

**THE PRIVATE DOMAIN OF  
S. OSBORNE BALL**

(Continued)

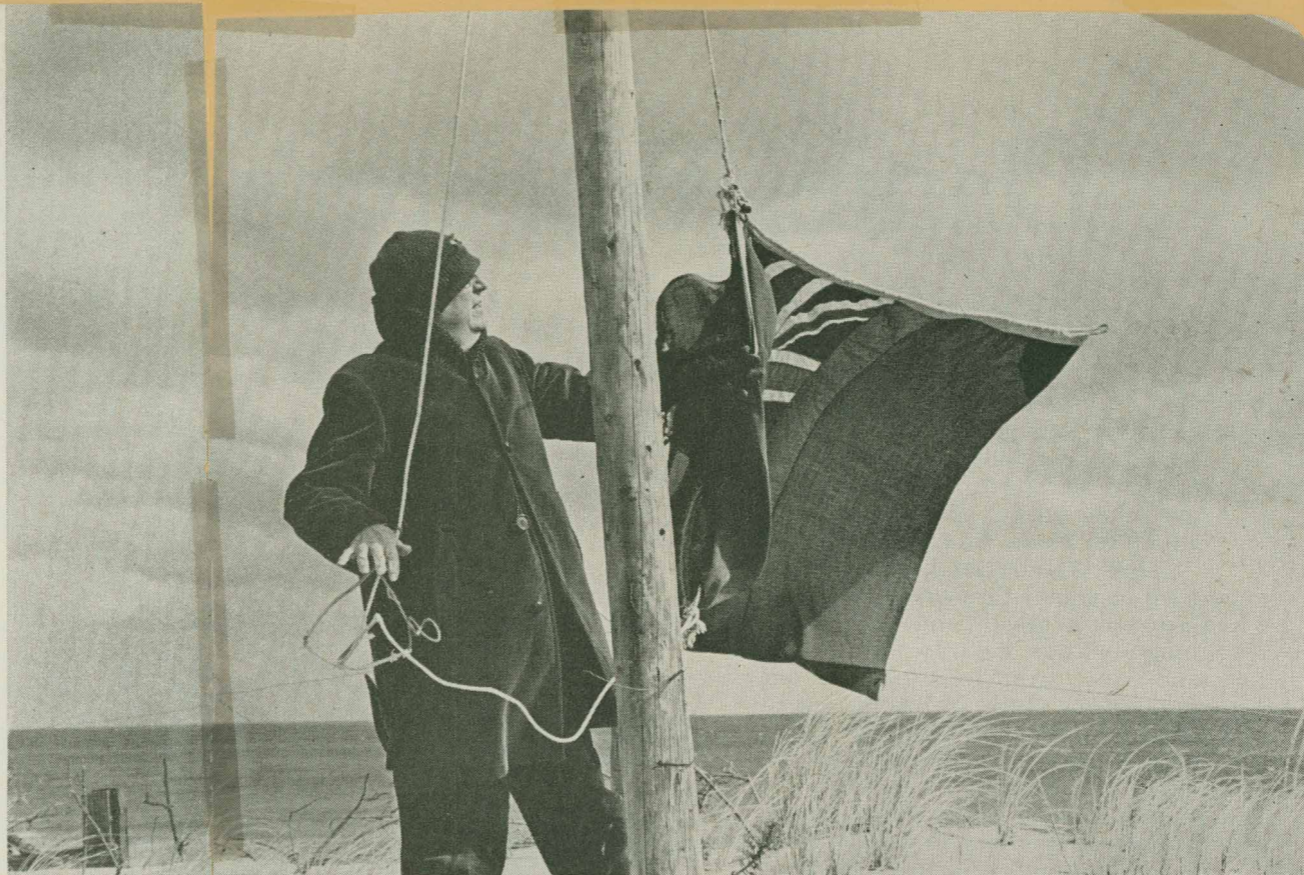
At right, Ossie raises the Union Jack, the same one he carried through blowing sand and snow to raise to half mast the day Winston Churchill died. On July 4, he flies every flag he owns—including two nobody can even identify. Below, he checks damage and digs his boardwalks out of the sand after a "hundred-miler" last March.

one thing is certain, after this summer, and perhaps next, they will never again enjoy the crude and sandy way of life of Ossie's shacks.

