



The David Fairbanks House at 90 Bradford Street - - June 13, 1977

Provincetown Advocate
-August 21, 1975-

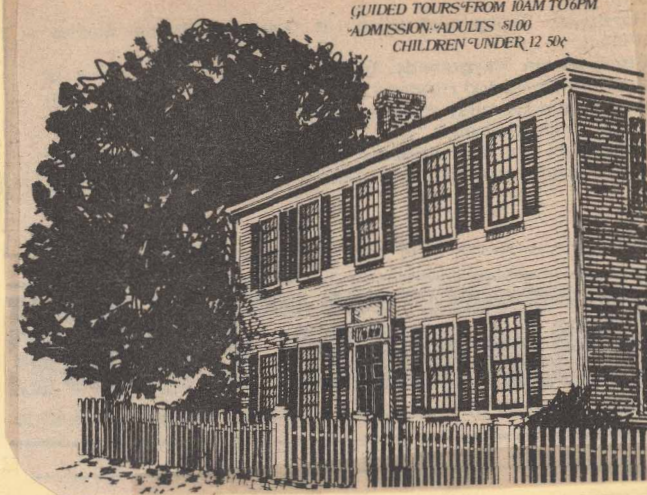
LOOK BACK 200 YEARS AT THE DAVID FAIRBANKS HOUSE

*The Lower Cape's First Authentic
Museum of Early American Folk Art*

The 200 year old David Fairbanks House has been carefully restored in honor of the Bicentennial and now houses a superb collection of over a thousand items created by Cape Cod artists, craftsmen and furniture makers between the years 1776 and 1876. The entire house has been restored so you can look back 200 years to the manner in which our Cape forebears lived.

THE DAVID FAIRBANKS HOUSE NOW OPEN DAILY & SUNDAY
90 BRADFORD STREET, JUST UP THE HILL FROM TOWN HALL
PROVINCETOWN

GUIDED TOURS FROM 10AM TO 6PM
ADMISSION: ADULTS \$1.00
CHILDREN UNDER 12 50¢



Provincetown Advocate Summer Guide, Thursday, July 8, 1976

David Fairbanks house a showpiece

By Karen Berman

Stan Sorrentino has been an opera singer, a public school music teacher, and for the last 15 years, the owner of the Crown and Anchor Motor Inn in Provincetown.

In those years, he has steadily built a collection of American folk art. Last year, he bought and restored the 200-year-old David Fairbanks House on 90 Bradford St. as a home for his collection, and opened it to the public.

"I'm a businessman," he said, "but I have my hobby, and that's collecting. This is what I enjoy doing, and I want to share it with other people who enjoy it."

The art and furnishings of the house encompass a period from 1776 to 1876, and come exclusively from New England, mostly from Cape Cod. Folk art is distinguished from fine art by the amateur, often childlike quality of the work. Sorrentino describes his favorite pieces with such unlikely remarks as "Look how terribly the water is painted," or "Notice the complete lack of perspective in this painting." Many of the folk artists did leave behind paintings that display only rudimentary attempts at shadow or perspective. Yet this lack of technique is a technique in itself.

What I look for in folk art is design, color, feeling, and that childlike, naive quality," Sorrentino said. "One thing I don't look for is the work of a professionally trained artist."

A folk artist is, by definition, an untrained, amateur artist. Folk art is often the work of a housewife trying to decorate her home, a young girl learning needlecrafts, or a sailor, passing time while at sea. Their work constitutes an historical chronicle of an era.

That journey back in time, to visually experience the life of New Englanders 200 years or 100 years ago, is what Sorrentino hopes to achieve with the Fairbanks House. He chooses the artwork and furnishings for the house meticulously, avoiding unauthentic restorations and pieces from other time periods and places.

The Fairbanks House itself, as restored by Sorrentino, is testimony to his concern with genuinely recreating the era. He and two architects prepared the house for exhibition with close attention to the original architecture and purposes of each of the rooms.

The task was facilitated by the previous owners of the house, who kept most of its original structure intact.

"This house was a real gem," Sorrentino said. "Most other old houses around here have been partitioned, fit with picture windows and sliding glass doors. The original houses are butchered. But the people who have had this house obviously respected it."

Most of the original woodwork, including broad-planked wooden floors, has remained in good repair over the house's 200 year life. Even most of the original door latches are in good working order.

But Sorrentino still had plenty to do to restore the house to its original condition. Fireplaces were rebuilt, some woodwork was replaced, rooms were wallpapered in authentic hand block-printed paper and furnished with pieces consistent with their original purposes.

Apparently, Sorrentino's heart, as well as time and money, went into the project. He is familiar with every

nook and cranny, and can give the architectural history behind even a crack in the wall.

The house was built in the 1770's by Eban Snow, a sea captain. David Fairbanks, founder of the Seamen's Savings Bank in Provincetown, bought it in 1826. He sold it in 1858 to Charles B. Snow, a tin merchant, no relation to the original owner.

Under Charles Snow's ownership, it became the first home in Provincetown to be equipped with a modern kitchen, which Snow added to the house for his wife's convenience, leaving the original cooking area intact. He also fitted the house with the town's first real bathroom, constructing a tub out of tin.

When the house went on the real estate market two years ago, Sorrentino saw his chance to set up his abundant collection of folk art. The furniture and utensils are completely authentic, and interesting to many of the house's visitors, but the artwork is Sorrentino's real pride.

He started collecting folk art through hand-me-downs and auction finds that he used for decoration, about 30 years ago. He became a student of the art and time period through his acquisitions. "I'd buy something, and then I'd want to see what it was I had bought," he said.

His collection grew through junk shop, auction and art dealer purchases. Now he said he has key art dealers across the country keeping an eye out for pieces that might fit his motif, Cape Cod and New England, 1776-1876.

The value of the art is in the story it tells of another time period and another way of life. Intricate memorials,

painted or embroidered, containing a symbolic weeping willow tree and monument to the deceased, recall that century's frequent brushes with death.

One Provincetown memorial commemorates a 21-year-old sailor, Parker Morse, who died when his ship, the *Ardent*, sank. Most needlework samplers show careful craftsmanship and often some artistic talent.

Paintings are uniform in their complete lack of dimension. Some resemble later works of modern artists in their disregard for realistic tone and perspective. But the touch is obviously that of the untrained hand. Faces are marred by slightly mismatched eyes, disproportionate features, and dozens of other signs that an amateur was at work.

But the mood of stern and hard times is captured on those canvases in the unsmiling, flattened, one-tone faces. Among Sorrentino's prized possessions are two portraits, of Captain Benjamin Dyer and his wife of Truro. The two were drowned during the Civil War while Captain Dyer, accompanied by his wife, served on the *Fredonia* in Arica Bay, Peru. An earthquake in August, 1868 swallowed the ship.

Some artists signified the occupation of the portrait's subject by picturing the tools of his trade in the painting. A portrait of shipowner, Norman Cook, shows Cook seated with a sealed letter in hand and a marine scene through the window behind him.

The utensils and furnishings are equally indicative of