

# FROM NORFOLK TO THE HAWK

By E. M. RICHARDSON

MANY people who knew Cape Cod before the triumph of the tourist say they are reminded of it by Barrington's quiet charm, by the dancing boats and bleached wharves, the breath of mingled sea and bloom along its winding street, across its green lawns.

Away from the village a Barrington side-road, bayberry and wild-rose edged, will lead as surely as any Cape Cod lane to drifted dunes where the winds romp and swirl or lie softly folded, and on to an outer expanse of white beach upon which waves ceaselessly foam out their wrath or sigh repentance for past furies. As inlets the sea wanders forgetfully through marshes behind the true shoreline; islands and points thrust purposely out into the ocean's sweep here as they do along the Cape.

These topographical resemblances are not surprising since this southwestern tip of Nova Scotia and the outer end of Cape Cod are scarcely three hundred miles apart, while through the ages both have been shaped and smoothed by the Atlantic which broke over the coastal plain between them and formed the peninsulas at their backs.

But portions of both regions recall David Copperfield's impressions on first viewing the Denes at Yarmouth: "It looked rather spongy and sloppy, I thought, . . . and I could not help wondering, if the world were really as round as my geography book said, how any part of it came to be so flat . . . . As we came nearer and saw the whole adjacent aspect, lying a low line under the sky, I hinted to Peggotty that a mound or two might have improved it; and also that if the town and the tide had not been quite so much mixed up like toast and water, that it would have been nicer."

Perhaps a man might grow to prefer his land and tide being toast and water fashion and if away from the mixture might wander discontentedly until he found it again. Did Cape Cod in the early years of the seventeenth century attract and hold a breed of men who had known water-laced eastern Norfolk, the sand bars of Yarmouth and the coast.

It is known that Barrington was founded in 1761 by men from "the elbow" of Cape Cod who, on their many fishing voyages, had recognised this shore's similarities to their own. They and their children settled the various villages that line the shore for approximately ten miles on either side of the parent settlement, through Wood's Harbour and Cape Negro and out to the end of The Hawk.

Though now Nova Scotian to the backbone the township has from the first cherished and handed down relics of its New England origin, (family traditions and names, a few precious old furnishings, more numerous but none the less previous turns of speech, and a characteristic outlook upon life and the world), and through generations the Cape Cod strain of its founders has remained dominant. Not everyone in the region—nor on the Cape—fits into a Joseph C. Lincoln story, but the Biblical names, the soft hearts and sharp tongues, the dry humour and the salty phrases are here.

No other Nova Scotian community has so many tap-roots in the Plymouth Colony and isolation and self-sufficiency, both before and after arrival on this shore, have kept much of the Pilgrims' forthright and picturesque speech. It must be admitted many individual vocabularies are quite unexpurgated of those once deplored by polite society but now coyly eulogised "Anglo-Saxon four-letter words." Local diction contains such (elsewhere) obsolete but traceable words as, *swonked* exhausted by labour, *moger a*—wretched or miserable, *stivver*—stagger, *reise*—move, *cobbing* and *dinging*—beating; and such baffling ones as *rinctum* a "heavenly rinctum" being an especially violent fit of temper, and *glin*—a sunny pocket in a blanket of fog.

"Oh ye be, be ye?", roughly equivalent to "Oh yeah?", *you'm* and *we'm* as well as the possessives in *n* (*hisn*, *yourn*) persist; but allied with a clinging to outmoded forms is a delightful ability to make up a word with gusto and aptness if an existing one doesn't come readily to tongue.

In common use is a wealth of idiomatic figures of speech, nautical phrases, well-couched superstitions and threats more vivid than elegant. "I'll fly aboard o'ye and dance a jig on yer palate," is intimidating enough surely, but perhaps more easily faced down than, "I'll spit in yer eye and drownd ye."

However, no list could give an adequate idea of the pithiness of the everyday speech and less idea of the vocal inflections that remain strong in outlying corners and in varying degrees mark

to a stranger's ear the speech of most of us in the township—so I've been told! An incident from the early days of the first world war shows how deep-rooted and tenacious the initial accent must have been and gives a hint as to where it probably originated.

He was young and ill and far from his own and he believed himself the only Canadian in the Kentish convalescent home for soldiers. Then out of the babble of voices that came from the main lounge to the ante-room where he sat, his ear caught accents that brought him to his feet. "A Hawker" he told himself joyfully and went to the doorway to look for a familiar face, a Canadian uniform. He had turned away disappointed when again that unmistakable intonation brought him about, and this time he watched until he identified the voice with a tall soldier wearing English regimentals.

