

Provincetown and Martha's Vinyard – Lee and Peter Wonson

For those of you who were born, raised or attended college in New England, Provincetown at the tip of Cape Cod or Martha's Vinyard might not be exotic travel destinations. But for a Southern gal from Baltimore (that would be my wife, Lee) who'd never been to the Southern New England coast, those two destinations were perfectly delightful.

In our first ten years of marriage, Lee and I travelled to "Uppah" New England several times: for our Class 50th birthday party in 1996; our 30th Reunion in 1998 with a stop at the Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, NY, on the way home; and a car trip along coastal Maine and then into the interior of Northern New Hampshire. One of the highlights of that trip was a dinner at the Mt. Washington Hotel compliments of a good friend of mine who shared our table that night and who had one-third ownership of the Hotel. Still, Lee had never been to Southern New England.

So, in 2002 I booked us a trip that included three days in P'Town and three days on the Vinyard. We flew from Roanoke, VA, into Providence, RI, rented a Chrysler Sebring convertible, and had the top down the entire time, six days of bright, glorious sunshine. We had seen our first Sebring – John Engelman's Dartmouth green convertible – on the lawn of AD at our Class 50th birthday party during the tailgate before the Penn game. For those of you who were at that game, in mid-September, it was about 90 degrees at the opening kickoff, and for a Dartmouth team that wasn't expected to contend that season the comeback win over Penn was the first victory in a 10-0, Ivy League championship season. But I digress.

We arrived at our P'Town lodging late in the afternoon and had a completely forgettable (except for it being a comp) steak dinner in the hotel dining room associated with our separate beachfront lodging – a rectangular, first-story space with multiple rooms fronting Provincetown's harbor.



Provincetown accommodations, white building at the center of the photo

We spent two relaxed, enjoyable days walking the streets of P'Town, soaking up the culture (and counterculture) and slipping into the many art galleries and shops. After seeking recommendations from the locals, on night two we ate at a fantastic restaurant called the Lobster Pot at 321 Commercial Street, a two-story operation with amazing seafood. The place was fairly full and the pace of the waitstaff somewhat frenetic, but after dinner in the first-floor dining room we left stuffed to the gills and tumbled out the back door of the restaurant onto the beach of the harbor, where we walked off some of that stuff.



Commercial Street Foot Traffic



The "Lobstah" Pot

The next morning we took a whale watching boat north out of P'Town to the Stellwagen Bank Marine Sanctuary, a popular location where pods of whales are said to gather. For July it was a cool morning out on the water, and everyone had on either a coat, jacket or sweater. Our actual whale watching that morning was rather limited. We chased sonar a lot and eventually saw a couple of the big animals. I guess activities like whale watching are mostly a roll of the dice. Let's say we didn't hit snake eyes, seven or eleven that morning. Still, it was a memorable jaunt.



Whale Watching

The food at the Lobster Pot was so good the first night we went back a second night. Things were a bit different that evening in terms of finding a table. The place was absolutely packed. And though it's truly not my style, I spied a guy posing as a maître de and slipped him a twenty. We were quickly ushered up the stairs to the second-floor dining room where we were seated at a table next to a bank of windows with a lovely view of the harbor. Another scrumptious meal, another quick trip to the harbor beach, and we were on our way back to our rooms.

