

Memoirs of Georgie Dyer Knowles

July 18, 1933

(Her Ninetieth Birthday)

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on July 18, 1843 and today, on July 18, 1933 her
family is having the rare pleasure of celebrating
Memoirs of Georgie Dyer Knowles
her ninetieth birthday.

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In this little booklet we have jotted down
(Her Ninetieth Birthday)
some of her interesting memories. Her life has
been very different any way of us in our lifetime
and she can be as loved as she.

When she was a frail girl, in a hired
room, long since torn down. Her
father, Benjamin Dyer, was a seafaring man. He
first went to sea as a cook when he was ten years
old. Grandma can remember his going fishing in the
spring and coming home again in the fall. He later
stopped going to sea so that he could be with his
family. He then kept a small grocery store in Province-
town.

Thankful Linnel Snow, her mother, belonged
to the Sewing Circle, was a member of the Methodist

Her mother wore a bonnet and was a good natured and good
Church, were a bonnet and was a good natured and good
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on July 18, 1843 and today, on July 18, 1933 her
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her ninetieth birthday.

In this little booklet we have jotted down
some of her interesting memories. Her life has
been very full and may many of us in our lifetime
do as much for others and be as loved as she.

The Grandma was born, a frail girl, in a hired school
story-and-a-half house, long since torn down. Her
father, Benjamin Dyer, was a seafaring man. He
first went to sea as a cook when he was ten years
old. Grandma can remember him going fishing in the
spring and coming home again in the fall. He later
stopped going to sea so that he could be with his
family. He then kept a small grocery store in Province-
town. On Saturdays Grandma remembers her mother
cooking Thankful Linnel Snow, her mother, belonged
to the Sewing Circle, was a member of the Methodist
steps.

Church, wore a bonnet and was a good natured and good woman.

There were two older sisters, Caroline Frances and Georgie, who died at nineteen months. Grandma was named for this sister.

When she was five years old, Grandma was sent to Sally Conant's School which stood where the National Bank now stands. There she was taught sewing, reading and spelling. She remembers that the children used "The Young Reader". Later she went to the town school and the high school which she left when she was eighteen. The high school stood on the hill and it was "as much as your life was worth" to get there. It was a poor place for a school - someone probably thought it "sightly". The boys used to gather by an iron fence to watch the girls round a corner where there was always a sweep of wind.

On Saturdays Grandma remembers her mother cooking doughnuts and as the odor penetrated the neighborhood the girls came and sat on the kitchen steps.

Her mother never failed to pass the doughnuts around.
schedule for Sundays. Sunday school at nine o'clock

When she was small she wanted very badly a red
which lasted until church time. Church at ten thirty.
paisley scarf which she had seen in Mr. Shed's store.
Then, after shaking hands and standing about to comment
Mr. Shed's store was quite a distance from her house.
on the sabbath, everyone went home for a light lunch.
One night she talked a lot about it until her father
Then back for afternoon meeting at two and home again
said he would give her the money for it if she would
walk to read the Bible or the Sunday school book. Sometimes
walk up alone and get it. Of course there were no
her mother would allow Grandma to stay at home from the
street lights then and the houses were further apart
than they are today. She looked out of the window
into the dark and finally decided to "risk" it, so out
she went to the store. She did not know, however,

In the evening the church bells rang for prayer
until she returned that her father had followed her
meeting and everyone went again.
all the way up to be near at hand if she became fright-

ened. Grandma recalls her wedding day on June 11, 1866

very clearly. She was twenty-three years old and
Grandma was not allowed out at night, but she
Grandpa was just thirteen months and thirteen days
did have two evenings a week for pleasure. She took
older than she. They were married at home in the
Monday and Tuesday evenings and planned on getting
morning. A lunch was served at the house and after the
errands for the other nights.

Her grandmother, who lived with the Dyer family,
followed the bride and groom up the main street to the
was married when she was seventeen years old and when

Grandpa Knowles used to walk home with Grandma,

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schedule for Sundays. Sunday school at nine o'clock
which lasted until church time. Church at ten thirty.
Then, after shaking hands and standing about to comment
On the sermon, everyone went home for a light lunch.
Then back for afternoon meeting at two and home again
to read the Bible or the Sunday school book. Sometimes
her mother would allow Grandma to stay at home from the
afternoon meeting if she would get the dinner, but that
was harder than going to church and she did not often
choose it.

In the evening the church bells rang for prayer
meeting and everyone went again.

