coincidence because Marty had been the principal backer (with Anne's money, when she was still Anne Farnsworth) of the National Conference for New Politics, where I worked as office manager in 1966-67 (see Chapter 12.C). I had not seen them in the 21 years since then. Marty was now the publisher (again with Anne's money) of *The New Republic*. Anne was an heiress of the Singer sewing machine fortune and I heard somewhere that her share was around \$600 million. Our house was worth about a tenth of 1% of her capital, never mind her income. She bought other properties on North Pamet Road also. Adam got quite friendly with Anne and her daughter and continued to visit the property and stay in the Little House for several years after we sold.

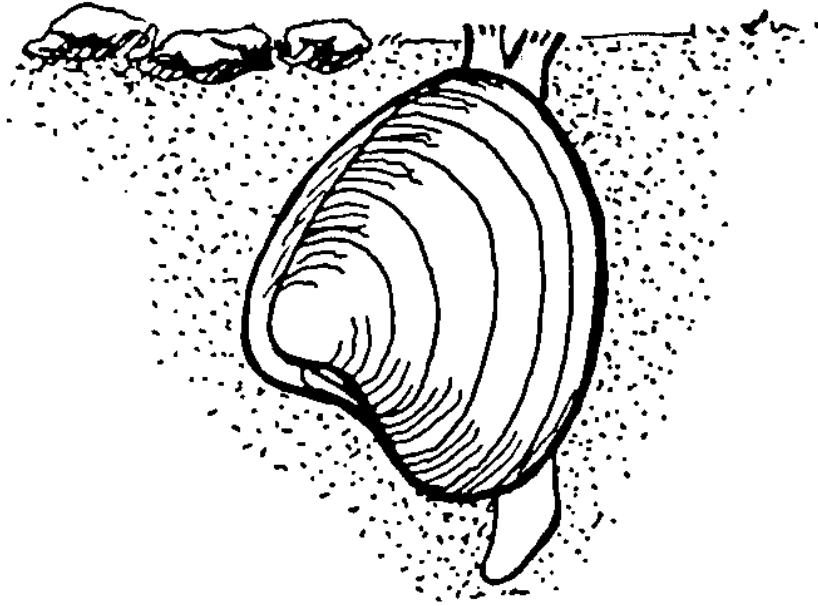
I handled all the details of the fix-up and the listing, and when the deal was done I packed up my possessions, mostly my library and records, and put most of it in a moving van bound for a storage unit in San Francisco. Then I packed a traveling bag and got in my car along with a few small things I didn't want to entrust to a moving company, drove to Orleans for the closing at a lawyer's office, signed the papers (I had power of attorney from my siblings to do this), and became homeless, on my way across the mountains and the prairies, back to San Francisco and the oceans white with foam.¹⁴

- “So we took leave of Cape Cod and its inhabitants. We liked the manners of the last, what little we saw of them, very much. They were particularly downright and good-humored. The old people appeared remarkably well preserved, as if by the saltiness of the atmosphere...” Henry David Thoreau, *Cape Cod* (1865).

