

Hey, You With the Camera....

When author John D. Bell found enough clues in this Provincetown, Massachusetts, street scene to pinpoint the exact year, day, and even hour that Louis Snow exposed his glass negative, he had no choice but to recapture the same scene — 73 years later to the minute.... (To compare the two photos, turn page.)

□ EMERGING FROM MY DARKROOM. I handed my wife a photograph of a Provincetown street scene taken in horse-and-buggy days. “Know where this was shot?” I asked, confident that I already knew the answer. My wife is an expert at one-upmanship. “Of course. It’s the railway crossing in the middle of town. When was the photo taken?” She turned the picture over. The white side was blank.

I answered lamely, “Early in the century. This is a contact print from one of Louis M. Snow’s big glass plates, the ones Morris and Stanley Snow gave me after their father died. Louis worked between 1890 and 1915, judging by the subjects in the collection.”

“Hand me that magnifying glass,” my wife said. She scanned the photo closely. “I see a poster advertising ‘The Actors Holiday’ for Wednesday, August 6, in Town Hall. Where’s our *Old Farmer’s Almanac*?” I found it for her.

Working from the *Almanac* formula for finding the day of the week for a known historical date, my wife soon announced with modest pride, “Using Wednesday as a known factor and the year as X, it works out arithmetically to be 1902, 1908 or 1913.” (continued)

Evidence the author has compiled indicates that Louis Snow photographed the intersection of Commercial and Standish Streets, Provincetown, Massachusetts, on Sunday, August 3, 1902, at 1:45 PM, EST. To see how the corner looks now, turn page.



Looking around, I discovered there was a parapet above the storefront behind me . . . there had to be a narrow ledge . . .

Challenged, I set to work. Our weekly newspaper, the *Provincetown Advocate*, is preserved in hardcover books, each holding two years of *Advocates*. Turning first to the 1901-02 book, I read the issues of July and August 1902. An ad in the July 31 issue announced "Miles & Caldwell's Production of M.E. Hanley's Superb Musical Farce-Comedy, 'The Actors Holiday.' One night only, Wednesday, August 6."

Studying the 1902 photo again under a strong glass, I found the scene full of life. Two more questions popped up. At what hour on what day of the week had Louis Snow exposed his glass negative?

Notice the wheels of the carriage on the railway tracks. They cast shadows like straight lines. The protruding hubs of the right-hand wheels register full length upon the ground below. If I could note the hour when shadows fell in the same way, I could answer one of the questions.

Standing where still-existing storefronts showed the same alignment as in the 1902 photo, I waited from 2:40 to 2:55 P.M. DST and deduced that Louis Snow had shot his picture about 1:45 EST, since Daylight Saving wasn't established until 1918.

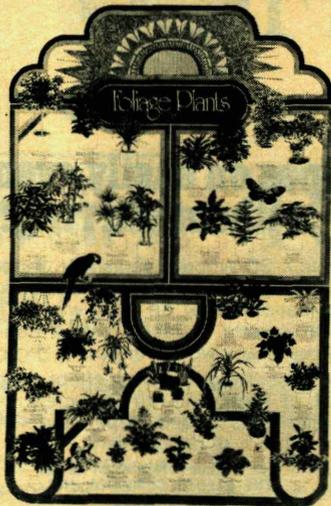
Back to the bound *Advocates*. Back to study my 1901 *Cape Cod Directory* in which Lower Cape residents are listed by name, address and occupation. Both of these research tools also carried illustrated advertisements that proved valuable. For example, they told me the one-horse carriage crossing the tracks belonged to Captain Joseph Cabral, whose "barge line to and from all sections of Provincetown leaves West End at 8 A.M. and hourly until 10:30 P.M. Large or Small Parties Accommodated at Any Time." (Years later, when one-horse and two-horse carriages gave way to open-air Ford and Dodge buses, the latter were called "accommodations.")

(continued on page 134)

Sunday, August 3, 1975. Many buildings shown in the earlier photo remain, but the railroad tracks are gone, and the number of horses has decreased as drastically as the number of people has increased.



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HEY, YOU WITH THE CAMERA

(continued from page 106)

Beyond Captain Cabral's barge, a one-story shop extends to the plank sidewalk in front of the taller white house at left. Your own magnifying glass will show you a striped barber pole mounted on the shop corner. The straw-hatted man standing in front, his arms folded, was hairdresser John F. Francis. Johnny also kept beehives, and old-timers still chuckle over the sign on his barbershop: "Honey in the Comb."

The man in the open window above the "Billiards, Pool Parlors" sign, his broad tie tucked into the taut waistband of pot-bellied trousers, was Joseph S. Fisher, "Commercial Street near the railroad."

Dovetailed evidence tells us Louis Snow took the picture on Sunday, August 3, 1902. Item: Nobody in the photo is working except the straw-hatted horse and its driver. The "jigger" behind them, low slung for carting barrels of fish from Railroad Wharf, was often used to carry baggage from the Boston steamer *Cape Cod*, which had docked at Provincetown at 12:30 P.M.

Item: Almost everyone in the picture is dressed in "Sunday best" except the tousled urchin walking his bike at lower left. Men in citified garb carry satchels as if they were visitors off the train arriving Sunday at 12:05 P.M.

Item: Wrote *Advocate* correspondent I.M. Small from neighboring North Truro, "Last Sunday, August 3, was the hot day of the season. Notwithstanding it has rained nearly every day for a month, there does not seem to be much water in the earth." Ike Small cultivated his garden and his Highland House Hotel guests with equal but opposite concern for weather's effect on them.

Item: Louis Snow, commercial photographer, was also a boatbuilder, also the violinist in the Amphion Orchestra that provided music for dancers every Friday night in Town Hall. He probably lugged his 15-pound Pony Premo No. 5, made by the Rochester

You With the Camera (continued)

Optical Co., to some perch above Commercial Street on a less busy Sunday.

But where did he stand?

Months earlier, I had tried to duplicate his photo from the top of a six-foot step-ladder. The angles weren't quite right. On Sunday, August 3, 1975, while waiting for shadows to fall exactly as they did in 1902, I found in Louis Snow's photo some new details: (1) the kid walking his bike is looking back over his shoulder at the photographer; (2) two men in the rear of Captain Cabral's barge are smiling up at him; and (3) Joe Fisher is watching him from the pool parlor window as if they were on the same level.

Looking around, I discovered there was a parapet above the storefront behind me. The second-story wall above that was set back — there had to be a narrow ledge between them. Two minutes later I was up there, looking down. Every angle was perfect.

Moreover, I was attracting the same kind of amused attention from the crowd below. One of a group of visitors called, "Hey, you with the camera!" and struck an exaggerated pose.

If he had been wearing a straw hat with his ears sticking through, I would have obliged him. ■ ■

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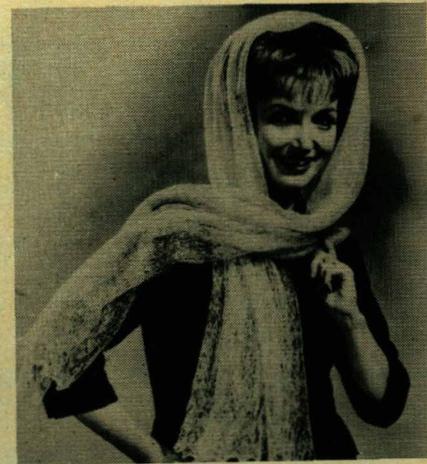
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