Grandma recalls her wedding day on June 11, 1866
very clearly. She was twenty-three years old and
Grandpa was just thirteen months and thirteen days
older than she. They were married at home in the
morning. A lunch was served at the house and after the
ceremony a procession was formed by the guests which
followed the bride and groom up the main street to the

her grandmother used to tell her that it would be far better if she walked ahead with the girls. Her answer to this was always, "How old were you when you were married, Grandmother?" and the reply was "There, there, child."

For entertainment there was the Ocean Hall in Provincetown where plays were sometimes given, but more often spelling bees were held. A lot of credit was given to the winners, but no prizes. Grandma was a good speller and Grandpa Knowles, after they were married, used to bring his important letters home for her correction.

She can remember when her father came home with the first kerosene lamp to replace the old camphine lamp which burned with two small wicks. This seemed a wonderful invention.

Benjamin Dyer was a very religious man and the Bible which he donated to the Methodist Church can be seen in the pulpit today. His family were, of course, all church goers and Grandma can recall the following

Steam Boat Wharf which is now Uncle John's wharf. The bride had to go directly to her state room on boardig the steamer as she was always seasick. Grandpa went down to dinner that night alone and the Captain's wife, who was a sort of nosey woman, said at the table that a bride was aboard, but felt too nice to eat with them. Someone nudged her and she saw the groom's white vest and was very embarrassed.

Grandma was married in a traveling suit of grey cashmere, made with a tight basque and a very full skirt which came to the ground. She remembers that no one showed her ankle in that day. Her hat was white straw trimmed with velvet the same shade of the dress.

For "appearing out and wearing to church" Grandma had a pearl colored silk dress and a white lace bonnet with ribbons and pink roses.

When they arrived in Boston they went to the Quincy House, where they stayed for two weeks. They bought their dishes on Hanover Street. The dishes

were white with a raised Grecian design.

Grandma and Grandpa Knowles came back from Boston by train as far as Yarmouth, then transferred to the Cape Stage Coach which took them the remaining distance.

They went housekeeping over the store where Grandpa worked and lived there ten years. One of the wedding presents, a dozen silver forks which Uncle Steven gave them, Grandma recalls had difficulty in reaching them. Uncle Steven purchased the forks in Boston and had them sent down to Provincetown by packet. The night the boat was sailing around the Cape there was a terrible storm and the packet went ashore on Woodend. The forks soaked all night in the salt water and the next morning men pulled the boat off. The forks were not hurt a bit.

Grandma thinks back on the amount of sewing she used to do. She made all her own clothes, shirts, corset covers, pants, underskirts, outer skirts and

addresses and things for the house and all of Grandpa's shirts and cotton wear. One quilt which one of her granddaughters proudly owns contains 3,652 pieces in it.

She remembers when the first train came into Provincetown from Boston and how the people flocked to the new station to see it come in.

The worst storm she recalls was when the Portland went ashore on the back side of the Cape. The gale was terrible, starting in the night and by morning the water was very high. It came up further and further and from the bay window in her house, she and Grandpa looked down between the houses across the street and watched their pier go up and down with each wave and finally break off and go away. The water came across the street into the cellars of the houses.

A good afternoon's entertainment was to ride through the town on the accomodation drawn by two horses, up to the "end of the side walk and down to the end of the side walk".

Grandma's pump which stood at the back of the house was a place where many people stopped. After she had gone to bed at night she could hear people getting drinks of water from it.

There were some interesting trips to New Bedford while Grandpa sold the sperm oil which his vessels brought home.

She remembers many articles and unusual foods which the Captains of the sailing boats brought back from the West Indies.

The Civil War was not greatly felt in Provincetown and Grandma recalls only that she was married soon after the war.

During these ninety years of her life there have been many changes in the material things of the world, but Grandma Knowles' qualities of cheerfulness, consideration, kindness and loveableness have persisted throughout the whole ninety years.

For years a feeble minded girl had a table with boxes of blueberries on it by the side of the road down Cape. Nearby was a sign, "Blueberries For Sale."

A lady stopped and bought a box of berries. She tried to be nice to the feeble minded girl and said, "Have you any sisters who help you?"

"Oh yes," said the girl.

"Have you any brothers?" said the lady.

"Oh yes," said the girl, "I gotta brother but he's in Harvard."

"Harvard College?" asked the lady.

"Oh yes - he's in a bottle. He has two heads."

Here are a few of Carrie Knowles Cook's stories. She was born in Provincetown in 1876 and lived to be one hundred and ten years old. She always loved a good laugh. ✓

A fisherman was taking leave of his wife for he was going on a long voyage. He said goodbye and started to board the ship when someone standing nearby said, "Captain, ain't you going to kiss your wife good-bye?"

He replied, "Hell, I'm only going to be gone two years."

In the mid-1800's the churches in Provincetown had prayer meetings every Sunday evening at seven o'clock.

