

(The Private Domain of S. Osborne Ball, Cont.)

about five miles. At eight a.m., the whole colony climbed aboard two "barges" pulled by four horses, for the slow, up-and-down-hill trip over the old King's Highway. At the pond, they swam, rented boats for five cents an hour, ate sandwiches, and drank milk and cold coffee. The Ball family lived at the Heights then, two miles north of the beach. They walked early in the morning to join the expedition, and after the two-hour trip back to the beach, trudged home again across the moors.

Church services were held every Sunday. When there was a dance, Ossie writes, "we walked to it with our shoes strung around our necks, and were home by nine p.m."

The Great Beach, stretching from Provincetown to Eastham, a distance of 30 miles, has always been the number one force which has drawn as many as five generations of one family back to the shacks. Yet the beach can be too hot, the water unbearably cold, fog and nor'easters have always forced sun worshippers to remain in the clammy, cold shacks for days at a time. Men have come to fish, lured by the great stripers which lurk off shore, but those who have hooked them are a select few. Whatever their reasons for renting, shack-dwellers have always been a hardy, close-knit lot, proud of their ability to survive a vacation in the miserable shacks.

They must be able to stand the water. Now pumped electrically from a great spring which lies not far from the cesspools, it flows to the shacks through ancient lead pipes in a thin trickle. Though pure, it tastes of rust and swamp and, when mixed with whisky, sets up a chemical reaction turning the drink a sickly yellow-green.

All shacks have kitchens now, if you can call them that. Most have kerosene stoves, terrifying at first, but far more efficient than a few obsolete electric stoves with burners that work only on low, oven doors that won't close, and which give off electric shocks. The ancient, dented ice-boxes are only a slight improvement over the sugar barrels. The iceman fails to show up, the drain pipes get clogged with bits of watermelon, and hamburger and lettuce float around in the water. All tenants sleep on musty, water-stained mattresses, which mice inhabit all winter, and one sagging bed was once infested with bedbugs.

There are elegant bathrooms with stained-glass windows, rust-stained tubs, and no hot water. Ossie tells the story of the couple from Texas who rented, sight unseen, arrived in a downpour, and moved into a badly leaking shack. Furious, they called him in Provincetown, and demanded their money back. However, when he arrived at the beach, the couple was hilarious; the man had gone to the bathroom, and he and the toilet had fallen through the floor to the sand below. They didn't want their money

back; they were having such fun, they'd decided to stay.

And there is Ossie. Almost as old as the shacks themselves, he is landlord and keeper of the Lucy O. Ball Trust. He rules his tenants, not with an iron hand, but with scathing post cards which he mails to naughty guests. One of his many rules is "no noise, no noise at all before nine a.m." Unfortunately, he is always up early, and the mother of four small children may receive a card reading, "What was going on at five a.m.? Sounded like dead bodies being dragged across the floor." Masters of dogs who bark early in the swamp will be notified, "Dogs who rise early must be walked on the beach."

But he's fair with his long-time tenants. No "new victim" can rent (there's always a waiting list) until all "oldies" have been taken care of. And he protects his subjects. Signs, printed in Old English script, reading "Keep Out, No Trespassing, Lucy O. Ball Trust," are everywhere. On the beach, a roped set of stakes runs down from the town landing which cuts through the dune adjacent to the shacks, and a sign says, A PRIVATE BEACH. To the north, Ossie's exclusive guests cluster under a handful of umbrellas, isolated from the hordes on the "public" beach, and "protected" from luminaries like Julie Harris, Abe Burrows, Gilbert Seldes, Kevin McCarthy, and other notables of the Truro summer colony.

Soon the shacks will be gone from the beautiful land that is the Lucy O. Ball Trust. For long-time tenants, there will be only memories; but above all, young and old will remember Ossie and his flags.

Every morning, rain or shine, Ossie, bare-foot, dressed in ragged sports coat and pants, his wispy white hair blowing in the breeze, climbs the dunes to the flag house, once a Coast Guard lookout. With the help of the shack kids, he selects the flags of the day and hoists them up his big flagpole, constructed from spars and masts of various wrecks. One day he flies the British, American, and the UN; the next he puts up the Australian, the French, the American; the next, the American and three no one can identify. (One turned out to be the ensign of the American Oil Company.) Most always he'll fly small craft warnings; and on a bright sunny day with no storm forecast, he'll run up his hurricane flags. On Fourth of July and Labor Day, the big flagpole groans, he flies every American flag he owns, big, little, forty-eight, forty-nine, and fifty-star, and some which he should have burned long ago. And when Winston Churchill died, Ossie trudged through drifts, blowing sand, and snow, to fly the Union Jack at half mast.

