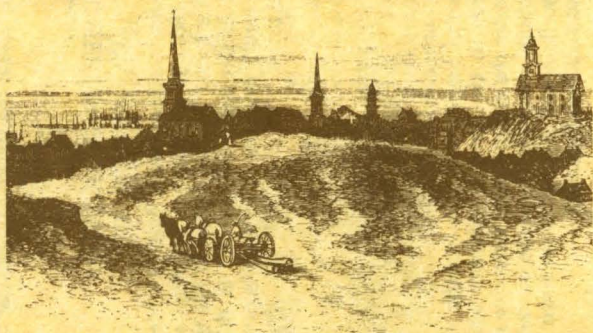
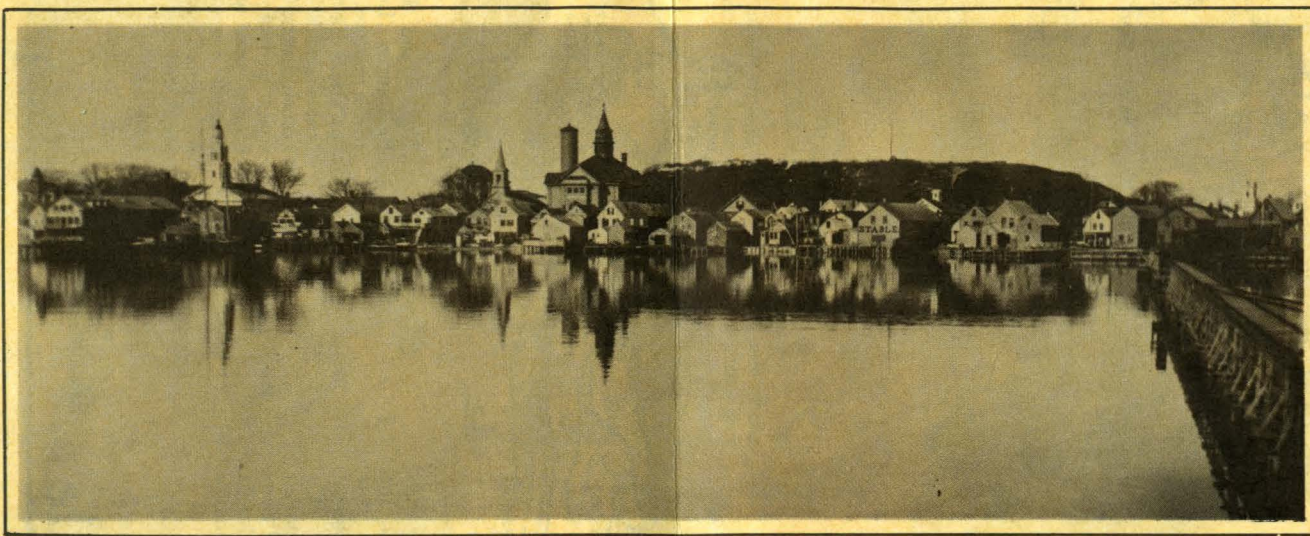


# A Provincetown Discovery



PROVINCETOWN FROM THE HILLS.





## Provincetown - A History

“Be it enacted, etc., that all the lands on said  
Cape (being Provincelands) be and hereby are  
constituted by the name of Provincetown . . .”

Act of July 14, 1727

Since its beginning, settlement within this spacious harbor has remained nestled against the shore. “The way it is built,” chronicled Mary Heaton Vorse, “has to do with the difficult and dangerous manner in which its living has always been earned . . . Provincetown’s history is the story of men against the sea.” The result is an incredibly compact town, built “three miles long and two streets wide.”

For its first century and a half of existence there was little more than a gathering of fishing shacks whose fortunes waned with each war, then waxed again. The village was again virtually abandoned during the Revolutionary War, then it began a period of growth that was to last a century. Wealth

was drawn from the sea in the form of cod and mackerel, whale oil and bone, and by the 1880’s Provincetown possessed more wealth per individual than any town in Massachusetts. The town was a prosperous city of 4,346. Then began another slow economic decline and an evolution into the character the town possesses today.

