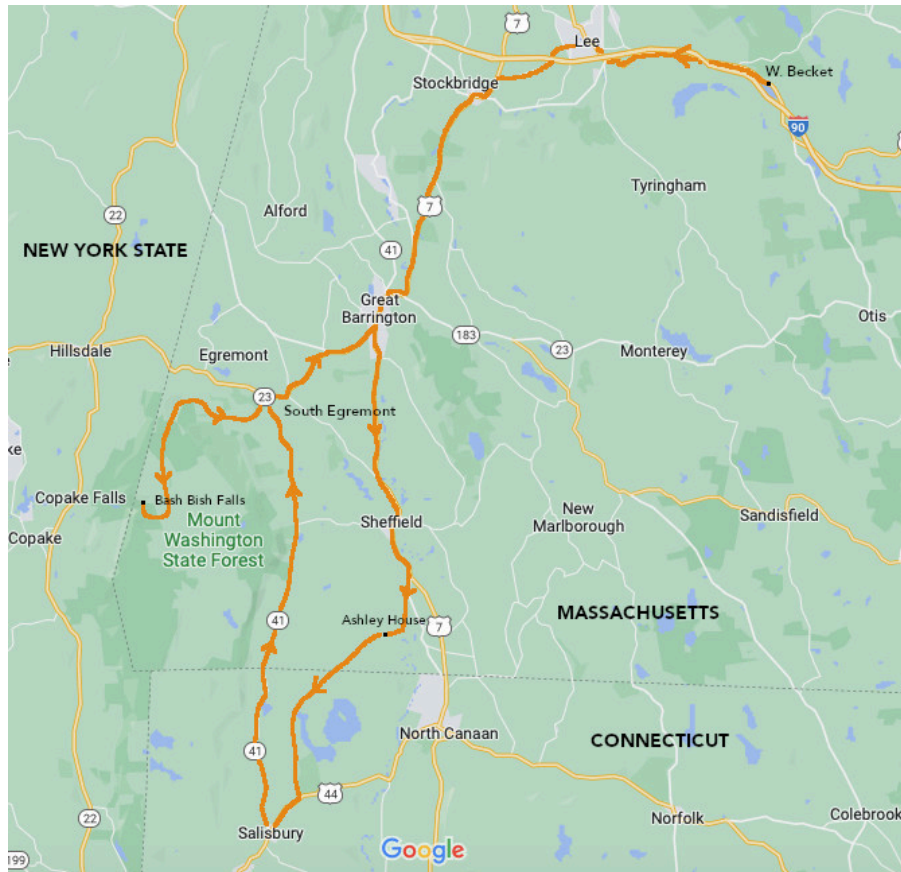


5 – MASSACHUSETTS TO RHODE ISLAND



Sunday, 18 October

This morning the alarm on my watch woke me at 6.15 a.m. Although we had gone to bed early the previous evening, neither of us had slept very well. As Colm had not known that I had set my alarm, he had been worried about oversleeping. Feeling rather groggy, I got out of bed and had a shower, which had the desired effect of perking me up a little.

We set off at around quarter to seven and drove in the dark to the little town of Lee, where we parked the car near the Catholic church. The Mass at this early hour of the morning was quite well attended; at seven o'clock precisely the priest and his altar boys processed up to the altar. As there was no singing (thank God!), the Mass just lasted forty minutes. When it was over, I shook myself awake and off we walked to a nearby restaurant, The Bagel Smith, for a hearty breakfast. I had orange juice, oatmeal porridge with cinnamon, then eggs, bacon and toast, all washed down with lemon tea and honey – delicious!

When we emerged and set off for nearby Stockbridge, it had turned into a fine crisp sunny morning. We soon arrived in the town, which consisted of exclusive houses discreetly hidden behind trees that lined the wide and straight main road. The bright sunshine and autumnal colours made the place look magical. We

paused at the 1739 Mission House, a fine wooden structure built by John Sergeant, first missionary to the Stockbridge Mohican Indians, and discovered that it would not be open until 10 a.m.



The Mission House, Stockbridge, Massachusetts

We therefore continued driving towards the famous Norman Rockwell Museum, which was housed in a fine modern building in grounds that had once been a private estate. At 9.30 in the morning the place was virtually deserted. We studied a plan of the grounds and set off on a short walk around the back of the museum. We found ourselves at the artist's studio which, we learned later, had been transported here in two sections from Stockbridge. It overlooked a heavenly view of the Housatonic River's calm waters and some nearby trees glowing in their autumnal colours.



