

Chatham At 200

AT THE ATWOOD HOUSE

by Spencer Grey

At town meeting on Feb. 8, 1911, the moderator, Oscar C. Nickerson, appointed a committee to select the members of a committee to create plans for the celebration of the 200th anniversary of Chatham. This committee met on Dec. 16, 1911, and prepared a plan for a three-day celebration to be held not on the actual anniversary of June 11, 1912, but on the first and second of August when more people would be able to participate. This committee appointed several subcommittees to plan specific parts of the celebration, such as the parade, the dinner the water carnival, decorations, and many others.

The first of August dawned rainy and windy, and the committee postponed the parade until the following day. But almost immediately after the announcement was made, the wind shifted and the rain stopped. At this point the gathered crowd walked to the depot to meet the train bearing Governor Foss, who was to be the featured speaker. When the train arrived 20 minutes late, which was usual, the governor was not on it, but the Salem Cadet Band was. With the band as its focus point, a parade formed with Captain Alfred Howard of the Stage Harbor Light mounted and leading his band of rough riders, followed by a platoon of deputy sheriffs and a long procession of the automobiles of the summer people.

The assembled group marched to the Rockwell Grounds, where the Godfrey Mill now stands. On this grassy bluff above the Mill Pond, a baseball field had been laid out and a large tent erected. As they looked toward Main Street, they could see the tower where Ziba Nickerson and his son William spent hours watching ships going by and reporting their imminent arrival to the harbor officials in Boston. Ironically it was at a few minutes before noon Ziba Nickerson died, and when his death was reported to the crowd, they sang an appropriate hymn in his honor.

The townspeople gathered at noon under the protection of the tent to enjoy dinners of cold roast turkey, stuffing, cold boiled ham and tongue, mashed potatoes, fresh vegetables, salad, pickles, coffee, rolls and butter, served by girls 14 to 18 years old, wearing starched white dresses. Two special tables were set up, one for the elderly people in town and the other for the guest speakers, who were William C. Smith, the Honorable James Hawes of New York, Alpheus H. Hardy, and Joseph C. Lincoln, who read three of his poems for his first published book, "Cape Cod Ballads."

James Hawes gave the principal address of 45 printed pages, summarizing the history of Chatham and recognizing some of the noted inhabitants of the town of past years, beginning with William Nickerson and covering the educational system, the participation of many men in the Revolutionary and Civil Wars, as well as noted clergymen and physicians throughout the years.

After the Hawes's address and the singing of "America" the Chatham baseball team played South Yarmouth. Chatham won 4-2. This was followed by a basketball game between the girls of Chatham and Orleans High Schools. Again, the home team won by a score of 3-1. That evening everyone gathered in the town hall for a reception with a receiving line of distinguished townspeople. The hall was decorated to look like a room from a Home Attractive magazine. Pink, white, and green draperies hung from the ceiling and walls and rugs covered the floor. Potted plants and summer flowers from local gardens and fields were set on tables placed along the walls. The decorating committee had provided Boston and Salem rockers, settees, and sofas for the elderly and

distinguished guests.

So many people were crammed into the hall that they spilled out onto the porch and lawn, where the Salem Cadet Band entertained with favorite tunes, attracting a large crowd, including some from neighboring towns. During the evening other entertainment was offered, such as a solo sung by Blanche Chase and a reading by Edna Hammond. A quartet of men sang tunes that were popular at that time. The evening closed with the assembled people joining in singing "Home Sweet Home."

The next day the postponed parade was held, featuring elaborate floats pulled by horses, followed by decorated teams and buggies, as well as a few automobiles, one carrying the Chatham Baseball Team. Following the parade 400 people were served another elaborate meal consisting of chicken and lobster salad, coffee, rolls and butter. For desert there was a selection of sherbets, creams, and cakes. Speakers at this even included C. A. Freeman, James W. Hawes, and state representative William A. Armstrong.

Below the bluff on the Mill Pond where lunch was served, the Chatham and Monomoy Life Saving crews demonstrated the use of the breechesbuoy to save ship wrecked mariners. On the water the Monomoy men displayed their skill in a fast launching of their rescue boat to save a supposedly drowning man. To this was added dory, surf, and power boat races, also on the Mill Pond.

To bring the day's activities to a close, a concert and ball were held in the town hall. To conclude the celebration of Chatham's 200th anniversary, all of the churches in town held services morning, afternoon, and evening.

