

Transcription of Tape by Bobbee Webster
(Mrs. Daniel T. Webster! Jr.)

"My topic is 'From There to Here Over the Years-1908 to 1973' with a good deal of wandering, I'm afraid, from the subject. I certainly don't remember my first trip from New York City to Northport! Maine, in late June of 1908. I was then only three months old. But I do recollect bits and snatches of subsequent trips...as well I should, since I covered that span at least 75 times over the years. I came to Northport early every summer of my life, and sometimes twice, until Dan and I finally retired up here in 1973. In the early years we traveled by boat via the old Eastern Steamship Lines; this meant two nights on the water, punctuated by a day-long stopover in Boston.

I have a haunting memory of a particular night on the first lap of one of those voyages between New York City and Boston. It was prior to the 1914 opening of the Cape Cod Canal! so we sailed outside in the open ocean around the Cape. We had left New York Harbor at five in the evening! Mother! Sister Peg, and I; I was probably four years old! in which case Peg would have been ten to eleven. By eight o'clock we were all nestled in our bunks in one of the tiny staterooms, presumably to have a quiet and restful sleep. This, however, was not meant to be, for later that night we sailed into the path of a furious storm. The ship pitched and rolled and pitched some more, and (...) and it groaned as though in the throes of some terribly agony. We three clung to each other for dear life until Mother finally succumbed to the violent case of seasickness. She had always been our pillar of strength, and it frightened us to see her so incapacitated! but shortly thereafter we too were overcome. We were all sure we were going to die, and we rather hoped that we would, such is the misery of motion sickness! on which subject unfortunately I am an authority. Well, the night finally passed, and we were still afloat. I have no memory of coming into Boston Harbor in the morning, but Mother always said that when we finally made it out on deck, we were faced by a mass of pea-green passengers, none of whom had fared much better than we. Anyway, we spent the day in Boston regaining our equilibrium. By five that evening, we boarded the Steamship Belfast and headed out again, no doubt with fear and trepidation. This was either a calm voyage, or so paled by comparison to the previous night's run that it didn't register in my memory.

Early the second morning we were on deck by the time we reached Camden Harbor! and from thereon we watched for familiar landmarks along the shore. Just before we came into the wharf at Northport we passed the foot of Bayview Park, and we were able to get a glimpse of our little cottage set way back on the hill just waiting for us. What a happy sight!

I think perhaps at four years of age I was anticipating the opening my box of treasures which we had packed carefully and stowed away in a large chest under the dormer window the previous September as we prepared for our return to New York. It was always a wrench to leave those toys behind, especially my dear little sweet grass cradle which held papoose all done up in Indian garb. There were many things in that

chest: pails and shovels, water wings and dolls' clothes, blocks and wooden beads, children's books and a tiny tin tea set, but none so loved and cherished as the little papoose in the sweet grass cradle.

Anyway, at 7:00 A.M. we pulled into the wharf at Northport. In those days it was quite an imposing edifice. It jutted out into the bay much further than it does now. There was a large platform on top of a cribbing filled with tremendous boulders. Capping this platform was a gray-green shingled building, probably sixty feet square. Inside there was a ticket office and a waiting room on one side, and a baggage and storage room on the other. Down the center ran a manually operated gangplank which was raised and lowered on chains to adapt to the tide. I can still hear them clanking even now. The incline at low tide was very steep indeed, which made it difficult for the wharf hands to haul a hand truck piled high with every kind of gear imaginable up to the baggage room. We always arrived with two steamer trunks and copious other baggage, as well as crates of china or linen or whatever other paraphernalia my family felt that we needed. Old Mr. Noyes would load our belongings onto his buckboard, bring it up the hill, and deposit it in the proper rooms in the cottage. We would then unpack and settle in for the next nine or ten weeks.

I really mean settle in, as we would possibly not leave the campground again all summer. There was really no need to, as practically everything came to our door: the milk wagon, the ice cart, wagon-loads of fresh vegetables and fruit, a miniature meat market on wheels, and a twice-weekly delivery of fresh fish from Fogg's Market in Belfast. We even had a couple who came down from Bangor with a load of oriental rugs and hand-embroidered linens at least once each summer. Their name was 'Christmas' and this name really delighted me as their wares delighted my father. We usually returned to New York come Labor Day with at least one rug, and to this day I have doilies and antimacassars and dresser scarves from the Christmas cart. There were several ladies of the village who made delicious breads and doughnuts and baked beans, which mother considered the greatest bargain of all time. She dutifully made doughnuts and beans once a week all winter in our New York apartment for Dad who was a born Mainer. But she was happy come summer to forgo that chore.

