

**A Brief History  
of  
Cape Ann, Massachusetts:  
Gloucester, Rockport, Annisquam  
and  
Points Between**

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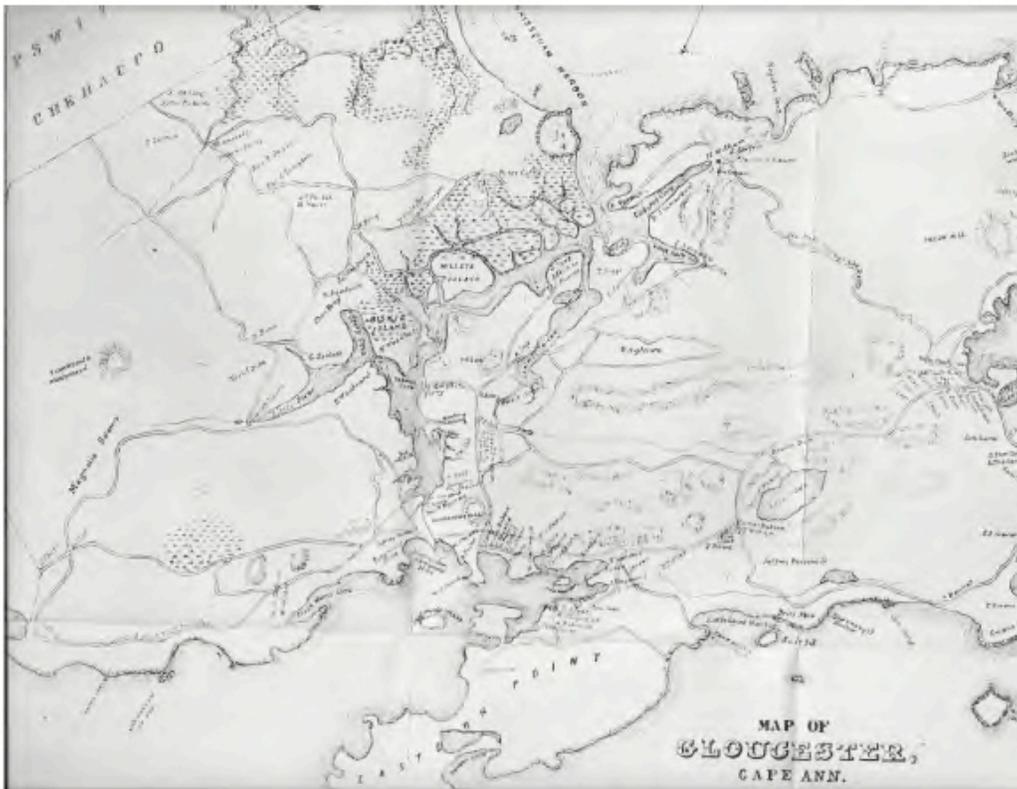
# Contents

Section	Page
Cape Ann: An Overview	1
The Cape Ann Economy	5
Cape Ann's Communities: A Driving Tour	7
Dogtown: The Commons Settlement	11
Annisquam: A Village Lost in Time	19
Roger Babson: Annisquam Eccentric	29
Cape Ann for the Boater	33
The Barnacle: Annisquam's Dance Hall?	37
References	41

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## Cape Ann: An Overview

In 1606 Samuel Champlain entered Gloucester Harbor, forty miles north of Boston, the first European to see Cape Ann. Champlain named the harbor *Le Beau Port*, an apt description, then turned and departed. Eight years later the ubiquitous explorer John Smith rediscovered the Cape. As you know, Smith's career was storied. Twelve years before that, in 1602, Smith had been an English soldier and captured and enslaved during a war with the Ottomans. He was sold to a Turkish princess named Tragabigzanda, of whom he must have had fond memories because he called the area *Cape Tragabizanda*. But when he reported the discovery to England's King Charles I (reigned 1625-1649) Charles renamed it after his mother, Queen Anne of the Netherlands.



**Cape Ann and the Annisquam River**

You will recall that Smith was also involved in the 1607 settlement of the Jamestown Colony, and that while there he was rescued from Indian (*oops*: Native American) abuse by Pocahontas, another princess. We will not delve into Smith's ability to attract the attention of princesses: most modern males don't get one, and those who do often regret it. Nor will we consider the implications for our beautiful part of the planet of living on Cape Pocahontas, though that might be marginally better than Cape Tragabizanda.

Cape Ann was originally a true cape connected to the mainland by a narrow isthmus, with Gloucester Harbor on one side and the southwestern end of the tidal four-mile long Annisquam River on the other side. In the mid-seventeenth century that isthmus was dredged by the Reverend Blynman to connect the river and the harbor, creating a safe and quick passage through the Cape. The dredged section, called The Cut, silted in frequently but it has been kept open for well over 250 years. The effect was to turn Cape Ann into an island connected to the mainland by the now elderly but recently refurbished A. Piatt Andrew Bridge that spans the Annisquam River.

The entire Cape was originally under the jurisdiction of the Town of Gloucester. Since 1840 Cape Ann has had two political jurisdictions: the Town of Rockport located at the Cape's northeastern tip and the City of Gloucester. Gloucester itself is divided into many self-contained villages, each with its own culture and some with none. In this respect it mimics the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, with its 351 town and cities each having a distinct history, demographic, and socioeconomic structure.

These notes will outline Cape Ann's economic and sociological history, with emphasis on the City of Gloucester (particularly its harbor and the posh Eastern Point section), on the long-gone community of Dogtown (formally called The Commons Settlement) that encompasses much of Cape Ann's interior, and on the village of Annisquam, which is arguably today's most delicious American time capsule. We will also take a driving tour around the Cape to see what other communities make up this unique area. We will delve into the psyche and career of Annisquam's (and the Cape's) most famous resident—Roger W. Babson.

Finally, as we descend into the mundane, we end with a brief history of The Barnacle, an “historic” (that is, old) house in Annisquam currently occupied by the author and his family.

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## The Cape Ann Economy

The Cape Ann economy has morphed over time from its natural resource base in the early days (agriculture, shipbuilding, fishing, and timber) to agriculture, granite quarrying, and fishing) to its modern services base (tourism and services for summer residents). The single constant in its history has been the fishing industry. The first fishing harbor on the Cape was at Annisquam, and Gloucester has long been the center of the now-dwindling Cape Ann fishing fleet. The local fishing industry was popularized by the book and movie *The Perfect Storm*, ostensibly about the great unnamed storm of 1991 but really about the fishing culture and the Crow's Nest Bar on the waterfront.

The early timber industry was part of a brisk coastal trade from Canada and the northern tip of Maine down to Cape Ann, Boston, and New York. The source of demand was largely from shipbuilding, both private and public. The tiny town of Essex just off the Cape was a center of private fishing vessel construction, as was the village of Annisquam on the Cape. Ships of the British Royal Navy and, later, the American Navy, were built with American timber at the large naval yard in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, where, since 1917 a naval submarine yard has been maintained. But by the early 1820s the timber stock was exhausted and much of the Cape was bare. In 1858 Henry David Thoreau visited Cape Ann and reported that the eastern side of the Cape (Dogtown and Gloucester) was barren of trees. Photographs of Annisquam in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century show houses that are now heavily protected by trees sitting then on bare ledge.

After the Civil War, Cape Ann's granite quarries became a major local industry. The first Cape Ann granite company—Boston and Gloucester Granite—was started in 1834. In 1864 the Rockport Granity Company was formed, operating out of Rockport's Pigeon Cove. This was soon followed in 1867 when Benjamin Butler<sup>1</sup>—a much-unremembered Union General, Massachusetts Congressman, and Bayview resident—induced a Colonel Ferry to start the

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<sup>1</sup> Civil war buffs will recall that Lincoln's Department of War twice placed Butler in positions of leadership—and it twice fired him! His forte was getting into positions from which he couldn't escape.