Carrie Cook used to smilingly say, "It was an inspiration to attend prayer meeting at my church."

"Obidiah Snow led the singing. He was an old man with white hair and one lone tooth which hung from his upper jaw right down over his lower lip. It didn't seem to hinder his singing at all."

"He would stand in front of the piano and announce the number of the hymn. The chord was struck and everyone joined in while he waved his arm madly around. Then he would say, 'You can do better than that,' and we would have to sing it all over again."

Here is another of Carrie Cook's stories. She knew George Washington Ready years ago in Provincetown and always said in a quiet aside, "I think he was the greatest liar in Provincetown."

In 1886 Professor Ready said that he saw a monster sea serpent on the sand on the back side of Provincetown. Here is Ready's description of the sea serpent.

There was a commotion in the water about a half mile from shore. It looked like a whirlpool. From the center jets of spray looking like steam were ejected to the height of 50 feet. A huge head appeared above the surface and pointed for shore. The head was as large as a 200 gallon cask, concave on the underside and convex on the upper. The creature swam to shore with a slow undulating motion. It was about 300 feet long and about 12 feet in diameter.

The body was covered with scales as large as the head of a fish barrel and were colored alternately green, red and blue. The most curious feature was the head. Which disclosed four rows of teeth that glistened like polished ivory and were at least two feet long. While on the extreme end of the nose extended a tusk at least eight feet in length. The creature had six eyes as large as dinner plates and they were all at the end of movable projectors and as the creature moved along these projections were continually on the move so the reptile could see before, behind and sideways at the same time. Some of these eyes were a fiery red, while others were a pale green.

A strong sulphur odor accompanied him and intense heat was emitted.

When the tail came out of the water, it was about 20 feet long studded with bony scales like the teeth of a mowing machine, and it cut everything to the ground, pine and oak trees nearly a foot in diameter were cut off smoothly.

Ready ends his description thus:

I, George Washington Ready, do testify that the foregoing is correct. It is a true description of the serpent as he appeared to me on that morning and I was not unduly excited by liquor or otherwise.

(Signed)

George Washington Ready

Another of Carrie Cook's Provincetown stories was about Mary Lizzie Rich.

"She never missed a prayer meeting. She was a very nice little lady with red cheeks and red hair piled high up in a bun on top of her head. Her hair was such a peculiar shade of red I think the coloring must have come from a bottle.

"When it was time for testimonials at the prayer meeting, Mary Lizzie would rise and talk about her dear departed mother, beginning by saying in a very tremulous voice, 'Once I had a mother,' then as she talked she became more trembly and her eyes more tearful. When she was about to collapse someone would pipe up singing a song about mother which always calmed Mary Lizzie and she would sit down to everyone's relief."

When Carrie Cook was young there was a home town in Provincetown called the Poor House. Beckey Hill lived there. She often gathered berries and peddled them through the Provincetown Streets to make a little money for herself.

All of a sudden Beckey was going to have a baby and she wouldn't tell anyone who the father was. Finally she had a little boy baby so they said, "Now Beckey you must tell us who the father is," and all they ever found out was, "I got him huckleberrying."

Carrie Cook also told this story:

"Captain Angus McKay of Provincetown was our good friend and neighbor. The Captain came to Cape Cod from Nova Scotia at a very early age. By working hard, he became captain of a Grand Banks fishing vessel. He told me this story."

"My mother had ten children. I was the first one and she named me Angus. When the tenth baby was born she thought, 'What can I name this new little boy.' She had run out of names, so she decided to call him Angus also, as she was very fond of that name."

Cape End Woman Nears 100 Mark

Mrs. Georgie Dyer Knowles Will Be Hundred Years Old Sunday

Next Sunday a Provincetown woman will reach her one hundredth birthday! She is Mrs. Georgie Dyer Knowles, widow of the late George O. Knowles whose schooners Carrie D. Knowles, Alcione and Gage H. Phillips, even as late as 1890, were engaged out of Provincetown in sperm whale business.

No celebration will mark the birthday next Sunday because one hundred years of living have made the little great-grandmother weary, with her mind, perhaps, on far more satisfactory memories than those of today. A decade ago, however, there gathered at the home of her daughter, Mrs. Irving W. Cook, of Hawthorn Street, New Bedford, where she is living, a number of her descendants, to do her homage. Present were four granddaughters, Mrs. Hugh Ferguson and son Hugh, now of Belmont; Mrs. Joseph Swift of Braintree, Mrs. Richard Henry of Madison, N. J., and Mrs. Kempton Howland of New Bedford. And from Provincetown, her niece, Mrs. John A. Matheson of Carver Street, her grand-niece, Mrs. Daniel C. Merrill and daughter Nancy, and sister-in-law, Mrs. Julia Knowles Hopkins of Pearl Street.