There were also two little country stores on the campground, one owned by Mr. Perkins and the other by Mr. Price. I used to love to sit on the pickle barrel in the Perkins store to eat my penny candy or one of the cookies out of the large bin from which these cookies were dispensed, one at a time or by the pound. This was probably not the most sanitary way of dispensing them, but some times when I am fighting my way into a modern plastic pre-packaged product, I'd be delighted to take a chance on it.

We also had several rooming houses where meals were served, and we took advantage of that service at least once each summer. Dad was obsessed with the preservation of the handsome parquet floor he and Grandpa Greenwood had laid in our living room, so each year we would wait for a long enough spell of dry weather to make varnishing feasible. When the time finally came, Mother and Peg and I would be shoed out of the cottage right after breakfast, and Dad would spend the day with his helper wielding varnish brushes. Come evening, we would go to the rooming house where we had carefully reserved our places at the common table! have a delicious home-style dinner, and catch up on all the local gossip.

The only staircase in the cottage was in the living room, so in order to get up to our beds on varnish night, we had to climb up a ladder from the front lawn and into the second story window. Peg and I would be cautioned not to jump around as we prepared for bed, lest we shake loose particles of sand or dust down through the single-layer flooring into the tacky varnish below. Dad's wrath could be rather fierce, so we took this admonition very seriously indeed. However, this day was always rather a lark, and Peg and I did a lot of giggling.

I guess I was seven or eight years old when I played with Natalie Burnham and her sister. They were the daughters of the man who managed the monstrous turreted old frame hotel at the head of Ruggles Park facing the wharf. I look at that site now and wonder how such a large building could ever have sat on that site. For a number of years it was a busy and flourishing enterprise, but in 1919 it burned to the ground, and was replaced by a considerably smaller structure. That building is now being remodeled into a five or six condominium complex, a fact which is frowned upon by many in the village and approved of by others. Many of us don't take kindly to such changes on the campground; however, changes are inevitable, and most of us feel that the refurbishing of that building is preferable to letting it become a dreadful eye-sore. It is, after all, quite a focal point in the village.

When I was about eight or nine years old, what is now the community hall was built as a moving picture theater. The films were silent, of course, but we had Mary Louise Smith's mother who played the piano with great gusto and I guess considerable talent. She seemed to have a faculty for sweeping the audience up into the moods of the picture by her changes of tune and tempo. She would reach a tumultuous crescendo in some moments of great excitement, and the dogs and the cats that had followed their owners into the show would either howl or get up and quietly leave the premises. I even remember one of C.O. Dickey's guinea hens wandering in one evening for the performance. Freddie Condon had opened a tiny candy shop next to the movie house, and before the show was half over the floor was strewn with buttered popcorn, candied chicken feed, and peanuts, a veritable feast for our four-legged friends. The first movie I remember seeing there was Alla Nazimova (1879-1945), in "Fog", a true tear-jerker.

The next summer I was ten; it was 1918 and the World War I was nearing the end. I remember that there were many shortages of cakes of soap. Housewives saved all their animal fats, bought lye, boiled these two ingredients together, and produced strong,

irregularly shaped bars of yellow laundry soap. It smelled dreadful, but I guess it was cleansing. We had a little old German laundress Sophie who came to our New York apartment each week, and her hands were permanently scarred, and small wonder. That soap was strong!

At ten I was not really too aware of the privations of wartime, but Peg was seven years my senior and her social life that summer in Northport was not very eventful, as all the eligible young men were off serving our country. I, on the other hand, had a very special young friend by the name of Henry Pepper who was a budding naturalist. He and I spent hours catching fireflies and rooting around under the seaweed on the shore, collecting all sorts of slimy and wiggly things, which both fascinated and repulsed me. We also climbed every tree on the campground until I finally fell out of one with a dreadful thud. I ended up in bed with badly sprained and scraped ankles. Dr. Kilgore bandaged it and brought me a cradle to put the foot in, and there I stayed for a number of weeks. One might think, "Poor dear," but actually after the first acute pain had subsided, I had a wonderful time. Family friends came to read to me, and many brought goodies and presents to entertain me. It was like having a birthday every day. Henry, who was somewhat disconsolate at losing his playmate, arrived one day with a garter snake in a jar, a token no doubt of his esteem; however, snakes were then and still are one of my greatest aversions, so as soon as Henry left the house Mother took the poor captured critter across the park and down into the ravine and let it loose beside the brook. I have only seen one or two snakes in all the years since then, so I guess that one was in no condition to propagate.