Cape Ann Granite Company operating out of Bayview's Hodgkins Cove. The Babson family's Babson Farms Quarry soon started operating at Halibut Point in Rockport; that location is now Halibut Point State Park and a large slag pile of broken rocks still disfigures the coastline. Soon there were as many as thirty small granite quarries on the Cape. In 1875 Captain Theodore Stornson<sup>2</sup> formed the Annisquam Quarry Company, consolidating sixteen of the Cape's quarries and producing 65 percent of the Cape's granite.

Cape Ann granite was widely used in the construction of public buildings in New York, Boston, and throughout the northeast. Broken granite slabs were used in constructing breakwaters at the Isles of Shoals, the long breakwater at the mouth of Gloucester Harbor, and the ill-fated breakwater still visible (and still a danger to navigation) off of Rockport.

Cape Ann's granite had two advantages over other granite: it was unusually dense, allowing crisper cuts with less breakage, and it could be easily hauled to one of the small Cape Ann ports and shipped inexpensively by barge. But the development of concrete, structural steel, and other new construction materials brought the Cape's quarries into rapid decline. By 1930 the last Cape Ann quarry had closed.

The Cape's modern economy has returned to its fishing origins, with the Gorton's fish processing plant in Gloucester served by the Gloucester fishing fleet, and with some commercial fishing out of Rockport. Supplementing this dying industry is a light industrial park at Blackburn Circle supplements this with a medical center, a plant producing semiconductors for Varian's Applied Materials division, a number of smaller businesses, and three new wind turbines that clutter the skyline. But the core of the modern Cape Ann economy is tourism and summer residents. The Cape's year-round nonfishing residents tend to be retired and/or involved in the arts, in servicing summer residents by caring for empty houses, or in constructing and renovating houses.

Still, Cape Ann remains as it always was—a relatively poor area that takes great pride in its unique history and traditions.

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<sup>2</sup> Stornson was quite an entrepreneur. He amassed a fortune in shipping and owned about thirty quarries.

## **Cape Ann's Communities: A Driving Tour**

To understand the Cape, let's take a counterclockwise drive on Route 127 (Washington Street) starting at the Grant Circle Rotary entered from Route 128, just after the A. Piatt Andrew Bridge. Taking the northern exit from that rotary, in ¼ mile you pass the Addison-Gilbert Hospital on your left. This lifeline to the medical community is the closest hospital in many miles and it is under constant threat of closure. It's recent association with Lahey Clinic has extended its life. Another ½ mile past the hospital brings you to the Mill River Bridge, a small and rude stone bridge that separates the Mill River (an offshoot of the Annisquam River) on your left from Mill Pond on your right. The community of Riverview is on the peninsula behind you, and you are just entering the Riverdale area. Note Rchdale, the Riverdale convenience store, on your left just past the stone bridge at the intersection of Washington Street and Reynard Street; once a general store it now provides mostly wine and snacks along with a few basics. The Riverdale store is at the southeastern corner of Dogtown, a community to which we will give attention later.

Continuing along Route 127 through Riverdale we skirt the houses above the Mill River on our left and the houses in Dogtown's suburbs on our right. We soon pass the Willow Rest store on our right, serving excellent breakfast and lunch and providing some convenience items. If we veered to the right at the Willow Rest we would go through a wooded residential area looping around Goose Cove and coming back onto Washington Street just at Annisquam's exurbs.

But we will continue on along Washington Street. About 1¼ miles after the Mill Bridge we reach a long stone bridge separating Goose Cove on the right from Annisquam's Lobster Cove on our left. We finally see what appears to be a real village, with houses marching uphill

from the cove and lots of boats anchored in or docked along the cove. For the next mile we have Annisquam on our left and on the right an unidentified area that may or may not be in Annisquam—it depends on who you ask: realtors define it broadly; residents adopt a narrower definition.

At the end of that mile we reach the intersection of Route 127 and Leonard Street, an intersection overlooked by a large white church on our left—the Annisquam Village Church. If we turn left onto Leonard Street we will be traveling through the heart village of Annisquam. We will return later to that point. For now we continue on Washington Street into the community of Bayview; this begins just after an attractive newly remodeled gray 1766 house on your left, directly across Leonard Street from the church. Just after Leonard Street is Ames Street, the entry to the former estate of General Butler. Regrettably there is nothing to see because the estate was broken up long ago and its houses are down a long driveway.

Continuing on, we pass Plum Cove on the left, a small body of water with a beach, then we come into the tiny commercial center of Lanesville. Here Route 127 and Washington Street briefly diverge; if we pass the center and veer right onto Washington Street we go through an attractive section of Lanesville dominated by an old church; this brief diversion would take us back onto Route 127. But if we continued on Route 127 we soon enter the Folly Cove area with small Folly Cove on our left, protected by a huge breakwater.

Eventually we reach the Lobster Pool Restaurant, also on the left, followed by an lone building on the left—a former restaurant turned condominium. We are now in the alcohol-challenged town of Rockport. Between the Lobster Pool and the condominium we have a great view of the Atlantic Ocean on the Cape's north side.

Very soon we come to Halibut Point State Park, the site of the former Babson Farms quarry. We drive on through wilderness until we emerge at Pigeon Cove, a small fishing harbor on the left in the Pigeon Cove residential area; this was once the distribution site for an inland granite quarry. Soon we arrive at an important fork with Beach Avenue to the left and Route 127 to the right. If we follow Beach Avenue we will see residences in north Rockport and

come out in the town center. If we continue on Route 127 we pass some stores—a bank, an Ace hardware, and a Dunkin’ Donuts and bypass the heart of Rockport on our way back to Gloucester.

Bearing left we follow Beach Avenue along the waterfront into the very heart of Rockport. Rockport is very diverse but its primary activities are art and crafts. The commercial area along Sandy Bay—the harbor whose name was once given to the entire town—has many restaurants, shops, and galleries. Many of these are concentrated on Bearskin Neck—the major tourist attraction. We must stop and inspect Bearskin Neck.

Now, wasn’t that fun? It’s too bad that “Motif One,” the original red shack on the Neck, a structure painted by many artists over the years, was swept away by a storm. But a replica has been constructed and it’s as if nothing happened. As we continue on through Rockport’s center we have a choice.

If we bear left we go along the scenic coast past large summer houses at Rockport’s coast, past a great view of Thatcher Island, scene of a major 17<sup>th</sup> century shipwreck and the only American island with two lighthouses. Both lighthouses were built in 1771 to distinguish that dangerous ledge from single-lighthouse areas that typically marked harbor entrances in those days. Nowadays there is no need to make such a distinction; everywhere there is a lighthouse is a bad place to be at night on a on a boat. Thatcher Island is uninhabited except by birds and poison ivy.

We continue along the Cape’s eastern coast to Good Harbor, a community facing eastward that has a fine beach and several resort hotels. Then we arrive in East Gloucester, where Rocky Neck sports a number of art galleries and restaurants. Next is West Gloucester where we travel down Main Street to view or visit the shops and restaurants. At the end of Main Street we turn right onto Washington Street. This brings us back to the Grant rotary where our tour started. Had we continued on Route 127 we would experience beautiful coastal drive with massive old houses.

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## **Dogtown: the Commons Settlement**

Now let's jump back to the Mill River Bridge. Instead of proceeding on Washington Street as before, we bear right at the Richdale Store onto Reynard Street, then we turn left onto Cherry Street, and veer right onto Dogtown Common Road. The road ends at a sign marked "Dogtown Common." From there you can walk or bike into Cape Ann's interior, a trip backward in time over rocks and pastures.

