

Arthur Bickers

A graveside service at Provincetown Cemetery will be observed at 2 p.m.

-June 5, 1975

Arthur Bickers

To the Editor:

Thinking of Arthur Bickers and of what he represented in Provincetown, there is a volume that could be written in appreciation.

As curator of the Museum when it was in the fine old mansion on Commercial Street he was one of the most valued and valuable friends of the Provincetown Playhouse from 1940 through the following years. His wealth of knowledge and interest in theatre, and background of experience as well, was always generously offered season after season.

Knowing him was knowing Provincetown as one was often happiest to have the opportunity. As a personality he carried the distinction of complete assurance in his own style and tradition. One remembers him with his little white dog following him down the aisle at church on Sundays as he took up the collection.

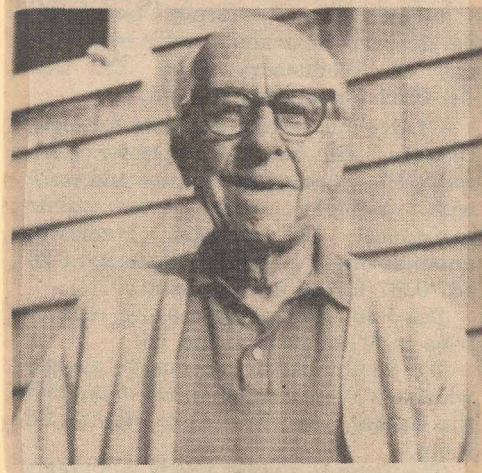
It is doubtful if it was ever fully appreciated what the masterly transfer for which he was responsible meant when the contents of the museum as it had been known on Commercial Street was moved to the present Monument Museum. There must have been, and indeed he spoke of the fact, that over a million treasures large and small were accounted for at that time. With all this responsibility and for the years following he seemed invariably serene and always with time for friendships and enjoyment. He was the high water mark for any place and any time. Provincetown has reason to be proud of him and none of us who knew will forget him.

Catherine Huntington
Boston

Wednesday for Arthur Henry Bickers of 6 Central Street.

The retired curator of the Cape Cod Pilgrim Memorial Association died at home Monday. His age was 85.

A native and lifelong resident, member of the Historic Committee, the Historical Society and the Cemetery Committee, the deceased was a son of the late George Henry and Abbie Caton Bickers. There are no survivors.



Arthur Bickers

He was Curator of the Historical Museum when it was located in the Ben Lancy House

Provincetown Advocate, Thursday, November 6, 1975

Save The Building II

To the Editor:

Please give special thanks to Josephine Del Deo for her efforts to save the old Benjamin Lancy House. I also have been distressed and saddened over the neglect and destruction of that unusual structure built by bachelor Benjamin Lancy Jr. for his mother Nabby (Cook) Lancy, my great-great-grandmother. She wished to have the tallest, largest and finest house in Provincetown. He made her dream come true and had it built to her every whim. But there were times when it wasn't easy. First she said it must be in the "new" style of "Boston brownstone." But brownstone was so expensive, especially when it had to be brought to Provincetown. Then there was the question of all that weight setting on soft shifting

sand by the beach. But "Ben" Lancy solved the problem between his mother's pride and his pocketbook by making the first (and maybe the only) imitation "brownstone." The outside of the house was made of wood, cut and shaped to look like blocks of stone. When painted to the proper color and still wet, workmen threw fistfuls of brownstone sand on the paint till it stuck. This was so successful that in the early days people really thought it was made of brownstone. These stories were passed down in the family by each generation.

"Grandma Lancy," who was born in Provincetown July 3, 1812, not only wanted the finest, largest, but also the "tallest" house with a "widow's watch" where she not only could keep account of the goings and comings of all ships in the harbor but could look down on all the neighbor's yards as well, (where

she could keep track of them too). It must be remembered that there was nothing between the Lancy brownstone mansion and the water but a sandy front yard to Lancy's own wharf, for he owned a small fleet of ships—some for fishing and some for cargo. I still have one of the logs to a fishing boat off the Grand Banks.

Well that top widow's watch became a problem while in construction. "Ben" Lancy couldn't find a carpenter on the Cape or Boston that could build the small hanging stairs safe enough and artistic enough to suit the Lancys. Quite by accident, Lancy found an old ship's carpenter repairing ship's stairs in one of the Lancy's vessels. It was the only kind of stairs he ever built. So he built ship's stairs into the cupola of the Lancy mansion.