He made his way to the man and asked, "You're a Canadian?" as he tried to find something familiar in the face that fronted him, for he should recognise any Hawker of military age, who must have grown up within a few miles of him.

"I'm from Yarmouth," the tall man said, giving him back stare for stare.

"I'm Warren Nickerson from Clark's Harbour," eagerly, for nostalgia wiped out any but the Nova Scotian Yarmouth, only fifty miles from his home.

"From Great Yarmouth—in Norfolk," the other explained and the Canadian swallowed his discomfiture.

But the incident stayed in his mind and after the war was ended and he was back in Nova Scotia he wrote the Mayor of Yarmouth regarding his perplexity. His letter led to correspondence with a resident of the town who could not, however, throw much light upon why, when other English accents had been merely puzzling that of Yarmouth should have rung so home-evokingly to the Nova Scotian. He did write that the old dialect was all but died out, and mentioned the curious upward lilt at the end of a sentence, which would have applied to the speech of Warren's non-existent Hawker. He also forwarded a HISTORY OF THE EASTERN COUNTIES which makes references to the "queer Norfolk dialect" saying it "might well interest a philologist". The example given by the historian could fit our vernacular but no printed words reproduce completely a local pronunciation.

Warren learned that Nickerson, his own surname, as well as others in a list he had sent, were found in Yarmouth, but those

ancestors of his who had sailed from that port did so nearly three hundred years before and many of them came from the interior of Norfolk; in tracing them to New England and to Nova Scotia it is necessary to resort to such scant records as were kept in the early settlements of the New World—and to the imagination.

There's a story of the salesman who, on the small ferry that used to chug and push from the mainland to Cape Sable Island, encountered a man who plainly expected to be recognised. "Good-day, Mr. Nicke. . ." he began, but the man's face warned him, "Mr. Smith," he corrected himself, certain of being right this time.

While not every man on the island is either a Smith or a Nickerson, enough of them are to give point to the story, and from the first men of those names have played a leading part in the township. Of forty-eight first-comers to Barrington, nine grantees were Smiths and six were Nickersons, while a similar ratio must have existed among the women who bore other names. It happens that we know a bit about the American ancestors of those two families.

In 1633 when the little ELIZABETH BONADVENTURE left Yarmouth twenty-three year old Ralph Smith was one of her passengers. Arrived at Boston, he and four companions located and founded the town of Hingham, Massachusetts, which was named after his home-town at the source of the Yare, and settled almost entirely by people from that town. Apparently Ralph Smith prospered in his "merchandising" there, but in 1635 he moved (with his Norfolk accent) to Eastham on Cape Cod and there stayed. He held the post of Constable, then a high office; his eldest son became one of Eastham's wealthier citizens, his youngest was elected Representative to the General Court at Boston. A progressive, responsible family, one would judge.

In 1662 "Ralph Smith of Eastham was fined ten shillings for striking and thrusting over a boat, one William Walker." Ralph may have been a spleeny man, or grouchy that day, or he may have been sorely tried, for his son writes, "William Walker is the most provokingest man ever I met."

The recorded details of Ralph Smith's life are scanty, only that one flare of temper throws a brief light upon his personality; but William Nickerson stalks life-size through the old papers. Nonentities are seldom nicknamed, and he is "Red Stocking".

Because he rebelled against Puritan hues? Or because of his possible stock-in-trade?

William was born in 1603 and (as one might expect of a Norwich man) became a weaver. In 1637, with his wife and four children, he sailed for Massachusetts on the ROSE OF YARMOUTH. Like Ralph Smith he seems not to have been contented until he reached the Cape, first at Yarmouth and later, as one of the founders, at Chatham.

Soon after his arrival on the Cape, William began buying land, but as he purchased direct from the Indians without permission of the authorities at Plymouth he was forever in hot water and litigation. The records tell of him being hauled into court once because of a letter he had written "defaming Governor Hineckley."

He bought a large tract of land and meadows from the sachems of Monomoiet for "one shallop, ten coats of trucking cloth, six kettles, twelve axes, twelve hoes, twelve knives, forty shillings in wampum, a hat, and twelve shillings in money," which would imply that William was quite a bargainer. This was only one of the several tracts that he got from the Indians, for altogether he purchased not less than 4,000 acres, comprising all but the eastern portion of what is now North Chatham and Chatham.

An extract from the diary of Rev. Joseph Lord says, "This William Nicholson in his lifetime was ye father of ye place (Chatham) and ye inhabitants of it were his children, either by consanguinity or affinity". William Smith, a recent historian says, "Probably nine-tenths of the residents of Chatham can trace their descent in some way from William Nickerson".