In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Gloucester's center of gravity was the Meetinghouse Green, called "The Green." This was a community once centered where the Grant Rotary now snarls traffic coming over the Piatt bridge onto Cape Ann. Gloucester Harbor (now the center of the City of Gloucester) was then a seedy and disease-ridden village with all the vices of a seafaring waterfront. Respectable folks wanted to be at The Green where Cape Ann's First Parish Church—the focal point of colonial life—was located.

But as Gloucester's waterfront activities grew the press of a growing population made The Green a less desirable area. The Green's population shifted northwestward toward the sparsely populated Commons Settlement (The Commons). The Commons was a large wooded area of over 3,500 acres centered where the Babson Reservoir (built in 1930) is now located on land donated by Roger W. Babson, of whom more later. About 1,600 of those acres were inhabited and paths linking small communities and enclaves with Rockport and Gloucester were once heavily traveled.

The rise of The Commons was due not just to the population push from the harbor area. Land was cheap at The Commons and increasingly expensive at The Green, and the area's staple activities were closer to the Commons in those days: fishing and hardscrabble farming—industries that had started in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century—were supplanted in the 18<sup>th</sup> century by new gristmills and sawmills on the Mill River that were encouraged by the strong tidal currents that powered the mills, and cheap transportation afforded by the Annisquam River and The Cut into Gloucester Harbor and the Atlantic Ocean. Also, as mentioned, The Commons was a major thoroughfare for people and goods traveling between Gloucester, Sandy Bay (as Rockport was then called), and villages like Annisquam.

The intersection of Cherry Street and Reynard Street, just up the hill from the Mill River Bridge, was a heavily-traveled crossing where, in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, snaggle-toothed Tammy Younger, the “Queen of the Witches,” lived on “tolls” obtained by hurling invectives at passersby until they paid her to shut up—not unlike some gypsies in modern Paris.

Tammy Younger was only one of Dogtown’s characters. Another was Cornelius Finson, a freed slave called Black Neil who was Dogtown’s last resident. In 1830 Black Neil was found frostbitten and starving in the open cellar of his collapsed home. He was removed to a poorhouse where he died a week later. Dogtown became a ghost town and in 1845 the last remnants of homes were razed, leaving only foundation stones.

The first Cape Ann census was provoked by a religious dispute. The First Parish Church at The Green was in need of major repairs, but it was not clear that with the population shifts the church should be repaired or abandoned and rebuilt at another location. The debate was fierce and often mean-spirited, as is often true of property and religious disputes. One faction wanted to rebuild the church closer to the harbor, which was improving as a residential area, but residents of The Common resisted because the harbor location would double the distance they traveled to church.

Because nobody knew the population’s center of gravity, a census was proposed and approved. Joshua Batchelder was commissioned to do the count and in 1741 he submitted his report. The Commons had 41 houses, ten percent of Cape Ann’s tangible property, and twenty percent of the Cape’s population (hence half the Cape’s per capita real property). John Babson’s 1860 history of Cape Ann confirms these numbers: in 1779 the then five parishes of Cape Ann had 4,945 souls with eighteen percent living at The Green and The Commons.<sup>3</sup>

The final decision was Solomonic. The First Parish and its meeting house would move nearer the harbor and a new Parish (the Fourth) would be formed at The Green to serve The Green and The Commons. The old church at The Green was rebuilt to become the Fourth

<sup>3</sup> The second and third parishes had already been established: the second on the west side of the river in 1716 (the Wingersheek Beach area) and the third at Annisquam in 1728. A fifth parish was later formed at Sandy Bay (Rockport) in 1754.

Parish meeting house. This saved The Green's meeting house for a time, but ultimately the congregational split and the attraction of the new First Parish church weakened The Green's attraction.

Legend says that at the time of the American Revolution there were about 100 houses in The Commons, though some place it at eighty and only forty foundations have been identified. Legend also says that the impetus for the growth of The Commons was the search for safety as coastal residents sought refuge from the marauding pirates and the Royal Navy at the time of the Revolution and the War of 1812. But there is little evidence that either privateers or the Navy were much of a problem, though fear of them might have been. There were few intrusions of peace and order. Annisquam experienced a naval blockade in 1814 to keep American privateers in the river, and Gloucester was attacked in the same year by the *Falcon*, a British warship intent on stealing supplies. Still, these were unusual incidents

Furthermore, and tellingly, by the time of the American Revolution, and certainly by the War of 1812, The Commons was in deep decline—its growth period had been well before the Revolution. What growth occurred during the Revolution was prompted not by safety concerns but by the increased demand for foodstuffs and timber to feed troops and build or repair ships. The end of the wars with Britain eliminated that demand.

As economic opportunities eroded and houses deteriorated, The Commons became a community of outcasts—war widows, prostitutes, moonshiners, hermits, and witches. Anita Diamant's novel *Dogtown* portrays a sympathetic and undoubtedly sanitized view of life at The Commons in its late stages.

At around this time The Commons became known as Dogtown. The name served several purposes: it recognized the many dogs left behind as their owners (often war widows keeping them as protection) died or abandoned the area, leaving the dogs to become feral; it acknowledged the decrepit state of the once vibrant community that had “gone to the dogs;” and it suggested that those people remaining at The Commons were themselves feral dogs.

What killed Dogtown? As always, a number of forces were in play. The demise of the timber industry as war demand ended and the landscape was denuded was certainly important, especially since it ended the demand for the sawmills, truckers and ancillaries who served the industry. Also, the post-war fall in agricultural prices made farming less remunerative. In addition, after the revolution a system of coastal roads was built that bypassed the paths that had crisscrossed Dogtown and eliminated its role as a transportation hub. The littoral road is now called Route 127 or Washington Street.

Whatever happened, Dogtown is now a desolate area of ancient stone foundations, of overgrown cellar holes, and of walking trails following the old-time paths, some overgrown but others kept open. Dogtown is also the location of huge boulders left behind when the glaciers retreated and cut out the Cape. Some boulders have exotic shapes: the Whale's Jaw, destroyed by vandals in the 1920s, looked like a whale's open jaws and has been called "Druidic;" other boulders are etched with inspirational slogans like "Never Try, Never Win" and "A Penny Saved is a Penny Earned."



**A Babson Boulder**

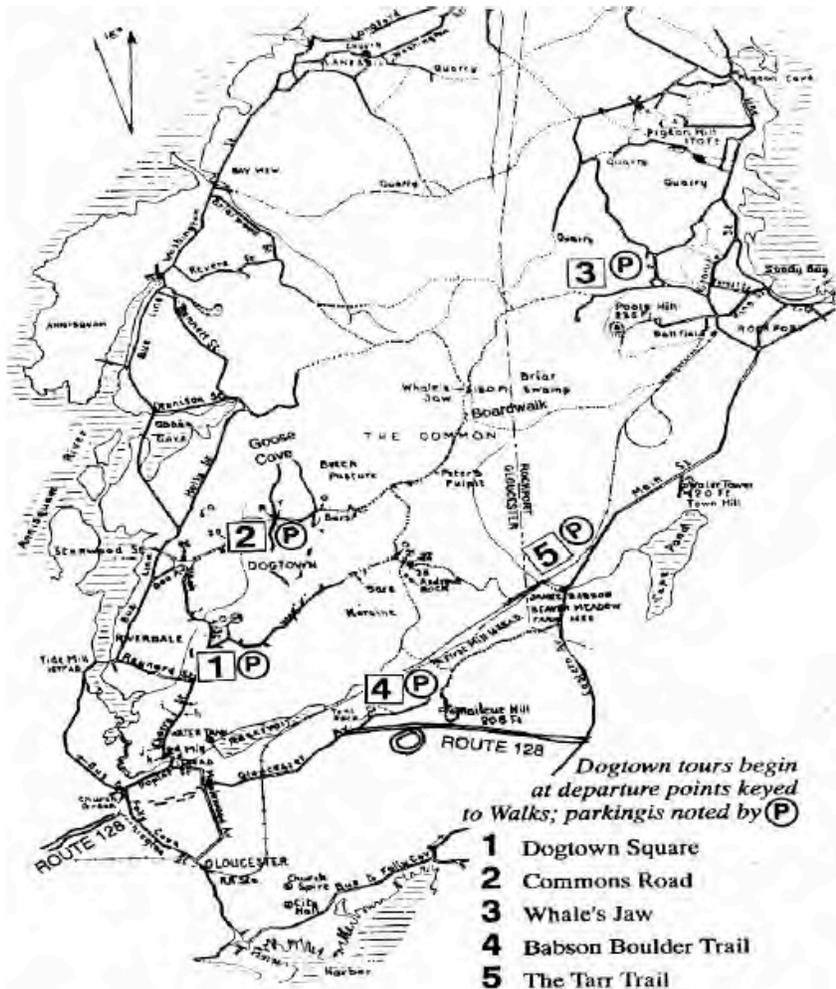
The inscribed boulders are called "Babson Boulders" after Roger W. Babson, the financially successful and eccentric tenth generation Gloucesterite who lived in Wellesley but summered at Babson Point in Annisquam.