The artist's studio in the grounds of the Norman Rockwell Museum, Stockbridge

As we stood admiring this delightful scenery and commenting on it, we heard the door of the studio being opened from the other side. Moments later the door near where we were standing was opened and a pleasant middle-aged man appeared. Although the studio would not officially open until ten o'clock, the man very kindly invited us inside to save us coming back later. It was quite a fascinating

place, full of interesting bits and pieces; Colm (a painting restorer) and the gentleman had quite a long conversation about it and the artist who had used it, Norman Rockwell. Here we saw the same easel and helmet that he had included in a famous and humorous self-portrait.



The Norman Rockwell Museum, Stockbridge, Massachusetts

After we had thanked the man and left, I ran back to the car and fetched my camera. I now photographed the museum, the studio and the fine view before we walked past the old mansion in the grounds on our way to the museum. The entrance fee cost us \$9 each. Knowing almost nothing about the artist, I did not know quite what to expect; however, Colm and I were most impressed by the building and its contents. First of all we joined a small group that had assembled in an impressive hall adorned with Rockwell's large paintings of the 'Four Freedoms'. Here we listened to a young man who told us about Rockwell and his work. During his introduction, he drew our attention to each of the 'Four Freedoms' paintings (Freedom of Speech, Freedom to Worship, Freedom from Want, Freedom from Fear) and explained them to us. He then brought us into an adjoining room, where he explained a couple more of the paintings, then let us go to enjoy the works for ourselves.

Colm and I now returned to the large hall to examine the paintings carefully on our own. I had noticed the sense of patriotism and emotion generated by the guide's enthusiastic explanation of the 'Four Freedoms' (which I had felt were a little 'over the top'), but now Colm and I began to smile at the painter's sense of humour and his tendency to caricature. It quickly became obvious that Rockwell was a superb artist with a wonderful ability to capture the essence of just about everything. We had a good giggle at *Art Critic*, in which the lady in the painting was staring down at a young critic who was carefully studying the picture with a magnifying glass. We soon came across a painting that I had seen before and had admired very much: *Girl at the Mirror*, which was a picture of a typical teenage girl looking at herself in a mirror. *Saying Grace* (which was in the nearby restaurant) was a very sensitive portrayal of a family at prayer at the dinner table. Rockwell's studies of faces, such as *The Gossips*, were wonderful, and we shook with laughter at *Going and Coming*: two paintings, the first one of a family driving to the seaside with three lively children and a dog in the back of the car, and the second one of the return journey with the mother asleep in the front and three tired children and an exhausted dog in the back. The only person who looked exactly the same in both

paintings was the unsmiling and bespectacled granny in the back seat. A lady approached us and expressed how delighted she was to see us laughing, for nobody else seemed to notice the wicked humour in Rockwell's paintings.



Norman Rockwell: 'Going and Coming', Norman Rockwell Museum, Stockbridge

The artist's more serious works were just as wonderful. I loved his narrow horizontal work, *Aunt Ella takes a Trip*, which depicted a well-dressed aunt and her niece in an open carriage pulled by an elegant white horse; this was a story illustration for the *Ladies Home Journal*. Clearly the artist had Vermeer in mind in a painting entitled *Fruit of the Vine*, which was an advertisement for Sun Maid Raisins. When a lady attendant overheard me uttering the name Vermeer, she came over and congratulated me on my observation and mentioned that somebody else had likened it to a Vermeer composition. She had not realized that a birdcage was hanging near the window in the picture as she had not known what it was.

We also loved Rockwell's humorous paintings *No Swimming* and *Welcome to Elmville*. *New Kids in the Neighborhood* was very clever: three white children with a black dog watching two black children with a white cat who were standing at the back of a lorry, watching furniture being removed from of it. We also liked *The Marriage License*: a young couple standing at a desk, the lady in a yellow dress signing the licence, and the town clerk looking on with little or no interest.

Later I wandered off and returned to a room that we had not paid much attention to previously. Here I admired portraits of important people such as Nehru, Tito and Robert Kennedy, and two lovely sketches of a Russian lady interpreter and a man wearing a black fur hat (or *shapka*). I then joined Colm in the shop, where I bought a lovely large book, *Norman Rockwell: A Centennial Celebration*, for just \$15.