It was strong and safe. Mrs. Benjamin Lancy Sr. watched her son "Bengie" sail in and out of the harbor most everyday for he had an office in Boston and commuted from Provincetown.

Her grandchildren loved climbing up and down the small stairwell as much as looking out to sea. Bread and honey was served in the afternoon to the children (to keep them quiet, I suspect) while searching the sea and sidewalks from the "top of the world" as they named it. Eating bread and honey was one of the Victorian graces with a ritual. It had to be one slice on a fancy glass plate. After honey from a silver "pot" was "run" over it, the bread was cut into little perfect squares all at once using just four cuts with a knife. Then it was eaten with a fork without getting a drop on clothing. Sometimes molasses was used instead of honey. This wasn't just a treat. It was considered good for you. It made strong bones.

When Grandma Lancy sent the grandchildren home, it was a dash down the side yard and up a few stone steps at the embankment at the end of the backyard to 90 Bradford Street where they lived. (Now the so-called Fairbanks House Museum).

Mrs. Lancy was greatly loved by all her family (most of them lived in the mansion with her). So everyone was most distressed at her death on a cold day in February (27th) 1896. Yet they

were even more disturbed to have her taken from them and put on the cold cemetery because a grave could not be dug in the frozen ground. So they opened the windows and "kept" her very well in her own bedroom, where they visited her every day, combed her hair and even cut her nails when they thought it necessary. Days passed into weeks. When spring came the body was still in its upstairs front bedroom still being visited by doting family and friends until the neighbors complained. Family tradition relates that due to public pressure they finally buried their beloved mother, three months after her death. This must have been the longest wake in Provincetown.

Old "Ben" Lancy, Jr. outlived his mother and even married the nurse that cared for him during one of his illnesses. The family did not approve, of course. But

Mr. Lancy Jr. never got used to Provincetown becoming crowded. He was used to going swimming when he felt like it, sans bathing trunks. Even when he was an old man, he would come out of his Lancy mansion, walk straight down to the water, take off his clothes, and swim nude. But no one paid any attention in 1912. When I read of the nude bathers on the Cape, I think of old Ben Lancy.

Perhaps they let him do what he wished because he was very kind and very generous. The Methodist Church not only started meeting in his home, but he gave them the land on which to build the church, plus money.

I thought that retelling some of the family stories about the Lancy homestead (yes, there are lots more) might gain interest and attention in saving this landmark for the town and even help acceptance in the register of

National Historic Landmarks.

Louise Holbrook
Whitman, Mass.

The Advocate, Thursday, November 1, 1979

Laissez-faire

To the Editor:

I agree with Mrs. Eva Stuart that the desecration of the Lancy Mansion was most unfortunate. The Provincetown Historical Association can hardly be held responsible, however, as it was not even in existence at the time. Even if it had been, it probably couldn't have stopped the desecration from happening.

To this day, the town retains a laissez-faire attitude toward its historic houses. There is nothing to prevent people from making whatever changes suit their immediate needs.

The late Victorian Lancy Mansion once served as the town's historical museum. It was built in the rich merchant and shipowner Benjamin Lancy for his mother, Nabby Cook, who wanted the tallest house in town. Following is a letter from her great-great granddaughter, which appeared in *The Advocate* on November 5, 1975.

Nell Husted
Provincetown Historical Assn.

Save the building

To the Editor:

Please give special thanks to Josephine Del Deo for her efforts to save the old Benjamin Lancy House. I also have been distressed and saddened over the neglect and destruction of that unusual structure built by bachelor Benjamin Lancy Jr. for his mother Nabby (Cook) Lancy, my great-great-grandmother. She wished to have the tallest, largest and finest house in Provincetown. He made her dream come true and had it built to her every whim. But there were times when it wasn't easy. First she said it must be in the "new" style of "Boston brownstone." But brownstone was so expensive, especially when it had to be brought to Provincetown. Then there was the question of all that weight setting on soft shifting sand by the beach. But "Ben" Lancy solved the problem between his mother's pride and his pocketbook by making the first (and maybe the only) imitation "brownstone." The outside of the house was made of wood