*“Provincetown is like an onion. There is here layer on layer, whorl on whorl. Three civilizations have met here and formed a unique strain. The old New Englanders, the Portuguese, and the summer folk have made a town individual in the world.”*

Mary Heaton Vorse  
*Time and the Town*  
1942

## The Pleasure of Provincetown

*“The supreme tribute that one can pay to a city’s charms . . . is a headlong, lifelong affair.”*

Bernard Rudofsky

*“. . . it was as though the town had literally got into my blood. I had . . . the sense of completion that a hitherto homeless person has on discovering home.”*

Mary Heaton Vorse

Through fortuitous events Provincetown escaped the fate of most American towns. It is compact. Its narrow roads remain connecting surfaces and not dividing surfaces. People control the streets, “. . . to congregate . . . to stop and chat, to feel free out of doors.” The streets remain the great world theater, with an intoxicating blend of visual, aural and social delights. It is a humane scene.

The wealth that was earned in the nineteenth century enabled the town’s world-traveling mariners to build and maintain homes typical of the progression of fine architectural phases that passed through America. And as a result, houses of Cape Cod, Federal, Greek Revival, Gothic Revival, Victorian Gothic, Italianate, Octagon and Second Empire styles created an eclectic richness in a very small space.

Happily, most structures survived. Happily, they accumulated cheek by jowl and irregularly spaced. The result is a town that prevents the boredom of predictable scenes. There are enclaves and focal points. There are changes in level and closed vistas. There are undulations and deflections and projections and foils. The effect is infinite variety and mystery. There is a never-ending expectation of what new view the next few steps will bring. There is an ever-present sense of the town’s heritage. There is a sense of place, an identity that is unique and comfortable and true.

**20. BARNSTORMER THEATER**  
27 Bradford Street

The abundance of ordinary shingled add-on structures like this shape Provincetown's character. Developed as a reaction to the traditional theater, Frank Shay first produced Eugene O'Neill's *Emperor Jones* here in 1924.

**19. NATHANIAL ELLIS-ATWOOD HOUSE**  
5 Nickerson Street

Also floated over from Long Point, this fine Greek Revival house has the high pitched roof typically found on Cape Cod—greater than a 45° angle. End gables and broad pilasters on the corners and flanking the door add classical lines.

**18. SETH NICKERSON HOUSE**  
72 Commercial Street

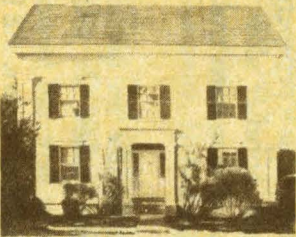
The nails, framing, paneling, windows and three main rooms clustered around a huge central fireplace are among the clues used to date this full Cape to the mid-1700's. The ells and skylight are additions.

**17. OCTAGON HOUSE**  
74 Commercial Street

The central planning of this design was a new concept in American planning. Built in 1834 by the whaling Captain Samuel Soper, it then boasted an open veranda and widow's walk typical of the style.

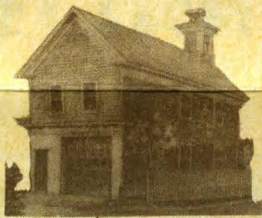
**16. LYSANDER PAINE HOUSE**  
96 Commercial Street

This 1840's Greek Revival house retains most of its original features. The powerful cornerboards, projecting as pilasters, are topped by a massive entablature (horizontal beam). A fan light over the door is a holdover from the earlier Federal style.



**15. FIREHOUSE #1**

Fitting the "barn and fish-house" category of Cape Cod construction, this shingled pumper station was built in 1880. Short end gables, or "seagull seats," and the square cupola add a Greek Revival flavor.



**14. GROZIER HOUSE**  
160 Commercial Street

This is an outstanding example of Italianate architecture, with octagonal cupola, consols (brackets) supporting the wide eaves, and hood moldings over the second floor windows. The dormer windows were altered or added later, as was the solarium.



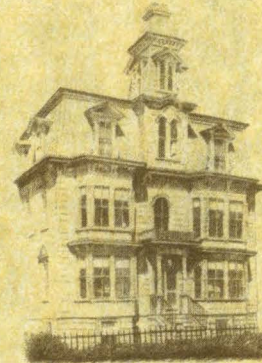
**13. ATLANTIC HOUSE**  
6 Masonic Place

Parts of this structure date to 1798. Its later remodeling is a mystery. Although claimed as 1812, the Greek Revival style came into this part of the world about 1825. The blend of pointed Gothic arch and Eastlake tapered columns add to the building's character.