We finally left, somewhat reluctantly, and went out into the warm sunshine. By now the car park was quite full. We drove back to Stockbridge town, where we found that the Mission House, which we had planned to visit, was closed until Memorial Day (the last Monday of May) in the following year. We took a short walk around the exclusive dwellings and returned to our car, having admired some fine automobiles and a fantastic-looking Honda motorbike.

We then left and drove to Great Barrington, where we stopped and looked in an antique shop that contained some second-hand books. I ended up buying a boxed set of two volumes: a biography of John Adams published by Doubleday. I paid \$28 for the books, despite the fact that I was still not sure how I would bring them and the other two books home with me.

Before leaving Great Barrington, which was quite a large and busy town, we looked inside another antique shop. We then drove southwards along Route 7, branched off into the countryside along 7A, then found our way to the Colonel John Ashley House, which was situated on a quiet country road. However, like the Mission House, it was closed until the following Memorial Day.

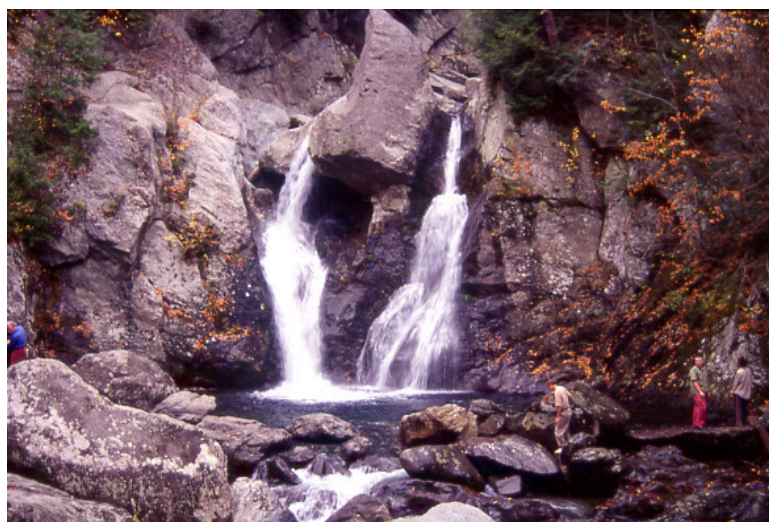


The Colonel John Ashley House, Ashley Falls, Massachusetts

We drove into the tiny car park, where we parked the car in the shade and had our lunch: slices of pizza left over from the previous evening, an apple, and some water. We then set off on a delightful walk through forest and fields towards Bartholomew's Cobble, then branched off for Hurlburt's Hill which, although it was not very high or steep, was a hard enough climb in the heat. As somebody had thoughtfully placed two wooden benches at the summit, we sat down to admire the view and to enjoy the silence. Around us mountains stretched to the horizon – including another Mount Washington. A couple sat on the other bench while their teenage daughter, who wore a blue dress and had blonde hair tied in pigtails, sketched the scene before her. Here the scenery, although pleasant, was not particularly striking or dramatic; it was simple and not unlike what one would find in Ireland or England. However, it was delightful to be away from the noise and bustle of a large town or city.

After a while we continued our walk, taking a trail through a forest that led us to a tulip tree, something that we had never seen before. From here we turned back and made our way down to the Cobble, where we walked along a couple of the trails, the first one leading to a knoll and the second bringing us round to the

Housatonic River. At one spot we found a pitted wall of rock and ladybirds crawling all over it; several of them flew after me.



