

Mr. Collins, Meat Man, Blew a Horn

By JACK MATHER
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It was 55 years ago when I first came to Truro with my parents to spend the Summer.

We left Boston on the steamer Long-fellow and landed in Provincetown. One had to hurry to get to the railroad station to catch the train for Truro. Mr. Ezra Hopkins always met the train at the Truro Depot and he drove us to the cottage on "Hogs' Back" accompanied by a million mosquitoes, more or less.

At that time there was a store at the South Truro railroad station. After being at the cottage for a short while, my mother sent me to this store for a couple of loaves of bread, 1 lb. of butter and a yeast cake. Much to my surprise the storekeeper started to weigh "pilot bread" — crackers to us. He then explained to me that everyone made their bread and as for having yeast cakes, that was something he never heard about. He did say that he would give me some "seed" and explained that it should be mixed with grated potatoes. Butter could be bought from whoever we would buy our milk from. I started home, walking up the railroad track, slapping the mosquitoes and trying not to spill the "seed" or drop the Pilot Bread. We found out that we could buy the butter and milk from a neighbor, Mercy Cobb.

PRAYERS FOR RAIN

We had a cistern and it was my job

to clean it — then everyone prayed for rain.

Once a week Mr. Collins, the meat man, came down the road blowing a horn and one would go to the cart and make the purchase. Eben Paine, the grocer in the center of Truro, came one day a week to get your order. He delivered it the next day. Later we had a baker call once a week.

At the bridge, over the Pamet River, near Truro Depot, was a fish house. The men brought in the fish and it was packed and shipped from there. Fishing was the chief industry.

On the ocean side, for a couple of seasons, the beach was covered with coal, from wrecked coal barges. It was worn smooth and egg-shaped from the surf. People carried baskets of it home.

The Postoffice was in the Snow House. Ed Snow's mother was Postmistress.

MAYOR OF TRURO

Schools didn't open until after cranberry picking was done. At that time there was a schoolhouse near the Hannah Cobb place, close by the Old Church that burned a few years ago. Services were held at this church every Sunday afternoon. Jesse Rich was the Sexton. The ministers came from the surrounding towns.

About everyone went to the railroad station when the trains arrived from Boston, noon and night. "Ike" Freeman had a grain store next to the station at Truro when he was station agent.

Obdiah Brown was Selectman, Constable and carpenter and was often called "The Mayor of Truro".

Mosquito control and hard roads have certainly helped to make Truro a perfect summer resort.

- January 1850 -

Truro—Simeon Higgins of Orleans, who took the contracts last July for carrying the mail between Yarmouth Port and Provincetown, has sold to Jonathan Collins of this place, the route between Wellfleet and Provincetown. Mr. Collins has bought a considerable number of horses and carriages from Mr. H. and will carry the mail in good shape, and no doubt will give general satisfaction to the travelling public.

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When the village of South Truro became a ghost town in the decades following the middle of the last century, the hardy South Truro names were spread across the nation . . . Elliotts, and Cobbs, and Mayos, and Freemans, the hardy families have established themselves from coast to coast. Some of the folks, finding a separation from Cape Cod too much of a sacrifice, settled in the neighboring towns, and one such family was the Lombards, who abandoned the family homestead located in the valley named for them, and moved over to Wellfleet. Their son David Lombard grew up, got his schooling, and entered business, first in dry goods, and later as a purveyor of seafoods. Mr. Lombard was a tall, thin man, of distinguished mein, who wore, habitually, a rusty black suit (protected, at the fish bench, by a pair of straw sleevelets) and a long white apron. He had a handsome gray moustache, and a high-pitched voice which, under the pressure of business or other excitement, would break into the most agonizing stammering imaginable—aspirate h's were particularly bad vocal traps for Mr. Lombard, and he avoided words like "half", or "howdy" or "Hezekiah" as best he could.

The Lombard fish shop was located on the bank of Uncle Tim's creek, near the Town pump, about where the Wellfleet fire station now stands. A neat, tiny, building, rich with the smell of the mudflats at low tide and the aroma of its merchandise—glassy-eyed mackerel, and bottle-green lobsters, and blue-gray quahaugs from the Bay, all neatly packed in ice in the glass-topped cases, the market served as a base of operations for the Lombards, father and son. Twice a week the family truck was backed up to the door, and the fish box was loaded with finny delicacies to be peddled around town, while the business at the shop was turned over to some trusted underling.

We are indebted to Ned Lombard, an old schoolmate, for the following true anecdote about his great uncle, David, and told in a spirit of sincere respect. Mr. Lombard had ground to a stop in front of some Summer cottage down the Neck way, had imperiously ordered his son, Clarence to shut off the motor, to save gas, and now stood at the customer's door, listing the fish in stock for the day . . . "I g-g-got cod, m-m-mackerel, f-flounder and ch-ch-cheeks and tongues," began Mr. Lombard . . . "No, we had griddle cakes for breakfast," said the lady, with true female obtuseness . . . L-lobster, oysters, whiting, and b-b-butterfish," said the merchant, hopefully. "What else?" queried the lady . . . A deep breath from the old gentleman, then, "S-s-swordfish, h-h-h-haddock, h-h-h-h-Oh damitall, lady, come out to the truck and see for yourself."