The story of the shacks is the story of S. Osborne Ball, Provincetown lawyer, and his family. In 1889, his father, Sheldon William Ball, a church organist, bought a round-trip ticket from New York City to Provincetown. Traveling by the old Fall River Line, then by train down the Cape, he got off at Truro, fell in love with the rolling moors which reminded him of his English home, and purchased some 1,000 acres of land between Long Nook on the north, and Brush Hollow, south of Ballston Beach.

Though the natives warned against building so close to the sea, the first seven shacks rose on the dune overlooking the beach in 1891. Since then, three shacks have been created from one bowling alley, more have been built, others added on to, and all have been moved back seven times from the edge of the bank, mercilessly cut away by storms every year. Ossie writes, "in 1913, in a terrible Easter Day nor'easter, the entire roof of the Creek Ark, then part of the Club House, sailed across the town road and landed gently in the swamp without a break. It must have been a fearful gust which tore it loose from 30 newel posts on the verandah." In 1932, the shack Cape's End was swept out to sea, and all porches of the front-row shacks were ripped off. Two years later, in a storm that took away 60 feet of bank, all front porches were again ripped off, and all the furniture in the front rooms had to be moved to the back to keep the shacks from tipping down the bank. That did it, they were all moved to their present location; but each year the bank creeps back toward the front porches and 35 precious feet were lost in a single storm several years ago.

Death and disaster were a vivid part of Ossie's early life at the beach. In the days of sail, as (Continued on page 94)



many as 75 ships might pass off the Back Shore of Cape Cod in one day. Storms and treacherous shoals took a heavy toll of this shipping. Wrecked in 1893, the hull of the full-rigged ship, *Jason*, (see *YANKEE* Dec. '65) was visible until 1935. Bound for Boston from Calcutta with a full load of jute, with only a few hours sailing time left, she was caught off the beach in a howling winter gale; her rigging iced, she became sluggish, and slowly she was driven to her doom. Of the 28 men aboard, there was one survivor. In 1913, two men perished when they refused to leave the barge, *Oakland*, which foundered after breaking loose from the tug, *Paoli*.

During the two World Wars, the beach was a lonely place. Ossie was there in 1916 "when the sad crew of the British frigate, *King's Castle*, rowed out of the fog. The ship had been torpedoed by a sub, some of the 19 were dead, others would die." In 1943, the shacks were unrented, wreckage and debris from torpedoed ships littered the beach, then patrolled by police dogs.

And late in the afternoon of June 4, 1923, Life Savers from the Pamet Station found Ossie's father dead on the beach. Though he'd been warned not to do heavy work, or walk in sand, he'd worked around the shacks all that hot day and, when found, was still clutching the garbage he was going to throw into the sea.

But there was also summer romance for Ossie. After being spurned by various "dolls" over the years, he at last married Mrs. William L. Archer in 1937. Mr. Archer had died in the shack, *Seaweed*, the previous year.

Many might wonder what drew people to the shacks in the early days, for even then they could have found more luxurious accommodations. There was a central dining hall; wives and mothers did enjoy a summer free of the chores of cooking and shopping. But the only plumbing was two four-holers; there was no electricity and no refrigeration; sugar barrels were lowered deep in the sand to keep the butter firm and the milk cool. Though fresh meat was unheard of, fish was delivered fresh from the sea, and the nearby Joseph farm supplied milk (forty quarts a day), eggs, vegetables, and berries. Water was pumped by two twin windmills. However, if there was no wind for twelve hours, there was no water.

Except for the Pamet Life Saving Station, the shacks were isolated. A deep sand road was the only access to the beach. (It took the stage an hour and a half to travel the three miles from the Truro depot.) Once there, tenants stayed for the whole summer. There were no cocktail parties then (liquor was not allowed) but tenants visited from shack to shack for tea. There were games of croquet on the more even moors, bridge, whist, and anagrams, and bathing in the sea was done in balloon-size bathing suits, stockings a must.

The grand outing of the season was a trip to Gull Pond in Wellfleet, a distance of