The Bash Bish Falls, near Mount Washington, Massachusetts

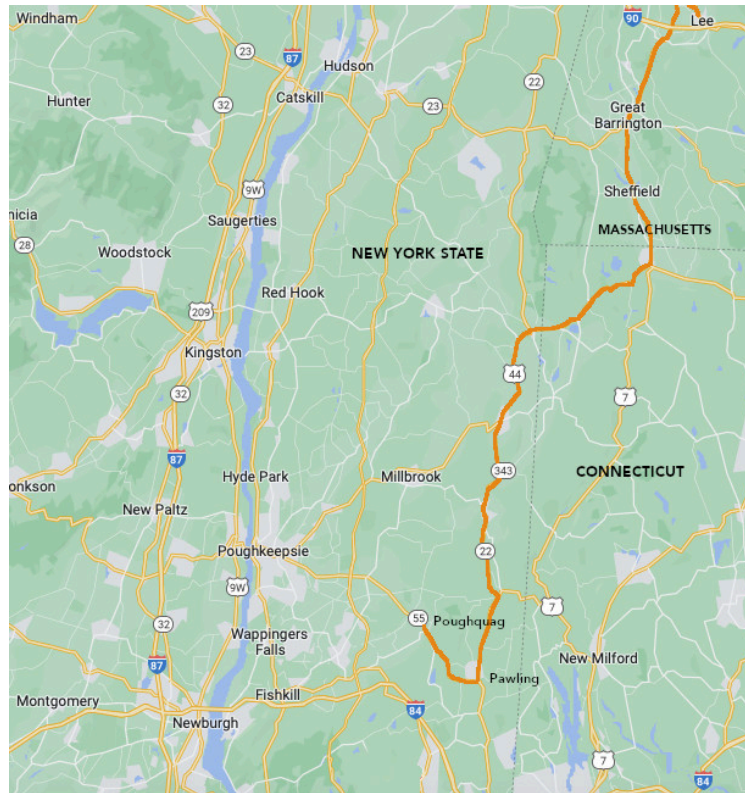
We finally returned to the Colonel John Ashley House and then set off in the car for the Bash Bish Falls, near the border with New York State and beside the local Mount Washington. This drive took us along some beautiful country roads and through a charming small village. We dropped down into Connecticut, passing through Salisbury, drove back into Massachusetts along Route 41, and continued up to South Egremont. From here we took a narrow road that wound its way uphill and down dale through forested land. We stopped at a spot where we scrambled up a rock to get a view of the mountains and then drove on until we at last found the approach to the falls. As the waterfall turned out to be quite pretty and dramatic, we were glad that we had taken the trouble to make this journey. After we had seen the place, Colm drove back to South Egremont, where I took the wheel again.

We then returned to Great Barrington, where we stopped and I used a public telephone. Although it was late in the evening, I managed to get my parents and speak to them for a few minutes. We finally arrived back at our motel by about half past six, and both of us had showers. Afterwards we drove to nearby Lee, where we had a rather indifferent meal in one of the restaurants; the best dishes were the salads and the dessert. I drank some root beer (ginger ale) for a change. We took a short walk afterwards and finally returned to our motel for the night.

Monday, 19 October

It was about eight o'clock when we rose this morning; it looked like the start of a beautiful day. I ambled down to the side of the lake to do my morning exercises. We then packed our bags into the car and drove into Lee for breakfast, but found that the restaurant that we had used on the previous day was closed. We walked around and eventually found a small coffee shop, where we had egg and bacon sandwiched between the two halves of pumpernickel bagels.

After we had eaten, we went into a shop nearby, where both of us bought some presents. Colm looked in a couple more shops and we finally set off at ten o'clock to my father's cousins' house in New York State. As we had done the previous day, we drove to Stockbridge, then dropped down to Great Barrington and Sheffield. We then drove into Connecticut, passing through Canaan and then along Route 44,



where we saw some pretty scenery. Having driven through Lakeville we then entered New York State, where the landscape instantly became more expansive. From Millerton we headed southwards via Route 44 and 22 to Pawling, where we stopped briefly to ask for directions. From here we made our way to Poughquag, where we pulled up at the town hall. I went inside the building and asked to use the telephone. I rang Larry and Flo's number, but got their answering machine. I left a message and then got directions from a lady behind the counter, who kindly gave me a map. We found our way to Deer View Lane without much trouble and drove up and down in search of the house. As none of the houses had numbers and we could not see the name 'Gannon' on any of the mailboxes, we stopped and I approached a man playing golf in a garden. The man turned out to be Larry – neither of us had recognized the other!



