

## **AT THE ATWOOD HOUSE**

### **Tourists Discover Chatham**

**by Spencer Grey**

During its first hundred years, Chatham was socially isolated from the rest of the country, largely because of its geographical position at the elbow of Cape Cod, an area that sat out the industrial revolution. Consequently it remained a place unto itself undiscovered by most people from the outside world.

But by the early 19th century hunters from Boston and other nearby places discovered that Monomoy Point had an abundance of birds, attracting the earliest visitors for the unparalleled shooting. Especially notable among that group was Daniel Webster, whose passion for shooting was rivaled only by his enthusiasm for politics. In a letter to a friend on Aug. 2, 1832, he wrote, "... on the 28th, we must go with our two boys direct to Chatham, and create a sensation among the curlews." Because at that time Chatham had few accommodations for visitors, it is likely that Webster and his boys stayed at the house of his guide, Oscar Nye, on what is now Bridge Street.

But Henry David Thoreau probably was the first true tourist to the Cape, as he traveled here in October, 1848, not for the shooting but, as he put it, "... to get a better view of the ocean." At that time Thoreau saw no signs of tourism on Cape Cod, ending his book *Cape Cod* saying: The time must come when this coast will be a place of resort for those New Englanders who really wish to visit the seaside. At present it is wholly unknown to the fashionable world, and probably it will never be agreeable to them. Such beaches as are fashionable here are made and unmade in a day... by the sea shifting its sands. A man may stand there and put all America behind him.

Even when train service to Sandwich began in 1848 and was extended to Yarmouth and Orleans in 1854, it bypassed Chatham, leaving it a place apart. Those who wished to travel to Chatham could reach it either packet boat or by stage coach, a trip that took several days from Boston to Chatham over dusty, bumpy roads. Shortly after the end of the Civil War, however, Chatham had been discovered by tourists, as indicated by this excerpt from an article from the Chatham column in the *Barnstable Patriot* on July 31, 1866: Visitors from the city are now arriving daily. We are told that a party of gentlemen are soon to pitch a large tent on the shore of the briny deep, to be fitted up with elegant conveniences as a temporary abode... In this way the sea breeze can be more abundantly enjoyed than in any other, while boating, bathing, and fish of all kinds fresh from the element are at hand. For the enjoyment of these luxuries Chatham affords ample facilities.

After railroad service was extended from Harwich to Chatham in 1887 tourists began coming to Chatham in greater numbers, resulting in the expansion of boarding houses and inns. What is now the Wayside Inn first opened in 1859 when Joseph Nickerson built a commodious house on Main Street that he named Nickerson House, later to be known as the Nauset House, acquiring its present name in about 1910.

In 1884 Sylvester Small opened the Traveler's Home on Main Street, offering considerable competition to the Nauset House, which by that time had been renamed the Ocean House but was temporarily closed. As noted in the *Chatham Monitor*: Captain Sylvester Small swings a shingle to the breeze on which is written Traveler's Home. This is probably designed for the benefit of those who do not find the latch string out at the Ocean House... To be continued...



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