A less favourable account states, "William Nickerson was a man of intelligence and of great energy and strength of will which often degenerated into obstinacy. . . His purchase of land at Monomoy was doubtless in part dictated by a desire of independence and his intention to found a settlement of which he should be the head . . ." Of William's resistance to the authority of the Colony Court we learn, "He more than once expressed regret that he had violated the law but at no time did he alter his course."

If such a one spoke with a Norfolk accent its impress would remain upon the ear.

At Monomoy did the low lands along the marshy inlets, the dunes, and the long beaches remind William Nickerson of the Yarmouth shore only thirty miles down the Yare from Nor-

wich? And did he, remembering how Great Yarmouth was built upon a sand-bar risen from the sea, dream that this land of shifting bars might see its duplicate and that he or his posterity would be the owners of its site?

William Red Stocking Nickerson, fighting for his rights, brooking no opposition and defying the authorities to the last, lived to a ripe age, while his descendants and those of Ralph Smith increased and multiplied and spread into the various towns of the Cape and onto the mainland. A Chatham census of 1755 (six years previous to the Nova Scotian migration) lists as heads of families nineteen Nickersons and fifteen Smiths, outnumbering those of any other single name.

But they were not the only Norfolk names on the Cape—and later in Barrington. Though some now exist in Nova Scotia merely as Christian names they are too individual to be mistaken. Yelverton, Cheney, Sparrow, Attwood, Clark as well as the Norfolk towns of Yarmouth and Raynham have their namesakes on this side of the water. John Croe (Crowell) the American ancestor of that family left no record of his birthplace but his founding of Yarmouth, Cape Cod, might have its significance, and men from English districts would tend to gather in the New World where others from their old home had settled.

There soon developed on the outer Cape a farmer-fisher breed with no abundance of the world's goods but with tremendous self-reliance, ingenuity and faith.

Today few places on this continent know isolation as the towns of Cape Cod knew it for a century following their settlement, and intermarriage had little alternative. An established dialect would lose none of its potency under such conditions, for generations would live out their days hearing only the occasional outsider—who naturally would speak with a to-be-disregarded "furrin twang".

After the fall of New France in 1760 New England surged westward into the opened continent, but the hinterland held no lure for Cape Cod fishermen, while too many miles and too many years lay between them and today's west coast fisheries. However they shared the restlessness of the age and they knew well the good harbours and fishing grounds of western Nova Scotia, which after the Expulsion of the Acadians were offered in proclamations from Governor Lawrence. A group of men from Chatham, Eastham and Harwich applied for the 100,000-acre grant of Barrington Township, as the old French department of Cape Sable was renamed.

Having received the grant they were in no apparent hurry to take it up, consequently the government's offer of aid and transportation was withdrawn before they had availed themselves of it. (This would prove no deterrent since these people had always preferred to do things their own hard way rather than accept officious help.) Hence Barrington's founding was gradual and undramatic as groups of families arrived in their own small vessels and set about establishing homes. In 1761 twenty families crossed the flood from Cape Cod—Nickersons and Smiths forming a goodly portion of them.

Joshua Nickerson built the first grist-mill, the first decked vessel and framed the Meeting-house which stands today with the marks of the broad-axe plain on the timbers and on the crude ship-knees that reinforce points of stress.

Squire Archelaus Smith, a descendant of Ralph, was a large and kindly "fisherman, tanner, shoemaker, surveyor and magistrate" who also officiated at Meetings and burials. No wonder the old account says "his gifts were a boon to the settlement" and that he was loved and revered by all.

The settlers survived a terrible first winter of "unexampled severity" and in the spring were joined by friends and a group of Nantucket Quakers. Hopes were high and one year after its founding Barrington boasted 94 Plymouth Colony and 48 Nantucket folks.

But the new community was scarcely getting to its feet when it was hit by the growing trouble between England and her colonies. Upsetting rumours came back from Boston with the vessel-loads of supplies and no one had the heart for new undertakings. Immigration stopped; several Cape Cod grantees, zealous Colonial Partisans, hurried back to Massachusetts, while all but a few Quakers returned to Nantucket.

Beyond doubt the sympathies of the settlement as a whole lay with its kin across the Bay, but Barrington, with the rest of the coast, was harrassed by the "Long Splices" and "Shaving Mills", (small New England privateers that preyed upon unarmed vessels and defenceless villagers) so that fishing almost ceased and hardships increased. Yet the war itself had less permanent effect upon the township than did an aftermath.

In 1783 Shelburne, twenty miles or so to the eastward, was settled by 10,000 Loyalists. Barrington, perhaps a little jealous—and not without some justification—of the money and care expended upon the new town, and scandalised at the gay goings-on among the wealthier refugees and the officers of the British

men-of-war in harbour, sneered at the "dancing beggars" and prophesied dire ruin.