Larry and Flo's house in Poughquag, New York State

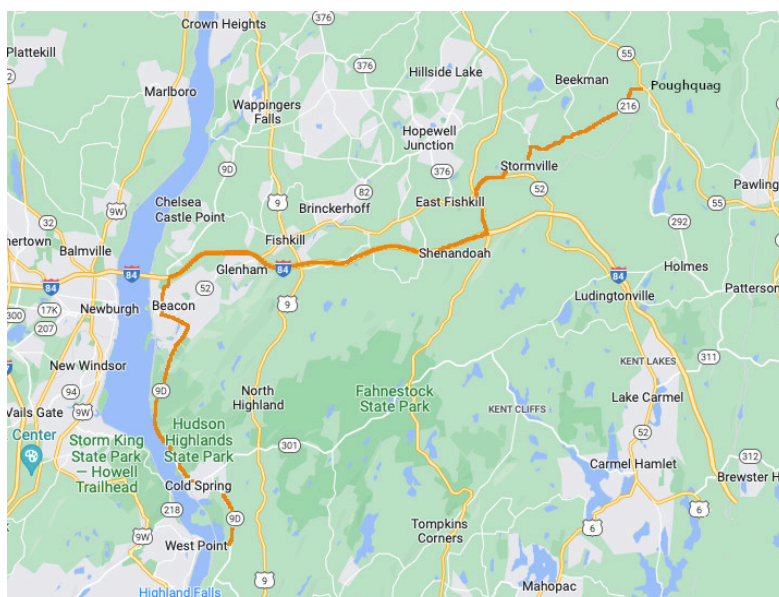


Larry and Flo's house in Poughquag, New York State

We now parked the car in the driveway and were brought into a large and spacious house. Flo – or Florence as Larry called her – breezed in and gasped when she saw us, for she obviously had not heard us arriving. We chatted in a large sitting-cum-dining room, which had once been a double garage.

Some time later their daughter Patricia, who lived with her husband upstairs, came in, and shortly afterwards we sat down to enjoy a simple lunch of coffee, bread and a selection of jams. Over the meal we discussed plans for the afternoon; as Larry had made an appointment with his doctor at 2.45, we decided that we would drive around the area to fill in the time.

When we left at two o'clock, Colm and I followed Larry in his car; he drove to the Taconic State Parkway and down to Route 84 heading west. He then waved us on to Route 9. The traffic here moved at breakneck speed, which made driving in this area a rather frightening experience, for we had become so used to quiet country roads. Taking Route 9D, we headed for Beacon. As we approached the wide Hudson River (we were now not too far from New York city), I suddenly felt drowsy and asked Colm to take over from me. He continued driving and I promptly fell asleep, missing some good scenery.





The Hudson River, New York State

I woke up as we crossed over the Hudson and turned northwards, approaching West Point. Here we got good views of the mighty river. We drove into the famous West Point Naval Academy campus, where we parked the car and walked to the visitor centre. We had a quick look around and I bought another \$10 telephone card. We then ambled around the little town, looking at shops and, in one of them, spoke to a lady who had a noticeable trace of an English accent despite having lived here for thirty years.

We then returned to the visitor centre at about five o'clock and I tried to telephone home, but without success. In the end I gave up and we left. I was annoyed at having wasted time doing this, for we had to drive back along the busy highways as dusk began to fall. Because of the speed of the traffic and our poor knowledge of this area, we missed turns and ended up driving around Poughquag in the dark. It was seven o'clock when we finally returned to the house – not six as arranged.

We then both took showers and were taken to a fine restaurant nearby, where we were treated to an excellent – and probably quite expensive – dinner. We brought back our desserts in boxes, put them in the fridge, and ate some of Flo's homemade apple pie and ice cream instead.

During the meal, Colm and I had been asked where we were staying this evening; I had to tell Larry and Flo that we had not booked any accommodation for the night as we had assumed that we would be sleeping in their house. We were now offered the use of their bedroom, but we politely declined the offer, opting instead to sleep on the sofa downstairs, which in fact was a folding bed. It was opened out and sheets, pillows and blankets were given to us. After we had said good night to our hosts, Colm and I removed the cushions of the sofa, which had been used as a type of headboard, put them on the floor and made them into a bed for Colm, which he declared was quite comfortable.

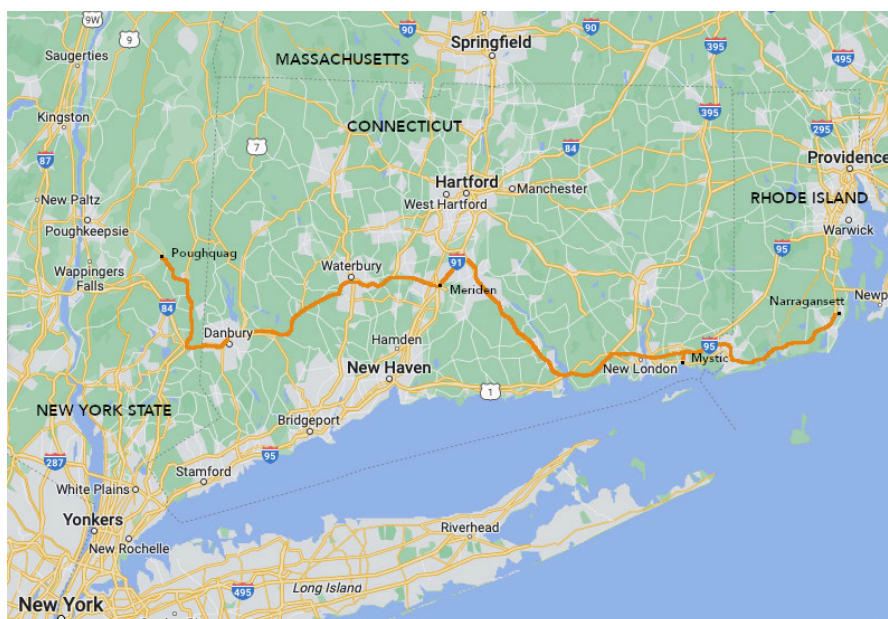
It had been a mixed day; the afternoon's drive, which had more or less been imposed on us, was certainly not one of the high spots of our holiday.