Dogtown fascinated Babson. In the 1930s he bought 1,200 of its acres, then he hired unemployed stonecutters from the local quarries to inscribe the slogans. His goal was probably more to give employment than to impart wisdom, so the Babson Boulders indicate

his compassion for those left behind by economic decline.

Babson's 1,200 acres were sold or willed by him to the City of Gloucester; Dogtown is now a Gloucester project into which it has poured perhaps hundreds of dollars over the years. Once nude, it has become heavily forested again, in part because of the time, energy, and efforts of Frederick H. Norton, founder of the Dogtown Commission in the 1970s. Norton began planting conifers in the 1930s and in the 1970s he created the Dogtown Commission. There is now a 121-acre tract at the northeast end of Dogtown called the Norton Memorial Forest.

Dogtown is a relatively safe area for the walker, camper, and naturalist, though in 1986 there was a murder: Peter Hodgkins, a disturbed Riverdale man who bonded to Dogtown's wilds, killed a young woman on her daily Dogtown walk. This is the most recent serious incident in Dogtown in recent history and possibly the worst in its 180-year history as a ghost town. Dogtown's most common illicit use is a place for teenage antics and lover's trysts.



"Dogtown Common & Cape Aru Footpaths", from a map © 1931, Allen Chamberlain [based on Historical date furnished by Mr. Roger W. Babson]

### Modern Dogtown



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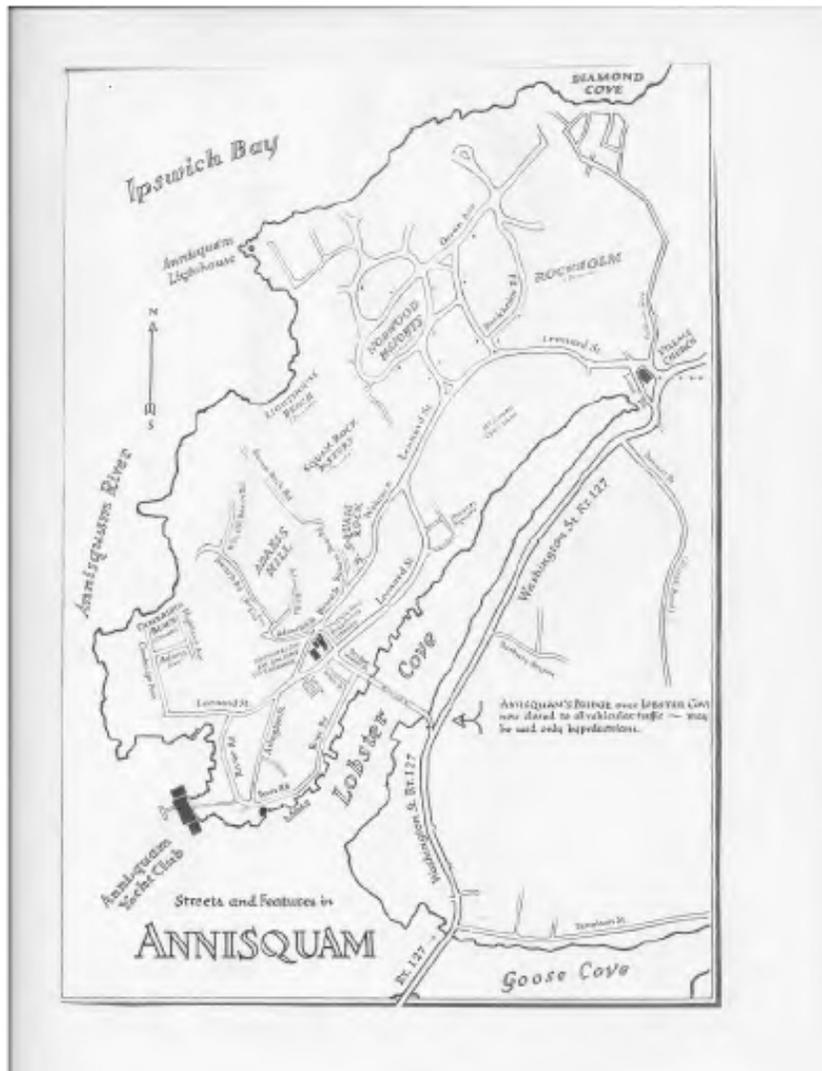
## **Annisquam: A Village Lost in Time**

Now we jump back to the intersection of Route 127 and Leonard Street. We turn onto Leonard, which runs down the center of the Annisquam peninsula to its end at Babson Point (once called Wigwam Point). Bordered by modest and often very old houses, and by the Mount Adnah Cemetery, it passes through what pretends to be a village center—a half-block with a realty office, The Exchange (now an arts and crafts shop but until 1940 the Leonard School), and the Village Hall that serves as a community center.

After the village center you reach the end of Leonard Street at Babson Point, site of the former estate of our friend Roger W. Babson and nine generations of his ancestors. It is now the Bent Estate, with an unusually large (for Annisquam) tract of land and a very impressive but massively decrepit 1920s Mediterranean villa overlooking the intersection of the River and Ipswich Bay. That villa can now be bought for a mere \$2,500,000, half of the original ask, though a reasonable reconstruction budget would be millions more. You would then have *the* signature property in Annisquam, not to mention by far the most expensive. (Update: the property was sold in 2013 for \$1.9 million subject to the proviso that the villa not be torn down.)

Leonard Street is the sociological railroad track dividing Annisquam into two enclaves. On its north “uphill” side are the gentrified areas—first Rockholm, then Norwood Heights, then Squam Rock Road, Adams Hill, and, finally, Cambridge Street; this is where The Ancients live—the descendants of the earlier generations. On and over the hill are the sprawling multigenerational homes of Boston and New York professionals and their extended families. The homes of the Ancients often have lots of land and marvelous views of sunsets over Ipswich Bay. More on this later.

But south of Leonard Street is where the action is. When you reach the village center, turn left down Bridgewater Street and you will see ahead a footbridge across Lobster Cove. After a short block, turn right along River Road. This was once the location of shipyards, fishing wharves, flaking yards, and orchards. It is now a densely-packed residential area with Annisquam’s only commercial activities—here new arrivals live.



As you go along River Road—a one-way street—all of the “commerce” is on your left: The Market at 33 River Road, once really a market owned by the Chard’s in the early days and by anonymous others since then, now has an excellent seasonal restaurant drawing flocks from far away; it also has docks for small boats, and a few moorings; the Annisquam Boat Livery at 27 River Road has dock space for about a dozen small boats (no transients); and the *pièce de résistance* is the Annisquam Yacht Club (AYC) looming over the river at 17 River Road. After the AYC, River Road reintersects Leonard Street at the home of Brad “Dirt” Murray, a much-loved and ever-cheerful Annisquam native who takes care of Annisquam’s waterfront, docks, and people as well as participating in community activities.