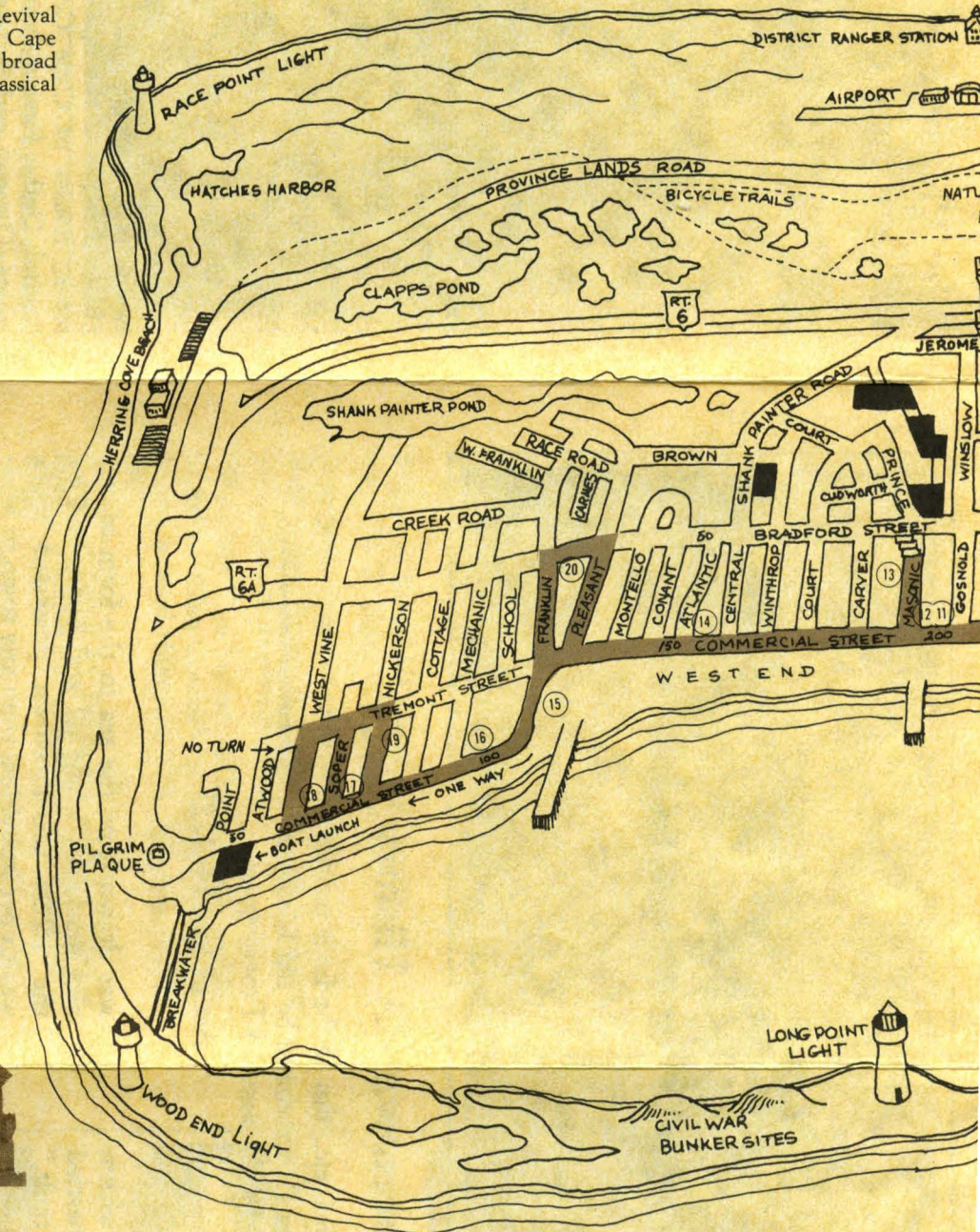


**12. LANCY MANSION**  
230 Commercial Street

The ground floor Benjamin Lancy's 1890's mansion is but above it is an ornate detail of French Second Empire style: a high topped with wrought iron, dormer with fretted scroll variegated tiles on roof.