Amazing Lifetime

Ripe old ages are not unusual on Cape Cod, and even the hundred mark is not a rarity, but it is interesting to contemplate the history—not of this nation or of the world, but just of Mrs. Knowles' home town, Provincetown, encompassed in her amazing lifetime. Born on July 18, 1843 during the administration of Democratic President John Tyler, tenth President of the United States, she was the daughter of Benjamin Dyer, a seafaring man and later a grocery store keeper, and of Thankful Linnel Snow. When she was five she was sent to Sally Conant's School which stood on the site of the First National Bank, and later to the town school and to the high school on the hill, where, she recalled, the boys would lean against the iron fence to watch the girls go by on windy days, a thrill which the modern girl has removed along with practically all of the clothing thought necessary and proper in those olden days.

Ocean Hall, since converted into the New Central House, and now the Towne House, seems to have been the center, apart from the churches, of social life in Provincetown and it was here that Grandmother Knowles, when a girl excelled in spelling bees.

But pleasures of those early days for most adults and all children were confined chiefly to cultivating the mind for the soul's salvation, and Benjamin Dyer was a very religious man whose gift of a bible to the Methodist Church can still be seen on the pulpit. Every Sunday's schedule started with church school at nine, lasting until church time at 10:30. There was a brief pause for a light lunch at noon and back to church for the afternoon meeting at 2, back home for bible or Sunday school book reading, and early in the evening the bells rang again for prayer meeting.

Miss Georgie Dyer's wedding day was June 12, 1866 and after the ceremony and lunch at home, a procession followed the young couple to Steam Boat Wharf—Matheson's Wharf now gone—where they took the boat to Boston and stayed two weeks at the Quincy House, spending much of their time shopping in Boston's great emporiums. Abraham Lincoln had been assassinated only a year before. Returning they came as far as Yarmouth by train and the Cape Cod Stage Coach brought them to Provincetown.

Homes Were Busy

Then began for the young bride all those activities which once made the home the center of so much industry. She sewed all of her own clothes, shirts, corset covers, pants, underskirts, outer skirts, dresses, bed coverings, and all of her husband's shirts and cotton wear. She cooked, baked, and preserved, reared a family and was faithful in all of her duties to her church.

And though, from the sophisticated, satiated and bilious outlook of 1943, life in Provincetown during the last half of the past century must have been very dull, it could hardly have been that. It was a period of unbelievable activity in town and judging from even a most sketchy record of achievement, the men and women of those days were truly progressive and determined to improve their town. And they had the means and mind to do it. Judge Henry D. Scudder in his oration at the first anniversary of the Cape

Cod Association in 1851 when Grandmother Knowles was eight, had this to say about the town, "Provincetown, the Sahara of Cape Cod, where all the freehold property which nature ever gave her, if bid off at public sale, would hardly satisfy the auctioneer—Provincetown in proportion to her population is not only the wealthiest town upon the Cape, but in personal estate is, I think, the richest town in all the Commonwealth."

So it was that, although as a bride, Grandmother Knowles returned from her honeymoon in a stage coach that skirted the shore of East Harbor, she saw the building of the dyke across that harbor in 1869 and a solid road constructed eight years later, and she was in the crowds that flocked to the station to welcome the arrival of the first train into town on July 22, 1873—70 years ago next Thursday.

Long Point Flourishing

When she was a girl there was a flourishing village on Long Point with many houses, school, salt works, fish flakes, and a fish oil plant. And she saw that village disappear and its buildings floated across the harbor to new locations in town. The property of the town was such as to warrant the incorporation of both present banks when Grandmother Knowles was a small child. President Ulysses S. Grant saw fit to visit the town on August 28, 1874 and Grover Cleveland came here in 1889. She saw the glorious edifices of the Center Methodist, the Centenary (since burned) and the Universalist churches in the building during her youth when Provincetown men and women were determined that not even Boston should excell them in the size and beauty of their buildings.

As a child she must have watched, too, the great wharfs, now gone, being built, jutting into the harbor like teeth on a gigantic comb, to serve the needs of the whalers, Grand Bankers, and hundreds of deep sea craft that came into Provincetown. She heard the clang of many an anvil in ship fitting blacksmith shops, and the thump of coopers' mallets, smelled tar, oakum, whale oil and fish flakes along Commercial Street, and she must have been among many a fearful and praying group imploring the safe return of an overdue whaler.

Her memories, now weary with a full life of a century, must be on a Provincetown of great and daring achievements and upon the people