Annisquam's very long history began in 1631 when a nonresidential fishing center called Planter's Neck was established. The name Annisquam came later, and its origins are obscure: the first written use of the name was *Anasquam*—*asquam* is an Abenaki word for "broad sheet of water." A likely origin was the name of one of the first settlers: Charles Annis immigrated to the area from England in 1664, dying in 1706 in nearby Newburyport. So Annisquam is probably "Annis's Harbor," not even close to other translations I've heard like "peaceful harbor," "top of the rock," and "river with two mouths."<sup>3</sup>

Planter's Neck was Cape Ann's first fishing village, well before Gloucester was chartered in 1642. The basis for it as a fishing center was undoubtedly its direct and easy access to the abundant shoals<sup>4</sup> of fish twenty miles north at the Isles of Shoals and even farther northeast at George's Bank. In addition, Lobster Cove and the river provided excellent mooring for small fishing boats and a protected area for ship repairs. As noted earlier, in the 17<sup>th</sup> century the Annisquam River was a long and narrow tidal inlet from Ipswich Bay, ending about ½ mile short of Gloucester Harbor. In 1643 the river was dredged to connect to the harbor through The Cut. This connection is called the Blynman Canal after the preacher who oversaw the first dredging. The Cut is bounded at its southern (harbor) end by the Blynman Bridge, a drawbridge, and by a railroad drawbridge at its northern end. The Cape Ann Marina and Resort is located on The Cut.

Fishing remained Annisquam's *raison d'être* long after its first permanent residents arrived circa 1660. The northern side of Lobster Cove was first to be developed; this is where River Road (once named Curve Street) was constructed in 1851. At that time Curve Street was just a footpath that passed directly through a house located across from The Market. The owner (originally the Chard family, who owned the Market) left the front and back doors unlocked and pedestrians walked through at any time; a plate of cookies was left in the house to feed the weary travelers.

Smuggling and privateering had become major activities and privateers sortied from Lobster Cove to raid British merchant ships. When the U. S. Treasury Department was

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<sup>4</sup> The archaic definition of "shoals" is schools of fish. This is how the Isles of Shoals got its name, not from shallow water.

created in 1789, under the advice and leadership of Alexander Hamilton, its new Customs Bureau was tasked with collecting the new federal tariffs on imported goods; these tariffs were the only source of federal revenue and were greatly resented by the population that paid the tax and by the states, which had previously been the sole recipients of tariff revenues. A fleet of Revenue cutters was launched to interdict smugglers, and custom stations were built to weigh and measure cargos for taxation. A customs house was built on a wharf between the Annisquam Market and the Annisquam Yacht Club. There is now a small house in that section of River Road called “the Customs House,” though it never served that purpose.

At the time of the Revolution the southwestern end of the Annisquam peninsula, between Leonard Street and River Road was owned by William Saville<sup>5</sup> and used primarily as the site of flaking yards where fish were dried, of tillable land with orchards, and of shipyards. In 1815 Asa Woodbury bought Saville’s land. Woodbury continued the operations, including a shipyard where the Yacht Club now stands. Woodbury owned three homes on what is now Arlington Road, one for himself and one each for a son and a daughter.

Lobster Cove properties near the head of the cove (between the bridge and the church) were owned by a number of families. One whom we will later meet was the Griffin family. The Griffins owned shipyards and fish houses along Lobster Cove between the bridge and the Annisquam Market, as well as a blacksmithing business just south of the yacht club where The Barnacle and a large new (2015) house (23 River Road)—built by people without sensitivity to their surroundings and locally called The Monstrosity—now sit. In fact, a Griffin built The Barnacle, but more on that later.

The bridge from Bridgewater Street across the Cove was built in 1846, Originally this was a carriage road with a swing bridge for schooners to pass to and from the shipyards inside the bridge; the swing bridge was later replaced by a draw bridge.

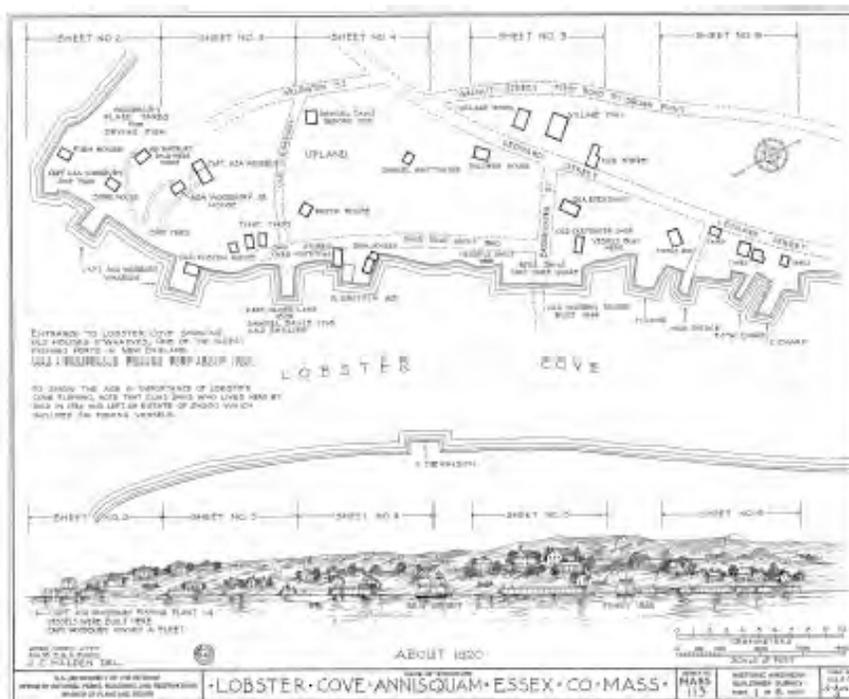
<sup>5</sup> The Saville family was prominent in Gloucester. Jesse Saville, William’s father, was Gloucester-born, as were all of his children. William was a schoolteacher, a trader, and a Gloucester town clerk. His brother, Thomas, was a prominent Annisquam resident and tavern keeper.

The last use of the draw bridge was in 1897 and for almost 100 years the old bridge served as a vehicle road across Lobster Cove to Washington Street. In 1989 a new bridge was built as a fixed

pedestrian bridge. The low clearance combined with the dry area inside the bridge at low tide allows only small boats in that area.



**The Lobster Cove Drawbridge circa 1875**



**Annisquam's Lobster Cove circa 1820**

When River Road was built on an the old coveside footpath it was extended to connect with Leonard Street. At that time the road that gave access from Leonard Street to the Woodbury property was extended to connect with River Road and named Arlington Street.

At the intersection of River Road and Arlington Street are two houses that my family now owns. A small house at the corner across from the Annisquam Boat Livery was once the root cellar for a Woodbury apple orchard; it is now a two-bedroom updated cottage that we call “The Periwinkle.” The second house is on the cove at the exact River Road-Arlington Street intersection; it has long been called “The Barnacle” because it stands completely over the water, held up by granite pilings with its back and one side resting on a seawall “like a barnacle.”

From Cape Ann northward there has been a long tradition of seaside resorts, beginning in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century when resort hotels began to appear on the Atlantic coast. The earliest was the Mid-Ocean House, built around 1840 on tiny Smuttynose Island in the Isles of Shoals off of Portsmouth, New Hampshire. This was followed in 1848 by the Appledore House on the Isles’ Appledore (*nee* Hog) Island. Both the Mid-Ocean House and Appledore House were owned by the parents of Celia Thaxter, the gardner-poet so well known in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Appledore House was her home until after her marriage.

But the heyday of the grand hotels began in the early 1870s. The Oceanic House on Star Island—also in the Isles of Shoals—was completed in 1873, and in 1874 the Wentworth Hotel went up on New Castle Island in Portsmouth, New Hampshire. From this small core, hotels blossomed along the entire coast.

