

Town Hill, where the Pilgrim Monument now stands; it can be seen on the GUIDE'S banner above the "A" in "Advocate") were destroyed when that building burned around the same time.

The house at 72 Commercial is considered "the oldest, most-complete standing" house in Provincetown by Architectural Forum magazine. It was built by Seth Nickerson, a ship's carpenter, using the interior wood from wrecked or abandoned ships.

The house contains a massive 16-ton central chimney called "the anchor" because the house was built around it and it anchored the house down in severe storms. The chimney has a beehive Dutch oven, which means that it was built before 1750, when the side oven came into vogue. Other details date the house at around 1746. It is now owned by John Gregory.

Next door to the "oldest house" is an unusual eight-sided house built by a sea captain named Soper around 1834. Octagonal houses were popular in the early nineteenth century; it was said that they allowed more light inside. Mrs. Mellen C.M. Hatch, the present owner, runs it as a rest home known as The Hatchway.

Several of the older West End houses were originally located on Long Point, where there was a fishing settlement for more than 40 years. Arthur Bickers, the former curator of the Provincetown Museum (at the foot of the Pilgrim Monument) says that the settlement was made up largely of fishermen and people who worked in the blackfish oil factory there.

Blackfish (a small whale) oil was burned for illumination in the early nineteenth century. according to Bickers, the process for manufacturing the oil produced such offensive odors that the factory had to be located away from town.

At its height, in the 1840's, the Long Point settlement had a population of 200. The first house was built by John Atwood in 1818, and school was originally held in the lighthouse.

When the settlement started to disband in the 1850's, the residents decided to take their houses with them. They floated them across the bay on scows (flat-bottomed boats) and relocated them throughout Provincetown. The majority of the houses ended up in the West End, near Gull Hill around Point Street.

A mural at the Provincetown Inn by Don Aikens depicts the Long Point settlement

and gives the present addresses of the houses that were floated over. Aikens did other murals too that are at the Inn—early scenes of the West End—all of them meticulously researched.

Although the majority of the fishing wharves in town were in the East End, the West End had two of the busiest—Central Wharf, opposite Central Street (where the town landing is today), and Union Wharf, (today called Union Warf, without the "h," at 97 Commercial Street). Both wharves had railways for repairing boats, chandleries (stores that outfitted boats), and fish flakes all along their length.

Union Wharf was the second oldest wharf in Provincetown. It was built in 1831 by Jonathan Stephen and Thomas and Samuel Nickerson, and was one of the longest in town (at one time, there were more than 60 wharves in Provincetown). The wharf and the Union Wharf Company encompassed what are today Union Warf, Sal's Place, and a house across the street (which, incidentally, was the first home of the Seaman's Savings Bank, the oldest bank in Provincetown).

The "Portland Gale" of 1898 completely destroyed Central Wharf and almost all of Union Wharf. An article in The Advocate at the time describes the gale's effects: "At the West End of town, the water flowed across the main street and formed a lake 800 feet wide and nearly a mile long."

At the turn of the century, Provincetown was often visited by the elite and rich of the day. The fashionable place to stay was the Red Inn, 15 Commercial Street. According to Charlotte Wilson, whose family ran the inn for 52 years, part of the building dates back to around 1805, when Captain Freeman Atkins built the house for his bride, Meraiah Gross of Wellfleet.

In 1915, Miss Wilson's uncle, Henry Wilkonson, a prominent New York architect, bought the Atkins house from a Mr. and Mrs. Straucher, who had run it as a boarding house for many years. Wilkonson doubled its size and turned it into an inn, which his sister Marion ran until her death in 1932. Then, Miss Wilson took it over and ran it until 1967, when she sold it to Francis C. Dickonson.

Today, the Red Inn is a restaurant, and Ted Barker, its new owner, is restoring the entire inn as it was in 1915. He wants to keep it small and intimate, in the scale of the West End and reflecting its history. He has

recovered some of the original furnishings and is restoring them. Some of the china that he uses in the restaurant dates back to 1915. Barker is also planning to restore the original silver used by the inn.

The West End is zoned Class G Residential from Kelley's Corner to the Red Inn. Excluded are all stores (with the exception of the few that existed before the zoning bylaw was passed) that are not true antique shops or craft shops selling handmade items. The handful of shopkeepers who are located in the West End say they prefer it there, away from the teeming tourists.

The residential zoning provides tranquility for artists and writers. The late artists Hans Hoffman and Karl Knaths, two of the prominent figures in the town's art history, were both West Enders, as are artists Mae Murphy and Jack Tworikov and poet Stanley Kunitz, along with many others, today. There are even art galleries now in the West End, the Paul Kessler at 108 Commercial Street and the Barn on Mechanic Street.

The West End, however, is no picture book Sturbridge Village (and no sterile Williamsburg either). It is alive, and it has changed in many ways over the years. Some of the older houses along the side streets are not well kept up and have become dilapidated. And the West End is not entirely guiltless of selling a little of its "soul and heritage" to tourism.

But on the whole, the West End is a community that is determined to maintain its integrity. Many residents say they will fight to the finish any attempts to change the zoning laws or to alter drastically the appearance of the community.

In this way, they are like their hero, Benjamin F. Lancy. Anyone who tries to saw through their property will apparently have to saw through their bodies first.