# The Architect



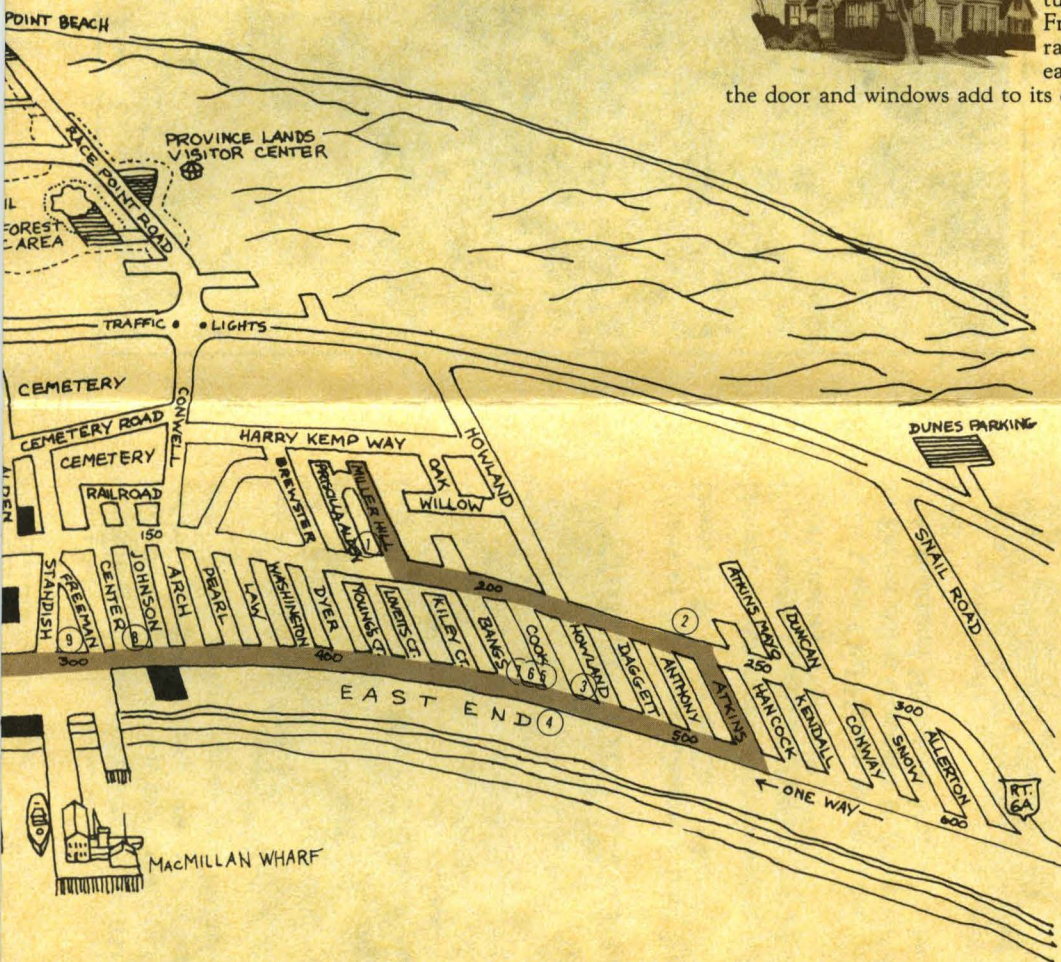
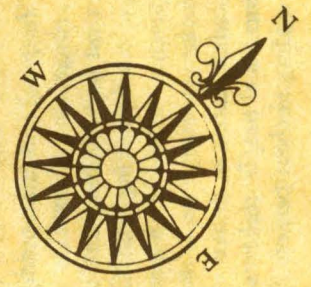
Public Parking  
National Seashore Parking

1 mile

# ural Trail

## 1. CALEB COOK HOUSE 180 Bradford Street

Built in 1890 for the whaling Captain Caleb Cook, this house is trimmed in front in the Gothic Revival Style: vertical board and batten siding, a steep gable roof and narrow windows to accentuate its height. Fretted and serrated boards on the eaves and above the door and windows add to its decorative look.