At the same time the glitterati began to establish permanent summer residences at spots like Newport, Rhode Island, and Gloucester’s Eastern Point. Newport was the haven for the New York crowd while Eastern Point (“the Newport of the North”) was a refuge for Boston Brahmins. Among the notable Eastern Pointers were Isabella Stewart Gardner (Boston art collector), A. Piatt Andrew (Harvard economics professor)<sup>5</sup>, Fitz Henry (*nee* Hugh) Lane (Marine artist), and Henry Sleeper (art collector and early interior decorator).<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> “Doc” Andrew taught economics to Franklin Delano Roosevelt, who apparently learned little. Doc later became a U.S. Congressman. He died in 1936 at Red Roof, his Eastern Point home.

<sup>6</sup> Joseph Garland, Cape Ann’s master historian, published a complete history of Eastern Point through 1950.

While Eastern Point was the more posh part of Gloucester, Annisquam became Gloucester's more artsy offshoot. Rudyard Kipling wrote *Captains Courageous* while living in the keeper's house at the Annisquam Light (or was it the Customs House? It depends on who you ask). Margaret Fitzhugh Browne, a famous portraitist and the mistress of Fitz Henry *nee* Hugh Lane, worked at her recently renovated studio home at 31 River Road.

Annisquam is also a bastion of Yankeedom, where people strictly adhere to the adage "use it up, wear it out, when its gone, do without." Annisquam stands four-square against any change. There is no better indication of this than the Annisquam Yacht Club. Built in 1896 as a large structure with a big central room and a verandah overlooking the river, it is still just that. By national standards it is a minimalist club that has only recently been updated, though without major change; most of the updating was just recognition of long-deferred maintenance and meeting the new safety codes. One Annisquam resident, showing keen insight, described the AYC as "the dingy club." I'm sure that was a misspelling of "dinghy," but both words apply. Only the Seal Harbor Yacht Club on Mount Desert Island (one room with no kitchen) and the Osterville Yacht Club (with no boats and no facilities, its "members" gathering at a local coffee shop) could be more minimal.

The recent (2013) AYC renovation has upgraded the club with new windows, new flooring, better lighting, a fire-suppression system, and an elevator (Americans for Disabilities Act, thank you). It has improved the structure and feel without changing the floor plan or footprint. This work, much needed after 110 years, was done after extremely hostile debate and over the pitiful moans of some members; Yankees pinch each penny till it looks like a pancake.

Great pride is taken in the AYC's adherence to its traditions; how else would an annual chowder-and-doughnuts lunch be more than an ephemeral experiment? Being the AYC Commodore is a feather in any true Squammer's capa—and it should be since the AYC is the focus of Annisquam's summer life: well-used by boaters, by diners, and by children who go to the day camp and get expert instruction in the art of sailing. The AYC has docks for boats up to around 25-foot length; the waiting list is very long.

As noted earlier, the Annisquam community is a mix of families that have been here since time immemorial (The Ancients) and new arrivals (The Nouveaus). The most common focus

of discussion among The Ancients is the relationship among their families over the generations; the Nouveaus sit quietly by and appreciate the centrality that Annisquam plays in The Ancients' lives. A Nouveau becomes an Ancient only after all Ancients alive at the time of the Nouveau's arrival have died.

Though there are many year-round residents, Annisquam comes alive in the summer. In that very brief period ("between winter and the fourth of July," as they say in Maine) there are many traditional activities. These begin with Chowder Day, a Memorial Day convocation in which members meet and enjoy a traditional luncheon of clam chowder and doughnuts. Then on the fourth of July there is a town parade in which Squammers and their children, dogs, and occasionally a car, parade around the Leonard Street-River Road loop, stopping every fifty yards or so to toot horns, greet friends, shout good wishes and generally cavort.<sup>7</sup> On the afternoon of July 4, the AYC has a "Bang and Go Back Race" in which boats engage in every effort to cheat their competitors; awards are given on the basis of "time in Annisquam."

Later in July is Sea Fair Day, when children gather in the village center to play games and eat ice cream while their parents buy old books and historic photos and chat each other up. On Sea Fair Day the Waxworks tableau is presented in the Village Hall: families gather in a darkened but now air-conditioned auditorium to see a series of tableaus representing that year's theme. The live figures in each tableau hold so perfectly still that you imagine yourself at Madame Tussaud's in Paris. According to Thayer, Margaret Fitzhugh Browne (1885-1972) started the Wax Works; but another and more accurate history has it starting in 1846.

The culmination of summer activities is mid-August's Annisquam Village Players presentation. Thespianism is an ancient Annisquam activity—the musical team of Lindsay and Crouse ("Sound of Music") were both Squammers, and Lindsay Crouse (the actress and daughter of Russell Crouse) is a lifelong Squammer. Annisquam's amateur thespians and a

<sup>7</sup> The 2009 death of Ken Hodgkins ended the classic car component of the parade. Hodgkins is an old Cape Ann surname: Hodgkins Cove is in Lanesville, Elmer Hodgkins owned the Boat Livery circa 1900, Ken Hodgkins owned both the Annisquam Market and the Annisquam Boat Livery in the 1970s. Ken was also a real character who collected early automobiles and once took a trip to Antarctica wearing a penguin suit and calling himself "Kenguin," a triumph that put him on the Johnny Carson Show. we have noted above that Peter Hodgkins was the 1986 Dogtown killer. The Hodgkins family was primarily located in Riverdale.

smattering of North Shore semiprofessionals rehearse for weeks. The play runs for a week, always to sellout crowds that display wild appreciation of the more emotive Squammers.

In short, Annisquam is a real old-time village, a step back in time to a more comfortable and close-knit community before the automobile, the airplane, and the smartphone cut the chords between us. It is filled with character and characters. It is the opposite of fancy—and that's the way they like it.

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## Roger Babson: Annisquam Eccentric

Arguably the most prominent character in Annisquam was Roger W. Babson, whom we've met before. Born in Gloucester in 1875, Babson attended MIT. In 1904 he formed Babson's Statistical Organization, a financial forecasting firm that still exists today as Babson-United, Inc. He was something of a visionary, a mystic, and a certified eccentric. His financial forecasts were heavily laced with references to physics—business cycles were analyzed using Newton's second law of Thermodynamics (every action creates an equal and opposite reaction). This now seems weird but we must remember that the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century English economist William Stanley Jevons had advocated the now long-discredited sunspot theory of the business cycle. Furthermore, Babson was a graduate of the nation's premier academic institution in engineering and physics, so something was bound to rub off.

But people paid attention, perhaps because of the scientific and philosophical gobbledegook, and Babson's forecasts were widely followed, especially after he "called" the Crash of 1929, a call that initiated the "Babson Crash."<sup>8</sup> After scoring well in 1929, Babson became a popular writer and speaker on financial matters. His money fed his eccentricities and he took on a number of strange projects. We know about the boulders in Dogtown, but there was also his 1940 Presidential bid for the Prohibition Party, advocating a return to one of the most disastrous domestic policies in America's long history.

Perhaps Babson's most bizarre project was his 1948 creation of the Antigravity Research Foundation. Its office was located in Boston, New Hampshire, which Babson determined was out of the radius of a nuclear attack on Boston. The foundation had no facilities but it made grants for antigravity research "...in order to harness gravity as a free power and to reduce airplane accidents." That this violates basic principles of physics was beside the point.

In 1961 the foundation made a grant to the physics department at Tufts University. Tufts commemorated the grant by placing a large tombstone-like monument. When the monument

<sup>8</sup> This was only a mild 3 percent one-day decline. As one should expect, Babson's "call" was not as clear as it sounds. In a speech he noted that if the market continued its surge there was bound to be a correction (Newton's Second Law); he did not call the timing—even a stopped clock is right twice a day.

disappeared it was taken as a sign that the physics department had broken the bonds of gravity; one can imagine the celebration as Tufts physicists anticipated Nobel Prizes.