Yes, it will be a sad day for many when the bright gay flags no longer blow in the wind over Ballston Beach. ◆◆

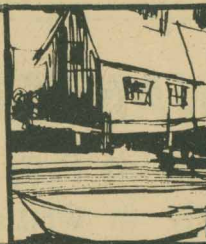
1967 -Wednesday, Novemeber 22 In Provincetown

AGREEMENT HAS BEEN reached between the owners and the National Park Service for the sale to the Park Service of the Ball Trust property in Truro. The property extends something over two miles along the ocean front from the Head of Pamet to Longnook Road and is three-quarters of a mile deep in most places. Attorney S. Osborn Ball with the support of 30 humane societies, was successful in his efforts to get the Park Service to retain a deer and wild-life sanctuary in the property which will be off-limits to hunters. Mr. Ball was granted permission to continue his policing and posting of the sanctuary and when title passes to the government, Park Service rangers will reinforce his protection of it. The agreed-on sale price is \$290,000. Because generations of Summer tenants have occupied the Ball Trust cottages at Ballston Beach and the Summer tenants pleaded to be allowed to continue their occupancy, the Park Service will allow the Ball Trust to continue operating the cottages for ten years. Ossie confesses that he, personally, would liked to have donated the property to the National Seashore had there been agreement among the heirs — who can scarcely be blamed for their contrary opinion. It isn't that Ossie has all that money, as he points out, but the beautiful lands — where, incidentally, his parents, Mr. and Mrs. Sheldon W. Ball are buried — were a "sacred trust" to him. The Portuguese have a word for off-beat impracticality that sounds like "malooka" and Ossie admits they've sometimes applied it to him.

Provincetown Advocate, Thursday, June 18, 1970

# TRURO TALES.

BY GRACE DESCHAMPS



This is the last Summer in more than half a century that you will see tenants in the Ball Trust cottages topping the ocean dunes at Ballston Beach. (The late Ossie Ball - Attorney S. Osborn Ball - always called them "shacks." As "shacks," he said, they raised no expectations of luxury).

"Shacks" or not, the row of cottages was rented every Summer by loyal tenants who returned year after year to make do with them and their appointments, or with the lack thereof. There could be a leak in the roof and sometimes there was, but patient tenants could stuff it with something until Ossie got time to fix it. The big bonus was the stark grandeur of the Atlantic to be witnessed a few yards from one's door.

A considerable number of the tenants were nationally known in their respective fields: artists,

writers, theatrical folk, people from business and from science and medicine - one of the tenants in recent years was a member of the team of surgeons that operated on President Johnson's gallbladder. (Ossie's unmitigated Republicanism could never let him understand how a Republican surgeon could bring himself to renovate a Democrat and put him back into circulation, much less one of Lyndon Johnson's prominence.

Ossie had nothing against Democrats as people - many of them were his good friends) it was only their benighted political judgment that saddened him - and that he did his best to correct.

If the weatherbeaten "shacks" looked unimpressive to the casual visitor they nevertheless housed many tenants who had the wherewithal to hire more

pretentious quarters - but who would have had to travel far to find the seascape that went with them!

Out of consideration for the tenants the National Park Service has agreed to honor for this Summer the rental arrangements Ossie had already made before his death.

The National Park Service purchased the Ball Trust property with funds from the National Park Foundation, a non-profit foundation chartered by Congress, whose purpose it is to provide support of the Park Service. Although much-needed funds for additional land acquisition for the Cape Cod National Seashore has been authorized by Congress, the money is not yet available and to conclude the sale of the Ball property, long in negotiation, funds were drawn upon from the Park Service Foundation.

The price of the rolling upland, extending all the way from Ballston Beach to Longnook Beach, is estimated to be high. Seashore Superintendent Leslie Arnberger says he feels that courtesy to the Ball Trust heirs suggests that announcement of the purchase price come from them.

After this Summer the cottages will be disposed of. If some of them, in the opinion of the Park Service, do not warrant repair, they will be demolished. Others will be sold and moved away.

In disposing of cottage colonies it has acquired, the Park Service has sold many such dwellings - the buyers required to remove them from the premises. In some instances the buildings are put up for public auction. This could happen with some of the 10 or 12 Ball Trust cottages. Seashore Superintendent Arnberger says what becomes of them depends on developments when action for their disposal is begun. Their removal will leave several other dwellings - year-round homes or Summer cottages - still on the Ballston Beach dunes. Their owners are protected by provisions of the legislation establishing the National Seashore. As long as the structures are one-family dwellings meeting zoning requirements and construction of them begun before September 1, 1959, they may continue in private ownership with the owner free to sell them or will them to their heirs.

Meanwhile as the Ball cottages pass into memory, Ossie himself is assured of a place in local history. Clippings about him are going into permanent files of the National Park Service, for Ossie was a landmark, too.