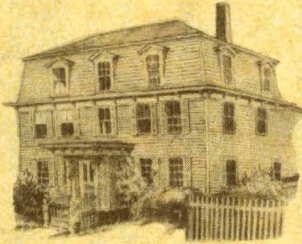


## 2. KELLSTEDT HOUSE 226 Bradford Street

Windows high on the wall, twelve over twelve window panes and original interior paneling are the marks of an eighteenth century Cape Cod house. The massive chimney of this three-quarter Cape is supported by an equally massive multiple fireplace.

## 3. FIGUREHEAD HOUSE 476 Commercial Street

Enriched by whaling and fish wholesaling, Captain Henry Cook built this French Second Empire house about 1850. A mansard roof, the surviving two over two pane windows and quoines — wooden replicas of stone — are typical of the style. A ship's figurehead in the form of woman once stood above the porch.



## 4. ADMIRAL DONALD B. MacMILLAN HOUSE 473 Commercial Street

Originally a barrack on Long Point during the Civil War, this house was floated to the mainland and "recycled." Later, it was home to the great Arctic explorer and native son whose name it bears. A few of the Greek Revival design elements still remain.

## 5. DAVID STULL HOUSE 472 Commercial Street

Built in the 1850's by Sylvanus Cook, this Federal house is distinguished by its hip roof. Wide cornerboards (pilasters) of Greek Revival style and six over one windows of Queen Anne style add to its pleasing appearance. David Stull, a later owner, was the "Ambergris King" and discoverer of super-fine lubricating oil.

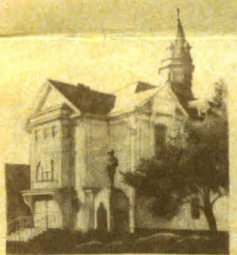
## 6. KIBBE COOK HOUSE 466 Commercial Street

"It is the true Cape Cod house," wrote Mary Heaton Vorse, "story and a half, low crouching . . . Its floorboards are wide . . . Its cedar shingles are made by hand . . . Its beams are joisted . . . the nails are hand wrought . . . Among the underpinings . . . are the masts of vessels." The dormers, added later, are topped by triangular pediments of Greek Revival style. This full Cape was built in 1795 by Ephraim Cook.



## 10. TOWN HALL 250 Commercial Street

Large curved consols (brackets) at each side of the entrance and the round-headed window above give this handsome 1886 building a Queen Anne flavor. Ornate cornerboards (double pilasters) and a sturdy spire add to the richness of this impressive place.



## 7. PROVINCETOWN ART ASSOCIATION 460 Commercial Street

After its founding in 1914 by artists who came to study under Charles Hawthorne, the Provincetown Art Association purchased a Cook family Federal style house and enlarged it to include the four galleries used today. The window, twelve pane over twelve pane, reveal the structure's colonial origins.

## 8. HERITAGE MUSEUM 356 Commercial Street

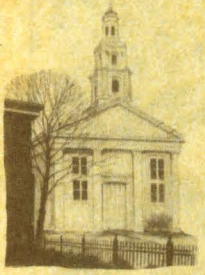
By its very size it is impressive. Built as a Methodist church in 1860, its pronounced moldings and details, and the round Roman arches in the spire reflect the Italianate influence popular at the time. Converted into a museum in 1958, it is now managed by the town.