In 1916 the Northport Golf Club was started. Ira Cobe, I believe, gave the property upon which the clubhouse was built, and the golf course was created on acreage purchased from Henry G. Hills. Father was active in the establishment of the club and became an avid golfer. He and Ira Cobe were golf partners, and mother and Annie E. Watt Cobe became golf widows. The focus of my parents' activities shifted from the simplicity of the campground to a more sophisticated way of life. Hillside Farms, the Cobes' beautiful home off Bluff Road, became the social center. There were cocktail parties and dinner parties and truly wonderful musicals. There was, and still is, a fine pipe organ in the music room at Hillside, and we had amongst us a musician to perform on it. Ralph Flanders, a summer resident of our community, was at that time the director of the New England Conservatory of Music in Boston, and there were a number of artists from that institution who summered here, violinists, pianists, vocalists, and what not, supplemented by many other famous performers from away. I wish now that I had been old enough to have had full appreciation, but the truth of the matter is I much preferred being down on the campground with my contemporaries, and sometimes felt rather trapped by the splendor of it all.

In the Fall when we and the Cobes had returned to our winter quarters in New York City! a slightly different routine was established. Dad and Ira Cobe would gird their loins and go off each Sunday to conquer a golf course on Long Island or in Westchester County, and Mother and Mrs. Cobe would stay behind and chat and sew until time to prepare a suitable dinner for the returning gladiators. As the really cold weather set in, the

golf clubs were put away, the card tables were set up, and the cribbage board was brought out, and for the rest of the winter the rafters would ring with "fifteen-two, fifteen-four, fifteen six," and so forth. This weekly routine was followed right up until Mrs. Cobe's death in 1928.

In the early 20s we made the annual pilgrimage to Maine, usually by rail on the state of Maine or the Bar Harbor Express. Dad was a teacher and had to stay behind for a few days to attend meetings or generally tie up loose ends, so Mother would concede the lower berth in the Pullman car to Peg and me, and she would climb into the upper berth. I was lucky enough to get the side by the window on most trips. I remember how mysterious it all seemed to me, watching the world speed by in the dead of night, and stopping at dimly lit stations to pick up new passengers. The window shut out most of the noise, so it was rather like watching a pantomime, at least until we'd start out again to the clickity-clack of the wheels on the rails.

To me the breakfast served in the morning in the dining car was sheer ambrosia and the service impeccable. The black waiters were always dressed in immaculate white uniforms, and the tables were set up with starched white linens. There would be a bud vase on each table with a single rose, little silver or would-be silver holders with salt and pepper shakers, and the creamer and sugar bowl, and these things would chatter gently as we sped along.

As I remember, if we took the state of Maine Express, we came into Rockland, and were either met by friends or took a taxi to Northport. If you rode the Bar Harbor Express, you'd get off at Burnham Junction and come across country on the Belfast and Moosehead Lake, or you could go on to Bangor and find your way home from there. It really never was an all-together simple trip. By 1923 or 1924 there were a few cars in Northport, and our little summer colony became much more mobile.

There were several seasons when we young people would go to dances six nights a week: two nights to Swan Lake Pavilion, two nights to Oakland Beach, one night to Montville, I think it was, to square dance, and Saturday night would be a gala affair at the country club with dinner and dancing to Henry Smith's orchestra, at which event my whole family would be in attendance. Lloyd Colett and Mort Cleal were both permitted the use of their family vehicles for these evening jaunts, so we had two seven-passenger Packard touring cars at our disposal. We didn't actually ever pair up, but the group of fourteen teenagers was usually comprised of seven boys and seven girls, and a number of summer romances developed.

Now our little summer colony was becoming more generally known as Bayside, though to this day that is not correct. We used to have a seasonal post office which had a sign reading "Bayside" over the door. This was merely to distinguish this little sub-municipality from the town of Northport. We had grown from being the Wesleyan Grove Methodist Campground through several stages ultimately to become the Northport Village Corporation, and that is still the official name. I sometimes find myself referring to Bayside because it's easier, but many of my contemporaries expect me to know better.

By 1926 I had met Dan and was working in New York City. My life was full of romance and excitement. Northport was somewhat less enticing than it had been, but still I never let a summer go by without making that nostalgic trip, though I'd only stay for a week or two. By the time Dan and I were married in 1932, almost all our traveling was done by automobile. Getting to Northport from New York City was 450 miles straight up Route One. 'Straight' is a poor choice of words, as the roads were anything but straight; they were winding and bumpy. There were no express highways and no city by-passes. It would be another fifteen years before the Maine Turnpike would be completed, and that would only cover 42 miles, less than one-tenth of the length of our trip. So we would start out at the break of day, pass through a myriad of small towns, and a number of large cities such as New Haven, New London, Boston, Portland, and so forth. The small towns slowed us down somewhat, but some of the routes through the cities had been laid out by some diabolical character with a perverted sense of humor, and one could wander around forever before getting out the other side of the city, and back on track. But at least by this time the bridge over the Kennebec River at Bath had been built, so we were no longer at the mercy of a ferry schedule, though I remember that ferry ride as an adventure, and a wonderful opportunity to stretch one's legs. For some reason, I never felt that I was in the state of Maine until I reached Bath. From there on, it was butterflies-in-the-tummy time. We usually reached the cottage before sundown, weary but happy. It would take me a day or two to catch up, and then it would be as though I had never left. Things on the campground never seemed to change very much.