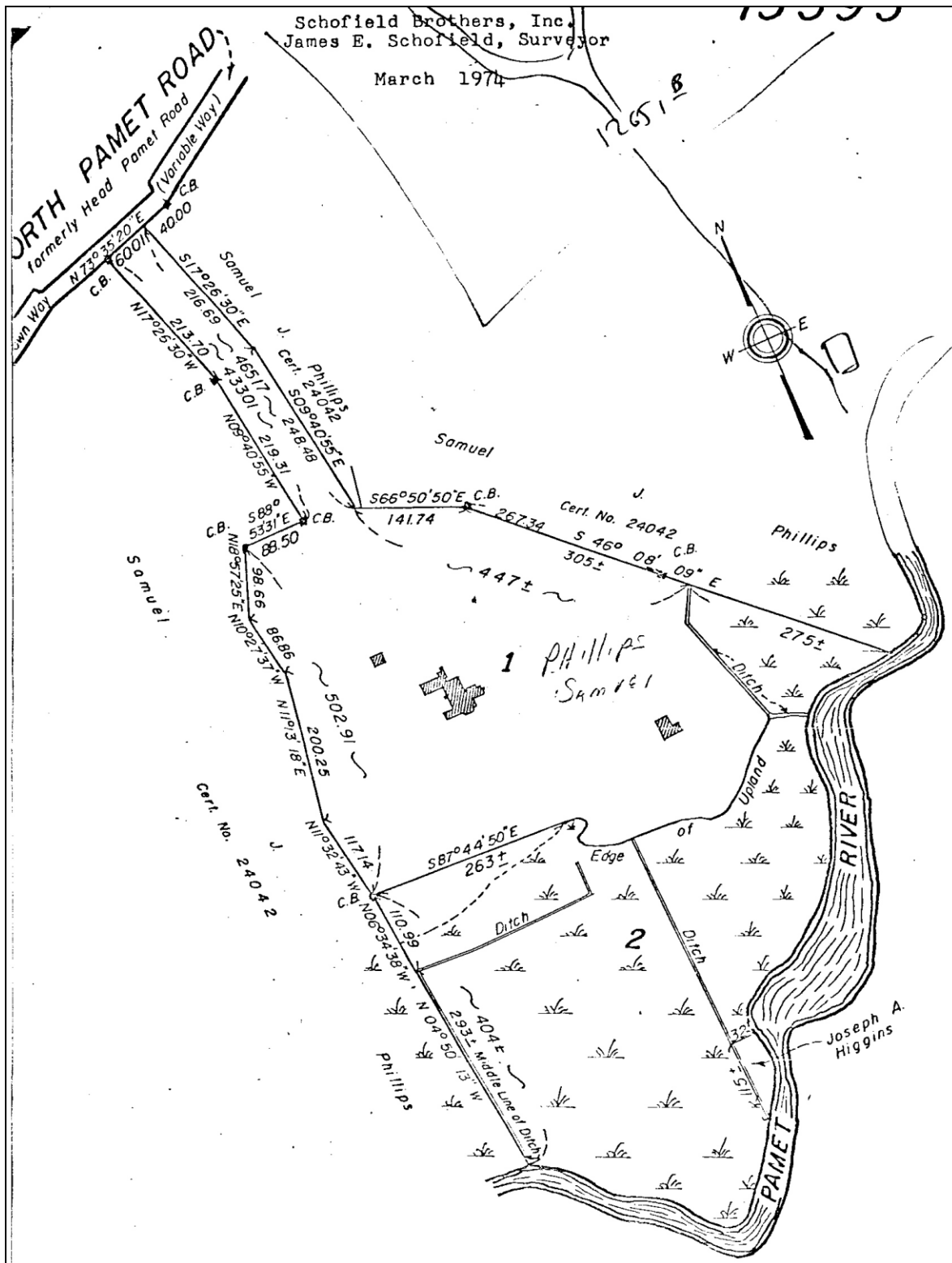
When I got to San Francisco it felt like I had never left – I eased seamlessly back into the life of the city, and it seemed as if I had been having a dream, or that I was coming back from a weekend in the country. I'm glad I had this experience in Truro – it was very interesting and broadening to have lived in a rural setting for a while. But I'm also glad it's over. I have not been back since leaving in 1988. I was never in love with the place, my parents were – my only reason for going there was to live rent-free so I could quit

¹⁴ Scholars of the 34th century: I am quoting here from Irving Berlin's 1918 song “God Bless America.”

work and travel more or less at will. I don't miss it a bit. There would be no reason for me to go back anyway now – my best friends from that time, Rosemary and Judy and Peter and Arne, are all dead now.¹⁵