But years later the stone was uncovered by a bulldozer, just where students had buried it. The monument now stands upright and imbedded firmly in concrete; even universities have a sense of humor. Sadly, evidence suggests that antigravity only works on the federal budget.



**Tufts University Antigravity Stone circa 1985**

Yes, Roger Babson was a flake. But he made at least two lasting contributions. Babson College in Wellesley, Massachusetts, was among the first business colleges in America. Formed at Babson's instigation and with his money, Babson College is now a highly regarded business school specializing in entrepreneurship; its MBA is a coveted degree. Babson also created Webber College (now Webber International University) in Babson Park, Florida; Webber is a highly regarded women's business college.

On a "small world" note, my daughter and her family currently reside in Roger Babson's house on what was the Babson estate in Wellesley, Massachusetts. The once large

estate has been developed into many houses since Babson's time, but his house is a signature property with an extremely interesting design and ambience, and signs of his idiosyncrasy.

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## Cape Ann for the Boater

So you want to visit the Cape on a boat? Gloucester Harbor and its environs offer the best opportunity for mooring and dockage. There is plenty of open mooring space around Five Pound Island and Ten Pound Island at the entrance to Gloucester's Inner Harbor; moorings are assigned by the Harbormaster and at present cost about \$25 per night. For those who want dockage, the pickings are slim: on the east side of Gloucester Harbor there are Brown's Boat Yard (regrettably in an uninteresting area) and either The Mad Fish Grill (now closed) or The Studio Restaurant, which have the advantage of being on Rocky Neck, an artist colony with galleries and restaurants.

If you want to be on the harbor's west side, near downtown with access to a wide range of good restaurants and shops, there are few opportunities. The east side is devoted primarily to Gloucester's fishing fleet, but one prospect is Rose Wharf near the Cruiseport, a facility built to attract large cruise ships that quickly found Gloucester unable to cope with thousands of tourists piling in at once. This is a prime boater's spot, so check it out. If you stay in Gloucester and can get a cab, take a tour to Eastern Point. There you can visit an historic house called "Beauport," taken from Samuel Champlain's name for Gloucester Harbor (*Le Beau Port*). Formally called the Sleeper-McCann House, this Gothic mansion was built in 1878 by Henry Sleeper, America's first interior decorator and one of Gloucester's glitterati. Each room has a different decor and ambience, and the view over the harbor is magnificent.

The next best stopping opportunities are through the Blynman Canal (The Cut) and into the Annisquam River. Call VHF 13 and the bridgmaster will tell you the time of the next opening; it won't be long—ten minutes is long. Two caveats *must* be remembered. First, the current through The Cut can be very fast, and the channel width under the bridge is narrow, so keep up head speed and prepare for the wash from boats ahead of you. Also, boats exiting the river and entering the harbor have right-of-way: if you are on the harbor side when the bridge opens, don't try to be first under the bridge.

The best dockage on the river is at the Cape Ann Resort and Marina located just inside The Cut between the Blynman Bridge and the railroad bridge. This typically has empty slips

for boats up to perhaps 30-35 feet. Larger boats will have to use a face dock or a side dock; these are not typically available to transients but give it a try. It also has Mile Marker One, a decent waterside restaurant.

After you pass under the railroad bridge you will see the Gloucester Marina on your starboard. Most space is taken for the season but there is likely to be some overnight space available. If dockage is not available at one of these two marinas, the only option on the river is a mooring ball; you will see hundreds as you travel along the river. Some are private but many are managed by the Gloucester Harbormaster; most are assigned for a season but many will be open. The unwritten code says that you can tie up to a private mooring if you are willing to move should the “owner” request it. I don’t advise asking for proof of ownership—people along the river are usually very decent, but “river rage” is a possibility; the Marquis of Queensbury did not design Gloucester. If you are uncertain, call the Harbormaster and see if a river mooring can be assigned. Be aware that moorings are in residential areas so unless you brought your car with you, there is nowhere to go.

If you have a low-draft boat like a tender or a kayak, or if the tide is high, on your trip up the river take a side trip along the Mill River to its end at the Mill Bridge. Pull your boat up on shore by the Richdale store and walk up Reynard Street to Cherry Street, then left onto Cherry, and proceed to Dogtown Common Road. It’s a bit of a hike, but well worth your time if you are a nature addict.

The Annisquam Yacht Club, at the north end of the river where it enters Ipswich Bay, has some transient mooring balls, colored orange. These heavy-duty moorings are for transients and can handle large boats even when the current rages. However, be prepared to experience the wakes from recreational boats whose owners don’t understand the “No” in “No Wake;” reading is not a highly honed skill in Gloucester and the Harbormaster rarely visits the area. If you are lucky enough to get a mooring near Annisquam, or are willing to take your tender up the river to Lobster Cove, you can dock temporarily at the Annisquam Market on the north side of the cove. This puts you onto River Road, and the information in a previous section tells you about the good things to see and do. You can take your tender to Wingersheek Beach, across from the AYC. This is a huge beach with lots of people on a hot summer day (and

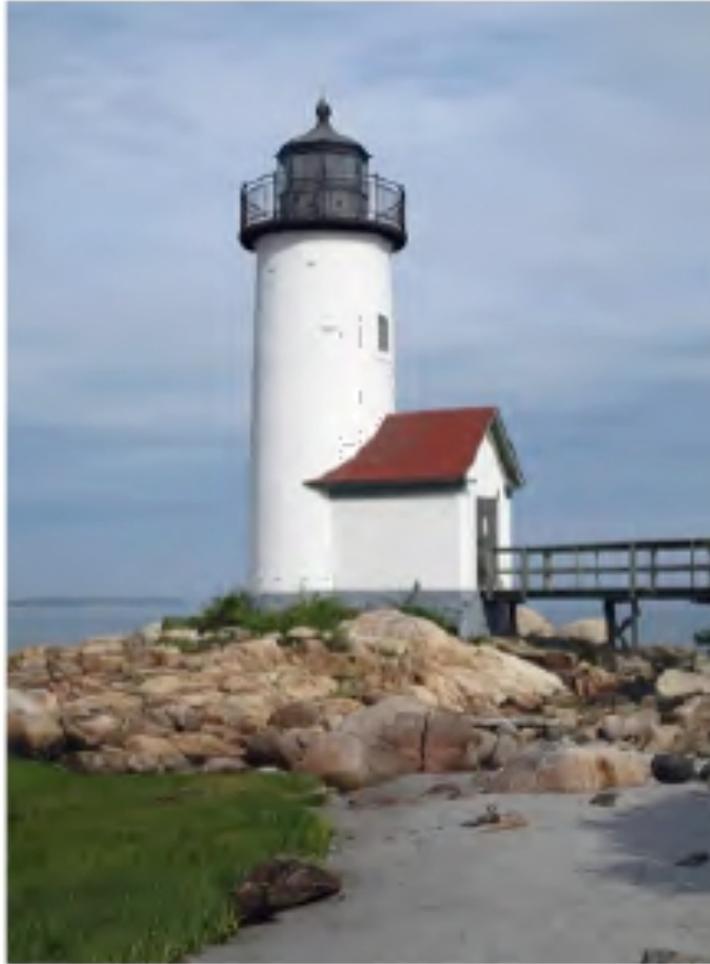
hungry greenhead flies in July). Around the coastline is popular Crane's Beach (ditto).