By the middle of the 1940's, we were driving to Maine, Dan and I, from Connecticut each year with our two young sons. We soon discovered it was the better part of wisdom to travel by night. This way we could look into the back seat at two beautiful slumbering cherubs instead of two infants bent on torturing each other. I stayed in Northport with the boys all summer, and Dan commuted on weekends. My hope was that the boys would grow to love this place as I did, and would store up many happy childhood memories, which they certainly did.

Now we are in the fourth generation, and I'm pretty sure that two of my grandchildren have a love of the place, and I can only pray that the other two will fall in line. They certainly won't remember the trip up, as they take a two-hour flight from Philadelphia, and a two-hour ride in a rental car from Portland...not very romantic, but infinitely more expedient. Four hours to get here from Philadelphia is a far cry from the 36 hours it took us from New York by the old Eastern Steamship Lines. If I have given you even a vague idea of what it was like getting from there to here over the years, I've accomplished what I set out to do, and will close by reading a piece I wrote in a fit of nostalgia back in March of 1985. It is entitled "Bayside: Shame on Me". Several of you have either heard this, or read it as it was printed in the little Northport Yacht Club paper. I'm not sure that I warrant your attention a second time, but here goes anyway.

Bayside: Shame on Me
by Bobbee Webster

"A wide expanse of open water, sometimes blue and sparkling with pure white froth; sometimes ominously leaden, and often lost to view in the shroud of quiet grey fog.

Tall sentinel oaks, and stately ash trees;

Rows of gingerbread cottages, lonely in winter and loved in summer;

The Community Hall twice as tall as need be;

Dogs of every breed, mostly mixed, at large and free to chase cats, walk purposely from one place to another, or simply lie down in the middle of the road to bask in the sun;

Mail boxes in untidy clusters, some neat, erect, and newly painted, some rusty and askew;

Small casual garden patches, and primly planted window boxes tenderly nurtured; looking desolate one day, and alive and gay the next;

A rocky beach with wonderful flat stones for skipping, beach glass, clam and mussel shells for gathering and seaweed that's fun to snap;

Summer Sunday sailboat races with spanking white sails and colorfully striped spinnakers;

A cannon shot to start the races sends the dogs scurrying for home and makes the babies cry in fright at the loud bang;

Upside-down dinghies drawn up along the beaches and bulkheads;

Bobbing red balloon mooring markers a few yards out;

Squawking herring gulls gliding on the air currents and dropping clam shells on the rocks beneath them;

Passing lines of black cormorants skimming the surface of the bay with uncomfortable-looking crooks in their long necks;

An early morning jogger flashing by so rapidly as to be seen almost in retrospect;

Fisherman...young and old... accomplished or novice...lined up at dusk along the wharf's edge hoping for a good run of mackerel and often getting it;

Couples headed for the Community Hall to square dance on a Tuesday evening;

The scent of lilacs and wild roses and pine needles with an occasional whiff of deep-frying doughnuts or meat being charcoal-grilled in the neighbor's yard;

The smell of wood smoke and newly-mown grass;

The sound of distant chain saws, power mowers, hammers, twittering birds, barking dogs, and young men playing on the basketball court in the park;

Children squealing delightedly on the slide or seasaw, or trying to touch the clouds with their toes from the swings;

Ladies on porches in white wicker chairs, knitting, sewing, exchanging recipes, or just chatting idly as they watch the passing scene;

Teenagers in their souped-up jalopies, displaying their prowess by rounding corners on two wheels, causing the ladies in the white wicker chairs to shake their heads and go "tsk,tsk";

The "Sunset Brigade" on the wharf after dinner each evening from early June until late September. Bundled in woolens against the wind or the chilling fog, or sleeveless on rare warm nights, watching the vivid changing colors and dramatic cloud patterns of the sunset, or a fog bank rolling across the bay to envelop them;

They swap stories and experiences, learning to know and care about each other;

In summer, local people and people "from away"; doctors, teachers, plumbers, lawyers, carpenters, and jacks-of-all-trades; a happy mingling;

Mostly people who would take secret pleasure in answering the question, "What did you do on your vacation?" with a smug, "Nothing, really! "

They are, also, mostly people who are "hooked" on Bayside.