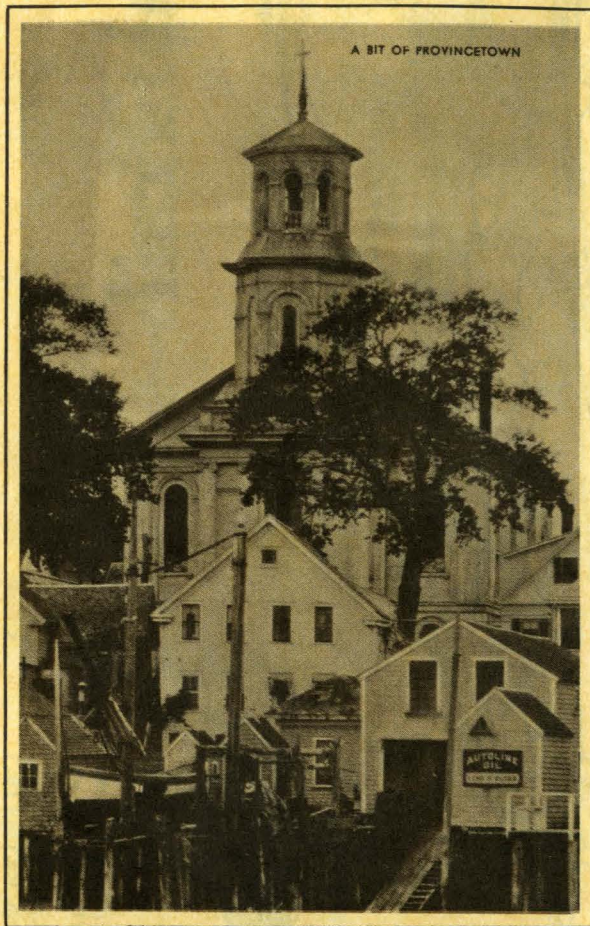
## 9. PUBLIC LIBRARY 330 Commercial Street

Essentially unspoiled by "improvements," this French Second Empire structure includes shutters, cornerboards in the form of pilasters with caps, brackets under the cornice, and attractive entablatures (horizontal members) above the windows. The building was built and donated to the town in 1873 by native son Nathan Freeman.

## 11. UNIVERSALIST CHURCH 236 Commercial Street

Of Greek Revival design, this architectural treasure was built in 1847. The four deep-set, powerful pilasters are well proportioned. Ionic columns add detail to the majestic spire. The windows and a great double door maintain the proportions of the front. Its interior is painted in *trompe l'oeuil*, giving flat surfaces the stunning three-dimensional effect of classical Greek architecture.





"Local pride . . . unimpaired by a lack of funds, and that great . . . force, tradition, inspire imaginative people to create works of art on a scale rarely undertaken by professional artists."

Bernard Rudofsky

"In spring and fall a prodigious carpentry goes on in Provincetown. As soon as the summer people go, houses cut bay windows and dormers with the regularity of a baby cutting teeth. Other houses sprout ells and porches, still other houses build them a Cape Cod cellar . . . Every man who owns a boat or a vessel overhauls it, alters it, tinkers with it. That is why all Provincetown people tinker with their houses and keep adding to them perpetually."

Mary Heaton Vorse

The evolution of Provincetown has not ended. The town continues to change, but in doing so the values that draw people still remain—an asset for living and an asset for business.

The sights to discover are many. The Architectural Trail is only a sampling, based on the historic study committee report available in the Provincetown library. So with this, with the selected readings, and with a sense of adventure, you have your own avenues of discovery. They can provide a daily and lifelong pleasure, and help to build a sense of place as you explore this remarkable city by the sea.

## Recommended Readings—

*History of Barnstable County*, Edited by Simeon Deyo. H.W. Blake & Co., 1890.

*Identifying American Architecture* by John J-G Blumenson. American Association of State and Local History, Nashville, 1977.

"The Cape Cod House: an Introductory Study" by Ernest Allen Connally in *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, Vol. XIX, No. 2, May 1960.

*Streets for People* by Bernard Rudofsky. Anchor Press / Doubleday, Garden City, New York, 1969.

*Time and the Town* by Mary Heaton Vorse. The Dial Press, New York, 1942.

*Townscape* by Gordon Cullen. Van Nostrand Reinhold Company, New York, 1961.

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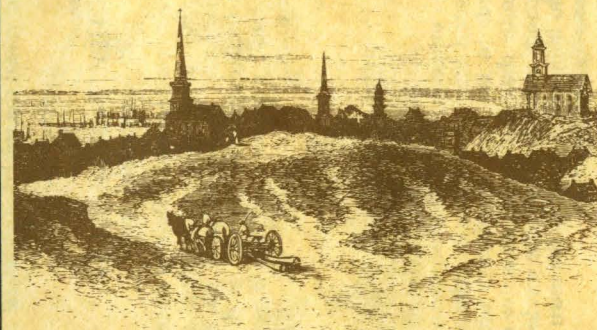
Text: Glen Kaye  
Nell Husted

Art: Steve Toomey



1981

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