Wingaersheek and Crane's beaches are very flat, and the tidal range is almost ten feet: a trigonometrician will tell you that with a 10° slope, a one foot change in tide level covers or uncovers about six feet of beach. So when you leave your tender at the beach to take a five-minute walk, you might return to find it well out in the water on an incoming tide, or well inland on an outgoing tide. One of the hobbies of Annisquam Yacht Clubbers is to sit on the verandah when the tide changes and watch surprised boaters returning to find their boats high and dry or, even worse, floating down the river.

Walkers will find Annisquam's well-worn Leonard Street-River Road loop worth the time. You can also walk uphill from the bridge at Bridgewater Street, pass Leonard Street and take a short block to Walnut Street (the Village Center bypass) to find Squam Rock Road or Adams Hill Road; there you can see the homes of The Ancients. Or you can walk westward on Leonard Street to Cambridge Street—at the end of Cambridge Street is an outstanding view of Ipswich Bay and of the Annisquam Light.

One sight to see by boat is the Annisquam Lighthouse on Ipswich Bay (do not beach your tender anywhere in this area). This is a beautiful lighthouse with a long history. Built in 1801, then rebuilt after storms in 1851, it was the second lighthouse on the East Coast—the first was Boston Light, which is now the only manned lighthouse in the country. *Now, Listen up! You are about to learn something that will astound your friends!!* Most boaters believe that the Intra Coastal Waterway (ICW) begins in Norfolk, Virginia and travels all the way to Florida. But the official beginning of the ICW is at the Annisquam Light, and the first navigable section is the Annisquam River!!!

It is true that after Gloucester the entire route to Norfolk is extracoastal (outside to Delaware Bay, then down the Chesapeake Bay to Norfolk). But still, Annisquam is officially the ICW's beginning.



**Annisquam Light, Ipswich Bay**

## **The Barnacle: Annisquam's Dance Hall?**

In 1863 Willard P. Griffin bought the wharf on whose seawall edge The Barnacle at 25 River Road now rests. Willard P. ran a blacksmith shop at that site, probably serving the shipyard where the AYC now stands. At his death his son, Willard N. Griffin, inherited the property. In 1909 Willard N. installed the granite pilings that support The Barnacle; the house was then completely over the water with its edges sitting on seawalls.

When Willard N. died in 1917 the house was sold to Nancy L. Flagg, a Maine resident who summered in Annisquam. Under her ownership The Barnacle gave room to boarders and sported a gift shop, a tea house serving breakfast to the public, and (some say) a speakeasy during Prohibition. At her death in 1943 Mrs. Flagg bequeathed The Barnacle to Florence Clark, her housekeeper and a neighbor at 21-22 River Road. At Mrs. Clark's death in 1963 the house was sold to W. Stuart Forbes, whose wife, Thayer reports, "...gave wonderful parties where once we gave our dances." According to Thayer, the house was "roomy," a judgment of the original house that would not be made today.



**Boat Livery and Barnacle c. 1915**



**Boat Livery and Barnacle 2005**

The Annisquam Boat Livery at 27 River Road is between The Barnacle between The Barnacle and Margaret Fitzhugh Browne's house at 31 River Road (her seawall is on the right side of the 1915 photo). At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Elmer Hodgkins owned the Livery (that might be him in the rowboat). He rented rowboats to people who wanted to explore the cove and the river, or go to Wingersheek Beach. The business was done on the honor system: you took a rowboat and when you returned it you put the money in a box. It was the first virtual business requiring no employees and the Livery has maintained its virtual character though for seasonal renters.

In the late 1990s I began searching for a waterfront property with a deep-water dock. The traffic associated with Cape Cod, and my involvement at that time in a business located on in Essex, led me to look to the North Shore. In 1999 I found an unusual property on Lobster Cove in Annisquam, adjacent to the Annisquam Yacht Club. That house was The Barnacle, and its dilapidation was part of the River Road culture at that time: River Road was populated by houses that had received little maintenance for perhaps 100 years. The Barnacle was perhaps the worst of these—it had been on the market for ages and virtually everyone we have met in Annisquam had looked at it and fled in horror.

There were many drawbacks to purchasing The Barnacle. The first of these was that my wife not on board; indeed, she was extremely upset at the idea. The place was a shack, we knew nothing about Annisquam, and—worst of all—she felt that I was doing it without her support. After the purchase, she said that it was the nadir of our married life! I certainly hope so!!

A second drawback was the difficult permit process in Gloucester. We wanted to renovate, but permits would normally take months and the purchase would be made without assurance of success. Not only was the lot nonconforming (as is every property in Annisquam), hence requiring a variation from the Zoning Board, but it was also over

the water and required approval from the Conservation Commission. This required new surveys—and so on. So we could own it but not necessarily change it; it was quite a risk.

A third problem was that The Barnacle was literally attached to a small marina that had existed for 100 years. The Annisquam Boat Livery could be a perpetual problem if we did not control it. So in order to buy the home we would have to buy the Marina. Fortunately, the Barnacle's owner was also the Livery's owner, so we purchased both properties.

A fourth problem was the likelihood of local opposition. Annisquam, as noted above, is a community that abhors change. Many people would rather see a house fall down than approve its renovation. There is no objection to normal maintenance, but normal maintenance was also an unknown concept. In effect, there was no such thing as “deferred maintenance:” maintenance not undertaken as needed would never be done until its cumulative effects required renovation, and then the opposition would come in. We did, in fact, encounter opposition—one abutter because there would be a very small change in sightline from a back bedroom at his house; another gentlemen spoke eloquently at a public meeting against the project because “I just don't want change.” But the permitting authorities were familiar with the ways of Squammers and, after taking a close look at the site, they found the objections frivolous and permits were granted.

A fifth problem was completely self-inflicted. When we bought the shack I called a good friend who was an architect in Boston. My goal was to see if he could recommend an architect in the Gloucester area who knew the local politics and could navigate the permit process. In our conversation I got as far as “Andy, we have just bought a house in Annisquam and it needs renovation...” At this Andy broke in with “I'd love to do it!” Being young and gutless, I had just found our architect. Andy was an excellent architect, but he knew nothing about Gloucester's building code and idiosyncracies.

When we bought The Barnacle it was a ramshackle 2,500 square feet with a large wraparound verandah, two small bedrooms, two small bathrooms on the second floor, and an undeveloped half attic.

When we finished renovation in 2001 we had 4,000 square feet with three bedrooms on the second floor (two baths) and two bedrooms (two baths) on the third floor. To do this we eliminated the wrap-around verandah and finished the attic. The footprint was not changed, nor was the volume; the extra space was gained almost entirely by internal reorganization.

My original plan for the Barnacle had been to use it as a shared house for family, but families get larger so that at best two families could stay there; with three children, each having children—a grand total of ten grandchildren—we quickly ran out of room. In 2003 we purchased a tiny 1,000 square-foot shack at 24 River Road, directly across the street from the Livery. A neighbor described it as having “just enough room for one woman without clothes.”<sup>14</sup> This was a former root cellar on Asa Woodbury’s orchard; there is still one remaining apple tree. (Update: it fell in 2015). The seller, Ina Noonan, called “Pidgie,” was a local legend popular with everyone. At age 70 she sold the house to us and ran away to join the circus, literally—she became a trapeze artist. Pidgie has since died, but she was a high flyer in her later day.

We completely renovated the shack and renamed it “The Cottage” (for public use), and “The Periwinkle” (for family use). We hired an excellent local architect who knew the ropes and could navigate skillfully through the political pitfalls. After completion we had 2,000 square feet with two bedrooms and two baths on the second floor, and a family room, kitchen/livingroom, and one bathroom on the first floor.

In 2014 we decided to sell our other house in Massachusetts and have Annisquam as our only northern property. This required (we thought) minor renovation—adding some closet and storage space and reconfiguration of the entry. But as we got into it we found structural and other issues that we had thought had been resolved in the renovation in 2000. In short, the house looked better and had more space than before, but it was in bad shape. The result was that our minor renovation turned into a major renovation. The renovation was finished in 2016.

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