

CAPE COD TOWN dumps are famous for turning up unusual things and many Cape Cod homes contain any number of things ranging from authentic antiques to the rather absurd—“picked up at the dump”. It was rather sad to discover among the debris at our own Provincetown dump this week a cart with a handle, showing no signs of wear, still with its paint bright and new looking, and bearing on one side the name “Freeman Express Co.” There is hardly anyone who will not recall Willie Alley and his cart in which during the hot summer days he hauled baggage from the end of the wharf for the boat passengers, or from which he sold his scallop shells or his cheerful cry along Commercial Street of “nice fresh water lilies”.

ALONGSHORE.

BY JOHN BELL



When I took my rubbish to the town dump last Sunday, the place was unusually barren. Not many people had been there since the last time Elroy “Lala” Pierce had bulldozed it. A thin layer of snow made it look like the Sea of Tranquility after the astronauts had left.

In spite of our modern sanitation truck, and the hard-working men who go out in the wee morning hours to pick up household dirt, I still prefer to take my own out there. It's a little more work, but it's worth it. The dump is a great institution.

It's a free rummage sale, a salvage depot, an exchange center. It replaces the cracker-barrel and pot-belly stove in the general store as the place to trade gossip and argue politics. It's a place to make new friends and ripen old acquaintance.

You can, without saying a word, learn a great deal about all kinds of people. Just watch what they throw away - and what they take home.

FOUR DUMP SEASONS

Right now, while lower Cape people are watching their purchases closely, is the lean season for dump-picking. It will improve as soon as

spring remodelling and house-cleaning begin.

When the weather finally breaks, useable scraps begin coming off the tailgates of builders' trucks. Old plumbing fixtures stripped of valuable brass fittings, and galvanized piping hoarded only by commercial junkmen, tell of modernized bathrooms. Old wiring seldom shows up, and copper hunters salvage it almost before it hits the ground.

As remodelling goes on, household furniture appears. (“That old divan doesn't match the new wallpaper.”) Most of the articles look pretty beat-up, but a lot of them go back to furnish low-rent summer housing. Occasionally, repairable antiques show up. They don't stay long enough to see the sun go down.

Summertime at the dump is garbage time. Restaurant men, dumping barrels of lobster shells, leftovers and empty beer bottles, eye each others' trash to calculate how the competition is doing. Whenever high winds keep the fishing fleet from going out, flocks of sea gulls gorge themselves. Then it's wise to wear

boots and an old hat and jacket out there.

After Labor Day the richest dump season comes. Summer earnings are being spent on clothes, household appliances, new construction. The weather is perfect for browsing among the things thrown out to make way for new. Veteran dump-pickers kid each other about taking home more than they brought.

APPRENTICE TO EXPERTS

Back in the 1940's, when World War II shortened the supply of building materials, Clifton Nelson and his late brother Clarence went into the chicken business. (No connection, I doubt, with the fact that he was living in the former “Red Rooster,” a famous night spot off Race Point Road.) They had spent years scavenging the back shore and the dump for lumber.

I helped them frame up Cliff's two-story henhouse, the one-story brooder house, the open-sided shelters in the yards. Although we used new planking for floors and roof frames, most of the boards we nailed up were from the dump.

Naturally, I learned the dump game too. When my wife and I tied broken shoestrings together to build our first house (on land Cliff gave us in exchange for labor) much of the material and most of the furniture came from the dump.

A legless circular table top, hung on a supporting post, became our dining table. Until we could afford a refrigerator, a salvaged icebox kept our food cold - with the help of ice chunks bought from Charles DeRiggs and lugged home in a bicycle basket. For heating and cooking we used an old-fashioned coal range that I spoke for when the late Oscar Gieberich asked me to cart it to the dump for him.

Twenty years later, we added onto our present home on Telegraph Hill. Two of the doors in my basement study came from the Gifford House hotel by way of the dump. They're the best-made doors in the house, good for another 100 years.

Before the inspectors from the state board of health told us to change from dump-burning to sanitary land fill, there were signs requesting people to throw their trash over the edge of the dump. This made bulldozing mostly unnecessary. There was a recognized exception to this rule.

If you had something that was still serviceable, or a bundle of magazines, for example, that someone might take home and read, you laid them carefully in a clean spot near the edge, making sure they wouldn't tumble over accidentally.

When aluminum storm windows began to replace wooden ones, the junked windows were stacked at the edge too. It was considered nothing less than malicious mischief to break the panes. People would often salvage just the glass.

Even the Navy men, when they dismantled their wartime quarters here after World War II, obeyed this rule. My bench grinder, equipped with a Sears Roebuck emery wheel, is powered by a motor Uncle Sam had no further use for. In other postwar theaters, he was notorious for destroying surplus goodies to protect the domestic market.

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE

Almost every time I go to the dump there's someone poking through the debris. It's very revealing.

A warning here: if your trash contains anything with your name on it - an empty envelope will do - someone's likely to “read” your cast-offs as if they were tea leaves in the bottom of a cup.

Did what's-his-name really leave his wife? Not likely, unless she's entertaining someone who likes the same brand of beer.

Johnny Jones must be making good money. He didn't even scrape the last meat off that T-bone.

Smith's wife must be spending his money hog-wild. Look at all those perfectly good clothes!

A laugh. “Young Bill's new wife has a thing or two to learn about cooking. She even threw the pot away!”