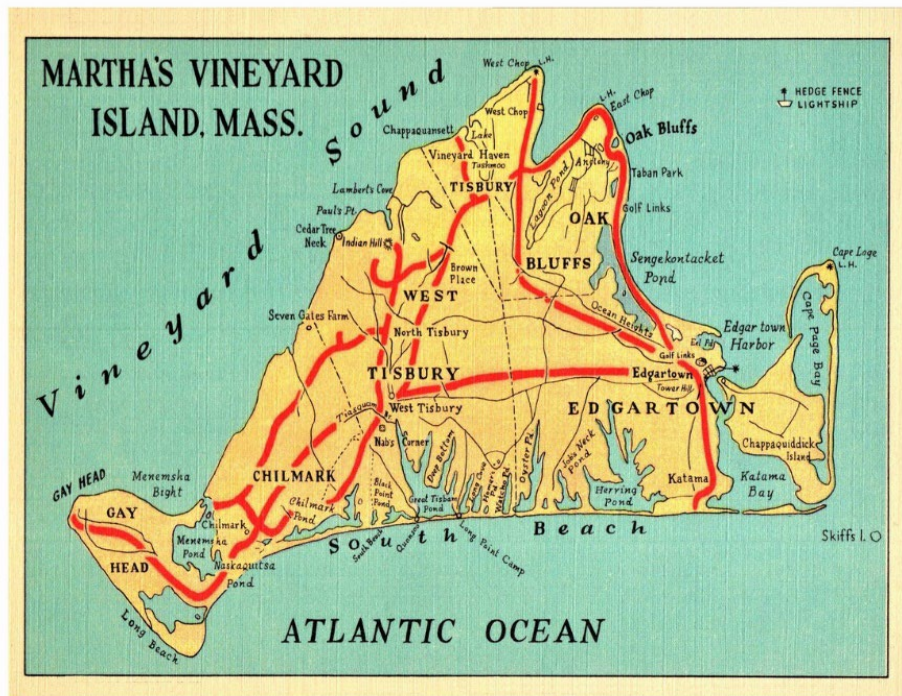
At the end of our three days in P'Town we drove back down the length of the Cape to catch a morning ferry from Woods Hole to Martha's Vinyard, an easy, breezy trip on the ferry to MV. The only challenging aspect was backing down the ferry parking lot at Woods Hole, aided by some desultory assistance from a hand-signaling guy, up a gangplank and into the maw of the ferry while trying not to ding the Mercedes rapidly approaching in the rearview mirror or the cars flanking us on either side with about 18 inches to spare.



Woods Hole Ferry

While our three days in Provincetown were very enjoyable, our stay on Martha's Vinyard was sublime. I was able to drive our car right off the ferry and quickly to our location for three days, a B&B in Oak Bluffs called The Capricorn House. Our third-

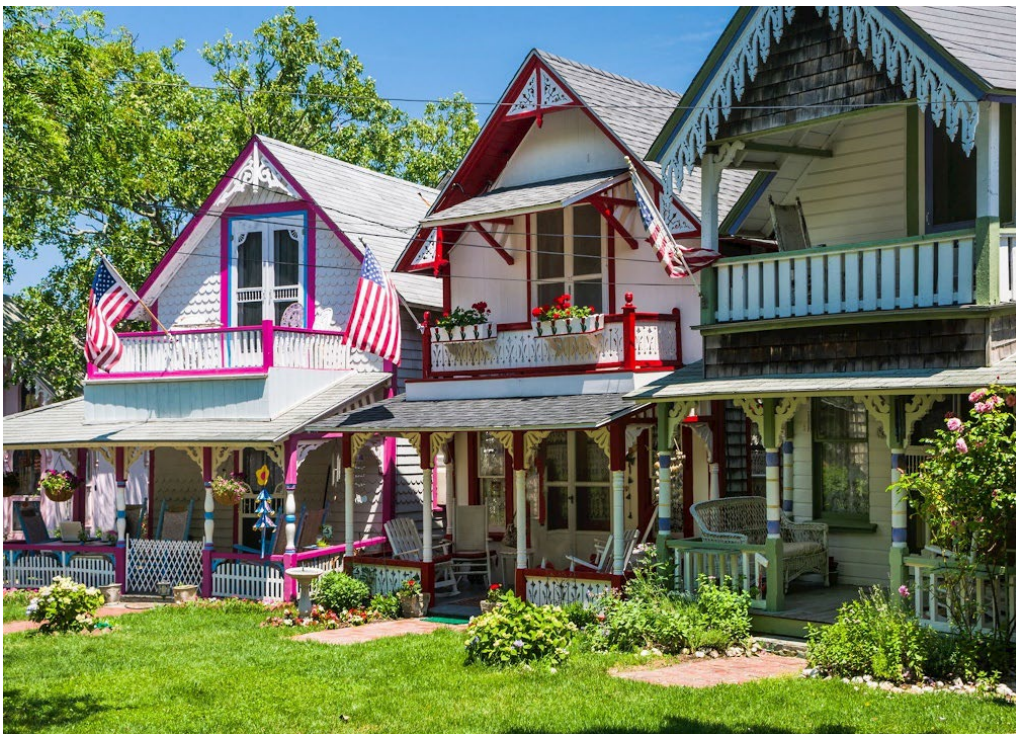
floor room overlooked Inkwell Beach, an airy, lovely room with a private bath including the world's tiniest shower which barely held one person. The owners were kind and helpful, breakfast was relaxed with a surprisingly broad menu, and we were within walking distance of downtown Oak Bluffs. We had the front balcony on the third floor facing the ocean all to ourselves day and night, since the only door to the balcony led out of our room. Looking past Inkwell Beach with the Atlantic spreading out to the East, the next speck of dry land beyond our gaze was Nantucket, 40 miles away over the horizon.