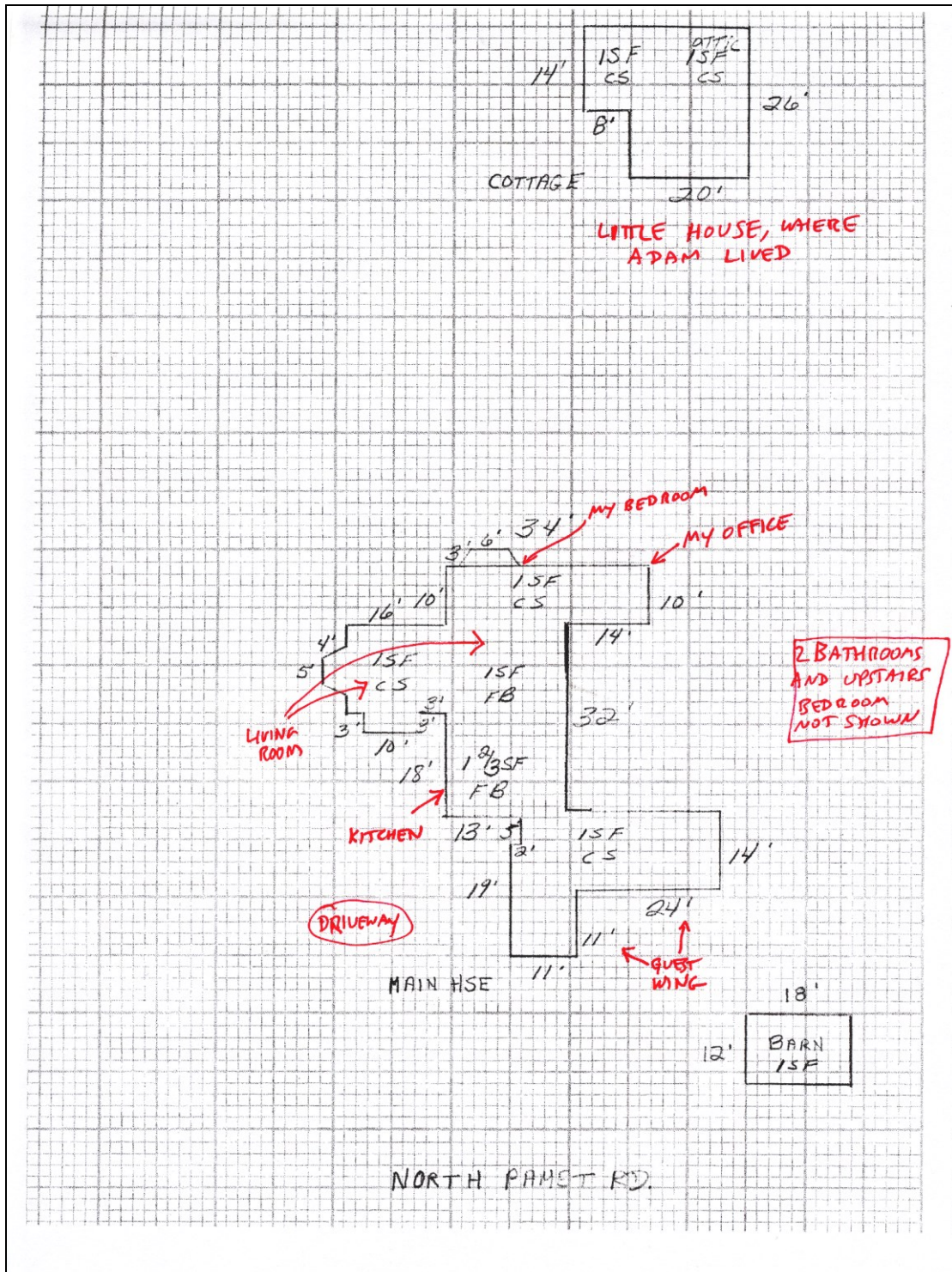


¹⁵ Diana isn't dead, but she moved back to Louisiana.



This is the plat of the 5.9 acres remaining after National Seashore condemnation. The structures shown are (left to right) the barn, the Big House, and the Little House.

Document 25-2: Floor plan and pictures of the Truro property





FRONT VIEW OF
SUBJECT PROPERTY



REAR VIEW OF
SUBJECT PROPERTY



STREET SCENE



FRONT VIEW OF COTTAGE



REAR VIEW OF COTTAGE



PAMET RIVER FRONT
AND PATH TO WATER



Typical wooded
View

Document 25-3: Letter re preparing Truro house for sale

July 6, 1987

Michael Sutton
Anne Ekstrom
Appraisal Company
Box 1655 Orleans

Dear Appraisers,

(1) I spoke with the Park people. You may take it that the wings in the big house were here before 9/1/59, thus being included in the base for expansion. The barn & cottage are outbuildings and as such the date doesn't matter. We are allowed 50% addition to the main house after the cutoff date and an additional 50% in outbuildings of whatever date.

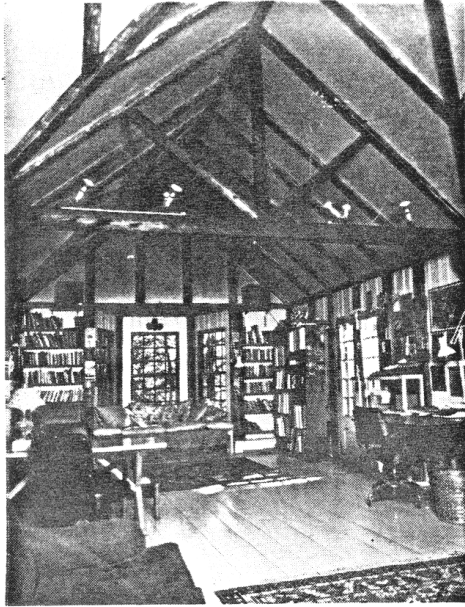
(2) Things you should appraise as having been done even though they aren't done yet:

