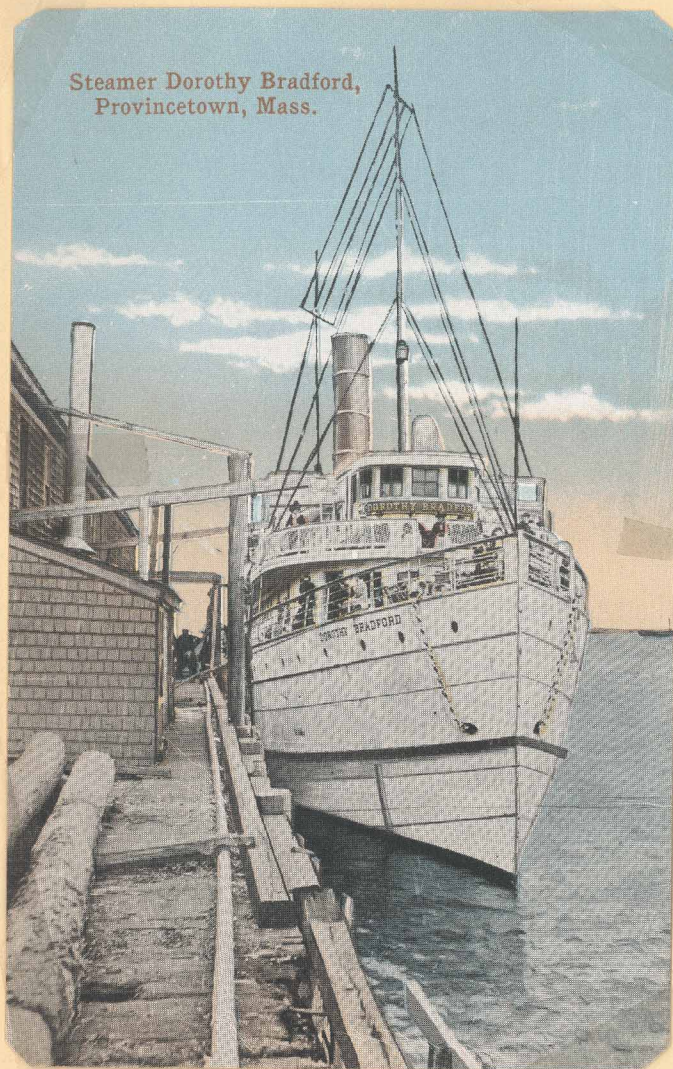


MY PAMET

By Town Father

Steamer Dorothy Bradford,
Provincetown, Mass.



The Dorothy Bradford at the Wharf - 1920

Provincetown Advocate,
Thursday, July 28, 1977

We drove over to Provincetown yesterday afternoon to pick up our favorite sister-in-law Mae De Groot, who had made the trip across Cape Cod Bay in the motorship Provincetown to spend a weekend at our home. We got to thinking as we watched the craft skirting the harbor sea wall and siding up to the dock with her exhausts spouting clouds of diesel exhaust, and her deckhands scuttling about, ordering the passengers to stand clear while they prepared to toss the heavy mooring lines ashore. We got to thinking about the old Dorothy Bradford, considerably longer and wider of beam than the Provincetown, if memory serves. She was big enough so a preteenager could have much fun exploring the ship from stem to stern and from top deck clear down to the bowels of the craft—provided, of course, he could manage to evade the eagle eyes of his parents. She was powered by an honest, coal-burning steam engine, a compound, reciprocating affair of massive castings and polished brass that you could observe from several vantage points on the lower deck. The Dorothy Bradford had a quick foodstand where you could glut yourself on the standard American hot dog and soft drinks and other goodies, and topside she had a fancy saloon where a small orchestra entertained the passengers. The narrow

outer passageways were lined with collapsible canvas deck chairs, and grim-looking lifeboats hung on their davits outboard the vessel. When you looked aloft you could see the pennant of the Cape Cod Steamship Line bravely waving in the perpetual breeze, or the captain in his trig uniform staring out over the water from his station on the narrow bridge, while some underling manned the controls in the wheelhouse.

A fine, interesting sea voyage, except when the weather was inclement, as it was one memorable June day when the family O'Caghan was making its annual trek to the Cape and our summer home in Truro. Even inner Boston Harbor was choppy that day, but by the time we had reached Minot's Light, a half gale from the northeast had blown up, and from that point—clear across the bay to Provincetown—the trip was a nightmare we'll never forget. Our sainted mother subscribed to the theory that the lower you rode in the ship, the better were your chances of avoiding seasickness. Besides, we had the family pets with us—a yellow tiger cat and a dwarf collie named Tobey, so we were obliged to ride down in the freight deck to keep them company.

In any event, of our party that day only the cat escaped the agony of mal de mer. We were on our second paper emergency cup—about halfway across Cape Cod Bay—when, of a sudden, a tremendous wave hammered against the huge freight loading door directly facing us, and the steel doors clanged open, allowing a wall of water to rush in and inundate the area. Mass confusion ensued as the passengers screamed and struggled to reach the ladders leading to the upper deck and the deckhands, hastily summoned, fought with the yawing doors and finally brought them back and fastened them shut with emergency gear.

The food stand closed down, its attendants as green as the rest of us from the violent motions of the Dorothy Bradford, and the muted strains of music from topside ceased moments later. People could be seen clutching their rosaries or mumbling prayers as the storm increased in intensity. But at long last, the pounding engine brought the ship around the hook at Wood End. In the shelter of the harbor the sun, by coincidence, showed its face, and in due time we were grating against the pilings of town wharf. We gathered up the luggage, the dog, the cat and the kids and climbed up the narrow gangplank, and with a sigh of relief, walked up the long wharf on unsteady sea legs to where Charlie Snow's big yellow school bus was waiting to fetch the Truro passengers to their final destinations.

"Rough trip, folks?" grinned Charlie, as he lit up a fresh White Owl cigar and ground the Brockway into low gear and threaded his way through the narrow, congested streets. There were groans of assent from us all. We opened the windows and let in the fresh air, but not for long. As the bus left the center of town and started to pick up speed in the East End, and hummed by the breakwater at Bangsville, Charlie flipped the ashes from his cigar and ordered, "Close all them windows, folks. We'll be drivin' under the trolley of the East Harbor Fertilizer Company in a few minutes, and that cussed overhead cart is swingin' like a good 'un with all this wind. Spillin' rotten fish gurry all over the road. Almost made me gag on the way in. That's why I'm puffin' on this here cigar." And with that the faces started to turn green again. Someone in the back seat mumbled, "Wish I'd saved my paper bucket. I can smell that gurry right now, and we still have a quarter mile to go."