Capricorn House, Oak Bluffs

For our three nights on MV we ate at three different, exceptionally fine restaurants; our third, fourth and fifth nights of delectable seafood. There are so many good restaurants on MV I won't recommend any single restaurant. Rather I'll recommend that you eat out every night, even if you've rented a house with a gourmet kitchen!

On our first full day on the Vinyard we took a short walk over to see the Gingerbread Houses. Many of these homes are now exclusive summer cottages, but this candy-colored storybook village originated as a 19th-Century Methodist campground. The Victorian cottages are clustered together, each with a colorful design reminiscent of the gingerbread house in "Hansel and Gretel."



Gingerbread Houses, Oak Bluffs

We also drove south to Edgartown that day. No, we didn't drive across the bridge to Chappaquiddick. But we did have a brief encounter on the brick paver sidewalk of Main Street with a power couple who were dating at the time. Repairs were taking place on a stretch of this sidewalk, and sawhorses were blocking the repairs, so foot traffic was single file. I was a step ahead of Lee when we saw a man and woman coming from the other direction. We allowed the woman to pass and she turned down a side street. Neither of us recognized her and I then took my turn past the sawhorses. Lee was going to let the man go next but he indicated that Lee should

come along. As she passed him on the sidewalk, with about a foot of airspace between them, he flashed her a 1000-watt smile. I thought to myself, "Wait a minute?" He then went ahead and turned down the side street to catch up with the woman. Lee whispered, "I think that was Tom Cruise." I looked down the side street at them walking side by side and Lee said, "Let them enjoy their vacation." We did. We learned later that Cruise and Cruz (Penelope) had been spotted having dinner that evening at an Edgartown restaurant. Close encounter confirmed.



Close Encounter on Main Street

Our second full day we headed out in the morning to visit Aquinnah and the Gay Head Lighthouse at the easternmost point of the island.



Gay Head Lighthouse

Then we doubled back to the village of Menemsha to see its celebrated boat channel, famous because of *Jaws*; photo below of the *Orca* steaming out of “Amity Harbor.” We also saw a disintegrating replica of Quint’s boat slouched against the far side of the boat channel as we were coming into the village. We poked around a bit, took a short walk on a wooden boardwalk to the end of the boat channel, then drove off to explore the interior of the island.



The Orca



The Wreck of the Orca



Boat Channel, Menemsha

One of the best parts of our stay was driving the narrow, curving roads that bisected the rural interior of the island; old rock walls, more cows and sheep than people, copses of unique, interesting trees. On some of those stretches it truly felt like we were driving to nowhere. The roads reminded me of the back roads of Vermont which I travelled in the late 60s and early 70s with the rock band Tracks. They also reminded me of the rural roads 25 miles or so west of my hometown of Minneapolis, where during my upperclassman years in high school and my college years I played summer semi-pro town baseball in the small burghs that dotted the rolling plains.



Beetlebung or Black Gum Tree



Scrub Oak

Later that afternoon we drove over to West Chop to visit my dad's Dartmouth Class of 1940 roommate Hugh Schwartz. When we knocked on the front door and Hugh – who was 84 at the time – opened it, he looked like he'd seen a ghost. He quickly collected himself and said, "You look an awful lot like your dad!" "Hughie" and his wife lived on a bluff overlooking Vinyard Haven harbor. At the back of their property a cliff with a great view from the top dropped precipitously to the beach below. The cliff had a wooden stairway that descended steeply to the harbor. I asked if I could go down it, and Hugh said yes. I clambered down, looked around for about 30 seconds at the beach and the harbor, and then hotfooted it back up the stairs. At the top Hugh smiled and remarked, "Your dad would have done exactly the same thing."

Our return trip off Martha's Vinyard was a snap. Same lovely weather and loading the car onto the ferry at Vinyard Haven was easy. I drove straight in and then exited straight out at Woods Hole... 😊 We headed west on Route 28, off the Cape over the Bourne Bridge and back to "Prov" for our return to the mountains of Southwest Virginia. On the return flight home Lee said, "I'd sure like to have one of those Sebrings." You know the old saying: "If momma ain't happy, ain't nobody happy." Within a year we owned a Sebring convertible.

One final thought – when you plan a week's trip with the goal of having your wife see in person what you always see in your mind's eye when you think of your destinations, make sure to pay off the weather man ahead of time!

(Full disclosure: in those days before cell phone cameras, we forgot our camera at home. Using the internet I found photos that accurately convey our time on MV and in Provincetown – PW)