- Carpentry: gutters replaced with white enamel aluminum
woodwork repaired & painted
all spots of damage repaired
screens and storms repaired
interior jobs done: stuck windows, sliding doors,
etc all fixed
new kitchen counter and sink
- plasterers: new drywalls on all wings rooms incl corridor & bath
kitchen ceiling fixed
upstairs wall fixed
other patches that ~~are~~ turn up also fixed
- painter: outside woodwork & selected interiors repainted
bathroom and upstairs repainted except for spackle
floor upstairs
windows repainted as needed
- sills dug out.
- life-of-house termite certificate in force.
- trees topped to increase ocean view
- electrical panel replaced with new circuit breakers
- outside oil tank disposed of; new one installed in cellar
- driveway repaired
- plumber: proper sink in little house, suitable for studio.
sink in big house kitchen repaired
outside faucets working
- brushwood gathered up, tulips planted, etc etc

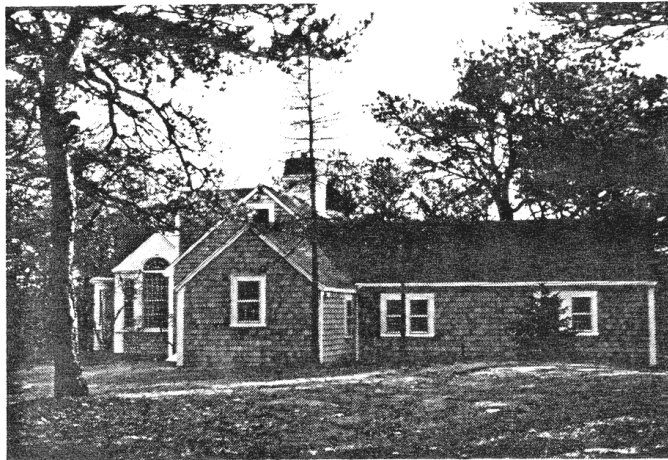
(3) Call if you need more info.

DAVID PHILLIPS

Document 25-4: Sales brochure for Truro house



TRURO, CAPE COD



\$696,000

5.9 ACRES RUSTIC WOODED SETTING—CIRCA 1925

This five bedroom house, originally built for artist Edward Wilson, and a 4 room guest cottage in the secluded woodlands of the Cape Cod National Seashore provide a familial intimacy with a distinctively classic Cape Cod flavor.

- 12 miles from Provincetown Airport
- ¼ mile walk to Ballston Beach (Atlantic Ocean)
- Private landing on Pamet River
- Situated in Cape Cod National Seashore parkland, protected from development in perpetuity
- No neighboring houses or roadways in view
- Cottage and main house secluded from each other

²³⁴²
MAIN HOUSE: ~~2119~~ sq. ft. living area

- 5 full bedrooms (one second story)
- Convertible den off livingroom with bay window
- Living room 38' long with large working fireplace, ceiling rises to 15½' with original exposed wood beams
- Cathedral window
- French doors open to south side
- Most rooms have 3 exposures, some have 2
- Cellar with 640 sq. ft.

COTTAGE: 632 sq. ft. living area

- 2 bedrooms
- Wood burning stove
- Close proximity to Pamet River
- Two entrances
- Exposures on all sides
- Attic full length of house

AVAILABLE FOR VIEWING AFTER MARCH 16, 1988 BY APPOINTMENT ONLY

FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE CALL ~~VICTORIA PHILLIPS 212-675-7245~~ AFTER MARCH 15, CALL 617-349-2727.

Document 25-5: Russian backgammon

The game Rosemary and I played for so many years, and called Pamet backgammon after the river that ran by my property in Truro where we invented the game, was based on Russian backgammon. Here are the rules of Russian backgammon, taken from the 1937 edition of *Foster's Complete Hoyle*, the standard encyclopedia of game rules. It assumes a knowledge of the basic of backgammon – the movement of the pieces, the method of play, passage around the board and bearing off at the end. These are widely available, and are explained in the pages of Hoyle which precede the rules of this variant.

RUSSIAN BACKGAMMON.

In this variety of the game, no men are placed upon the board at starting, but each player enters his men by throws of the dice, and both players enter upon the same table, so that all the men on both sides move round the board in the same direction, and both players have the same home table, which is always the one opposite the entering table.

After having entered two men on the first throw, the player is at liberty either to continue entering his men with any subsequent throws, or to play the men already entered. In moving or in entering a player may capture any blots left by his adversary; but he cannot enter upon a point covered by two or more of the adversary's men. If a player cannot enter a fresh man with the throw made, he must play a man if he can. When a man is captured, he must be re-entered before any other man can be moved.

