

Provincetown Advocate, Thursday, May 12, 1977

# MY PAMET

By Town Father

Drove down by Pamet Harbor on our way home from church, and found the view so beautiful and the day so pleasant we set the brake and strolled over to the edge of the parking lot where the south abutment of the old railroad trestle was once located. Closed our eyes for a minute and saw again the venerable bridge. The big timbered framework carried the twin ribbons of shiny steel, those protruding platforms with the steel barrels filled with rain water, crude protection against fire on the bridge.

We saw the battered handrail and the sagging copper telegraph wires that were strung on the glass insulators, the massive stone work of the head walls, and, of course, the flat Pamet always on the move in its channel below—some-

times in full flood, sometimes a tiny meandering stream—pooled in the shoals of the sandbars.

And we got to thinking about the time Horace Pop Snow had occasion to come down this way so many years ago, he claimed, in search of the wily sea-clam, while others said he had business of a clandestine nature. But here's the way Pop used to tell the yarn.

"Yessir, it was back durin' prohibition days, when they was landin' liquor all along the shores of the Cape. Now I decided to go sea-clammin' one mornin'. Ordinarily, I'd take my car and go down to Corn Hill, or South Truro, and walk out on the flats from the beach. But this morning, I decided to go by water. So I went down to Slade's landin' with my rake and a burlap bag, and cast off in my skiff. Still half-tide, it was, goin' out, and I had plenty of water to scull her down river to the bridge. I figgered on pushin' right out through the channel and out to the offshore bars, where I'd rake my sea clams and put 'em in the skiff and wait for the tide to come in, and row, easy-like, back up to Slade's Landin'.

"Well sir, just as I was makin' the bend by Cat Island, the trestle came into sight in the pale light of a waning moon and I saw signs of activity down by the depot. There was sounds of motors runnin', heavy truck engines, I judged, and headlights beamin' in the darkness, and voices yellin' back and forth to each other. Then, from offshore, I could hear the putt-putt of a motor boat slippin' in by Gull Island channel, and someone out there on the point seemed to be wavin' a lantern back and forth. I remember

about that time my cigar went out, and it was glowin' quite a breeze, so I sculled quietly up to the pilin's of the railroad bridge, and made my boat fast to a stringer.

"I stepped off onto the rocks and slipped in between two spiles, and turned around to light up my smoke, when all of a sudden the biggest commotion ever you heard broke out. There was a lot of yellin', and the sound of feet pounding on the cinder roadbed and the bridge planking overhead, and motors racing. Somebody hollered out, 'Stop, in the name of the Coast Guard, or we'll fire.' And then a voice down by the channel boomed out something that sounded like 'Vaaa-teemro-o-ra!' I learned afterwards from Joe Curley Francis that this means 'Get out of here' in Portuguese.

"Well sir, first off, I was goin' to climb up on the tracks to see what was goin' on. But soon's they started firin' shots, I decided to stay right where I was. They might have thought I was involved—in what I was beginning to realize was an attempted landing of some bootleg liquor. Good thing I decided that way, too, because next thing I recall, the motor boat revved up to top speed, and the trucks over in the parking space jammed into gear and roared off up the hill and men were runnin' around like hens with their heads cut off, and then a flashlight beam played down on the water next to me, and a voice shouted, 'There's a skill down here, cap'n.' And quicker'n you could say Obadiah Brown the water was swarmin' with fellers in rubber boots, with drawn guns.

"I tell, you, I was some scared. I everlastin'ly scronched up between them spiles, and I didn't even dast breathe. How they missed me, I'll never know. Anyways, in about an hour, the excitement died down, and I slipped out from the pilings and sculled home in my skiff. Never did get the seaclams I'd planned on."



Where Pamet River Railroad Bridge was  
- October 15, 1980 -

## Wall-eyed nag

Call it the late 1920's. The setting, Truro Square. The characters, in order of appearance, Joe Curley Francis' work horse, Sam; Eva Gray, proprietor of the ice cream and notions store north end of

Wilder's Dyke; Charlie Snow, in his capacity as driver of the school bus; Arthur Joseph, Truro's forest warden, general handyman, and incidentally, hero of the story. The characters also include sundry citizens of the town who happened to be there that memorable September afternoon when Joe Curley's horse found a breach in the pasture fence over on Depot Road, meandered down to Wilder's Dyke, nibbled his way along the sparse bunch grass back of the State guard rail and finally came to halt on the very edge of a tiny, bottomless hole. Folks used to say the mud had been the locus of an ancient vat used for the evaporation of salt water in the last century.

Sam, a sway-backed, spavined nag with one wall eye, had a reputation for self-destruction. He had previously waded out into the channel at Pamet Harbor while his owner was clamming on the nearby flats and like to drowned himself. And now he gingerly stepped off the peat bank and before you could say Obadiah Brown, he trudged along the soft bottom of the mudhole, his neck outstretched and his nose pointed at some mysterious object on the surface of the muddy, oily water.

Up on the bank to nor'ard, Eva Gray happened to peek out the window of the ice cream parlor and saw the poor nag sinking into the morass. Quick as a flash, she dashed across the street to Eben Paine's store yanked the receiver from the mag telephone and screamed out the number of Arthur Joseph, on the theory that if Arthur could handle a fire, he could certainly take care of a horse in a mudhole.

Eva completed her call. By the time she had returned to the scene of the potential tragedy, a sizeable audience had gathered there. Included were Mary Fratus and several customers from her grocery store across the street, kids just getting out of school, three or four men from the State Road gang, on their way home from work and finally, Joe Curley Francis, who had followed Sam soon's he'd noted the breach in the pasture fence.

Well sir, comes a squealing of tires as Arthur Joseph made the turn out of South Pamet Road, and the grinding of brakes as he nosed the ancient Reo truck up to the fence abreast the mudhole.

Arthur sized up the situation and commenced to bark orders. "Grab these planks and lay'em out on the mud. Take this rope end and make a bowline in it. No, no not a noose, we don't want to choke the critter. You, Curley, you lay them planks down and shin out there and drop the noose over Sam'e head. Then

pass the end of the rope back to me.

Done, quick as human hands could do the chore. And then Arthur tied the loose end of the rope to the rear axle of the Reo and vaulted up into the seat and, "Now I'm going to haul up the slack and then we'll yank old Sam out of the mudhole slick as a fava bean," shouted Arthur. With that he jazzed the Reo just a smidgin, let the clutch out slow and easy and the rope taughtened on poor Sam's neck.

By gosh, that horse's eyes bulged out and his vertebrae stretched. His tongue protruded so's you could hang your hat on it. But within seconds, derved if he didn't begin to inch out of the mud.

Curley patted the bony shoulders of the nag in encouragement. Folks standing on the mudbank shouted and whistled with glee. Pretty soon, SLUUUUP, out comes Sam, covered with mud, but none the worse for his experience. Curley tried to thank Arthur, but the fire chief would have none of it. "You can thank this ol' Reo." He said modestly passing off the credit for the rescue. "Smoothest clutch in any truck made. Any other truck'd have snapped poor old Sam's neck like you break a chicken's wishbone at Christmas."