Barrington proved right. In a few years Shelburne was a ghost town. Several well-to-do Loyalists moved to Barrington and engaged in various enterprises there so that the consequent social mingling and inevitable romances with offspring of the sterner Pilgrim stock gradually brought new customs and interests, a broader outlook to Barrington itself and to a lesser degree, to other sections.

During the ensuing period of growth and change Barrington began to consider itself the seat of learning and culture and to look down its nose somewhat at the outer villages, which in turn accused Barrington of becoming "dry-handed" and altogether too high-minded as it turned from fishing to business and the land. Barrington remained the municipal centre; it was on the stage-coach route, a port of call for packets between Halifax, Saint John and American coastal cities; later it had the first bank, post office, telephone and telegraph office, and railway station. Barrington speech early had the sharper edges of its Cape Cod tongue rubbed down by contact with the outside world.

No portion of the township was more removed from mainland innovations than the seaward side of Cape Sable Island.

The sea took a wide mouthful when it formed Barrington Bay but it could not swallow Cape Sable Island and left it loosely fitting into the bite. Through the years the tides raced in and out the bay in wild haste to encircle the island and rejoin the main Fundy current. They served to cut Cape Island off from the opposite shore more drastically than Cape Cod had been cut off from a changing New England.

The landward portion of the island was settled almost simultaneously with Barrington itself, the whole western side being taken up by Archelaus Smith and his family. But this stretch is comparatively sheltered and, like the Barrington shore, spared the brunt of storms and seas. We soon find the Smith sons on The Hawk, the first settlers of that seaward point named, tradition says, for a ship wrecked there. The Hawk beach is as daz- zlingly beautiful, as wild and storm-swept and as deadly to shipping as those off Chatham and Eastham, or off Great Yarmouth itself.

When travel was by boat or by foot-paths through the woods and over the savannahs which form the island's interior, The Hawk was little less accessible than the village on its either side, but in time a main road wound around the twenty-mile circum-



ference of the island and left the point's small and scattered cottages off by themselves.

Nowhere in the township are tide and land in a more toast and water state. The Hawk itself is really an island for a salt inlet makes in behind it, without adding to its remoteness however, for to a car the bridge that spans it is only one or two rattles wide.

At the end of The Hawk another inlet, deep and wide enough to demand a boat for crossing, separates it from a small island of drifting dunes. Here at the southernmost tip of Nova Scotia, solitary Cape Sable Light lifts a white finger to warn that these sands have buried many a ship and many a seaman and lie ready to do so again. Beyond Cape Sable and along the outer side of The Hawk lies only the ocean, "dark-heaving, boundless, endless and sublime, the image of Eternity". People who live with it as their frontyard would understandably be in no hurry to change habits or speech, even if their off-the-main-road situation did not exclude most conducements to do so.

But even here isolation is ending. A causeway now links Cape Island with the mainland at Barrington, cars buzz across it, along the excellent road that leads through the town of Clark's Harbour and on the splendid seaward beaches. Radios blare out cowboy dirges on the Hawk as elsewhere, most families have a car to take them to "the pictures". Soon everyone will talk like everyone else with a leaning towards American slang and wise-cracks, though to those who have known and loved the old the new speech will seem like salt which has lost its savour.

Yet progress must be served, and it is not good for any community to live too long in a side-eddy remote from the main tide of events, not good for it to be set apart even slightly by customs or speech. Just as in Norfolk itself, the old dialect must give way to the common tongue, already the "curious upward lilt", "the Norfolk dialect that might well interest a philologist", the accent that William Nickerson, Ralph Smith and their fellows brought across the sea, has survived two transplantings and more than three centuries on a new shore, while on its own soil it has remained recognisable to one who had known only the trans-Atlantic off-shoot.

In seeking its origin and tracing its survival I have used A. D. Bayne's HISTORY OF THE EASTERN COUNTIES, Crowell's HISTORY OF BARRINGTON TOWNSHIP, Volume 4 of William Smith's HISTORY OF CHATHAM and family

genealogies whose sources are unknown to me. And along with these, the before mentioned and necessary imagination mixed with an admiration for those sturdy Cape Codders of Pilgrim stock who settled this portion of the province. These I am proud to claim among my own ancestors—"south shore accent" and their penchant for land and tide mixed toast and water fashion notwithstanding.

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## MORNING

*By* DAVID PALMER

The cream clouds

Burst

in my  
coffee cup

Drowning

the black  
with a

beige

Conquest.