Except on the first throw of the game, doublets give the player a great advantage. He can not only play the upper faces of the dice twice over, as in the ordinary game, but the faces opposite them also, and can then throw again before his adversary. Should he again throw doublets, he would play both faces of the dice, and throw again, and so on. As the opposite face is always

the complement of seven, it is not necessary to turn the dice over to see what it is. A player throwing double four knows that he has four fours and four threes to play and will then get another throw. The upper faces of the dice must be played first, and if all four cannot be played the opposites and the second throw are lost. If the upper faces can be played, but not all the opposites, the second throw is lost.

If the first throw of the game made by either player is a doublet, it is played as in the ordinary game, without playing the opposite faces or getting a second throw.

The chief tactics of the game are in getting your men together in advance of your adversary, and covering as many consecutive points as possible, so that he cannot pass you except singly, and then only at the risk of being hit. After getting home, the men should be piled on the ace and deuce points unless there is very little time to waste in securing position.

We made three changes to these rules, which distinguish Pamet from Russian backgammon.

1. When a player is blocked and cannot finish the plays allowed him by his dice, the other player completes the play. If that leaves the second player with only one die to play as his turn, so be it. The successive throw after doubles is considered part of the play, so if a player is blocked and cannot finish playing doubles, the other player gets the successive throw on completing the earlier one. If the second player, after using some of the play which passed to him, is also blocked, the play passes back to the first player, who although blocked before may now no longer be blocked because of the changed situation after the second player used part of his throw. The play may go back and forth several times during a run of doubles.
2. A player is not required to maximize his use of the dice. Suppose, for example, that a player who throws a six and a three can move both six and three if he plays the three first, but if he plays the six first would then be blocked and unable to play the three. In Russian as well as English and most other forms of backgammon, this player would be obliged to move the six first, so as to be able to move the three. In Pamet backgammon a player may choose the order of play freely, even if it means losing the play on one of the dice, and could deliberately move the six first and cede the three to his opponent. Often it is strategically useful to do this. But a player who can make the move allowed by *one* of the dice must make that move – he cannot choose the blocked die first and avoid playing the unblocked die.
3. If a player is completely blocked and cannot make any move, and his opponent to whom play passes is also completely blocked, the opponent makes a fresh throw of the dice.

We found by experiment that two factors favor a party – making the first throw, and placing two men on the ace point (the last point on the inner table from which men are borne off at the end). Both of these conditions raised the odds of eventual victory from 1:1 to 2:1. Nothing else (in a game between players of comparable skill, which of course meant only Rosemary and me) correlated to a likelihood of winning. Indeed, no matter how far ahead a player seemed to be, it was not possible to predict victory with any confidence. A well-planned capture, or a run of doubles, could change the strategic situation completely and without warning. A player who had only one man left on the board could eventually lose to a player who had not even put all his men into the end table. This almost total balance, rare among games requiring skill, makes Pamet backgammon unsuitable for betting (one of the main uses of the English game), and the doubling cube is not used, because there is no situation (apart from the two just mentioned) which justifies predicting victory for either side.

| Because a player cannot land on a blot (a point occupied by two of the opponent's men), and no individual die can advance a man more than six points, a player cannot move his men past a row of six consecutive blots (called a prime). The technique of advancing a prime, and moving men from one end to the other without opening a gap, is one of the special skills of Russian (and Pamet) backgammon. We called it a *slime mold*. Enticing a single man beyond a potential prime and then closing up behind it, leaving it undefended to pick off at leisure, is a satisfying gambit.

As noted in the text, many useful karmic lessons appear in the course of a game of Pamet backgammon. One common lesson is the basic rule, taught by the Buddha, not to rely on structures, because they no sooner form than they begin to decay. They can be valuable in the short run, but we must not forget their ephemeral nature. Rosemary said, and I agree, that Pamet backgammon was at least as valuable as the *I Ching* as a source of life lessons.

Document 25-6: Paintings of Truro and Provincetown

As these paintings of Truro and Provincetown from the Outer Cape Auctions website show, the Outer Cape is really beautiful. But it gets boring after a while.



Document 25-7: Interiors of the Big House at Truro



Living room



Living room, continued



My office¹⁶

¹⁶ The picture in the second row left shows my heraldic library in the mid-1980s. Compare the partial picture in Chapter 6, taken 25 years later.



Kitchen

[pages 616-619 are reserved]