Tuesday, 20 October

I slept well, woke shortly after 7 o'clock and rose half an hour later. I tiptoed into the bathroom and later returned to the living room, where Colm and I put the sofa back together and removed all evidence of the second bed. Larry and Flo then

appeared in the kitchen, where they set about preparing breakfast. Shortly afterwards we sat down to a feast of eggs, bacon, sausages, coffee and bread. We chatted over the meal and afterwards, while Colm rinsed the dishes, I took some photos of the house. Larry then excused himself, as he had arranged to play golf with some friends, said goodbye and left. It was quite obvious that he had enjoyed talking to Colm more than to me, for Colm had provided the bulk of the conversation.

Shortly afterwards we left with a bag of food that Flo had prepared for our lunch, and said goodbye to her. Although her farewells were short and to the point, they were a good deal more heartfelt than Larry's.



In the car, Colm took the wheel and off we set on this warm and sunny morning. We stopped briefly to discuss our route and decided to use the highways rather than the country roads as we had planned to travel quite a long distance today. We made our way eastwards to Route 22, then dropped down to Interstate 84. Crossing the border into Connecticut, we stayed on this highway until we reached the town of Meriden, then headed north-eastwards via the I-91 to Route 9 and travelled south-eastwards to the coast. Because of the excellence of the roads and the speed at which we were travelling, we covered the long distances very quickly.



Mystic Seaport, Connecticut

Having passed towns such as Waterford and New London, we reached Mystic Seaport by about 12.30; it looked like a real tourist trap. We parked in a large car park that was either being built or altered, and walked across the road to the visitor centre. Here, near the men's rest room, we were amused to see a large reproduction of an old advertisement for commodes.

Although we had to pay \$16 each to see the famous sea port, it was very pleasant to wander around in the sunshine and breathe some fresh sea air after spending so much time in the car. We walked around by Hobie's Dock to see a reproduction of the *Amistad*, a nineteenth-century two-masted schooner, being constructed; this proved to be quite interesting. We then passed through the DuPont Preservation Shipyard, where we saw two historic boats, and entered an interesting old wooden building in which a scaled-down model of the whole area was on display. We walked past various other nautical buildings and a small lighthouse, then came down by the *Joseph Conrad*, a schooner that we boarded and examined. Nearby was an interesting rope-walk, which I stopped to look at.



Houses and the Charles W. Morgan schooner, Mystic Seaport, Connecticut

Next came a picturesque row of little houses, some of which we went into. There was an old fire engine in one of them; another was full of clocks, watches, chronometers and various navigational aids. In other houses we saw early electrical machinery, a ship carver's shop, a small printing press, a cooperage, a tiny bank and shipping office, a pharmacy and doctor's office, and finally an 'olde worlde' tavern in which we could hear, from another room, a recording of men singing.

Nearby was the most elegant specimen of a schooner, the *Charles W. Morgan*, which we boarded. This turned out to be quite an interesting boat, for we were able to go down to the crew's quarters and see the bunk beds that had once been used. Three young people had climbed up the main mast to roll up the sails as there was now a strong breeze.

Back on dry land again, we crossed a little green and found a house of the 1830s that contained fine furniture and an interesting kitchen. Afterwards we wandered around various other elegant buildings at the north end of the village, then went into a church that looked pleasing outside but was rather dull inside. Retracing our steps a little, we visited a little chapel and a store that was full of interesting old-fashioned items such as a tin box of Royal Baking Powder.



A house of the 1830s in Mystic Seapoint, Connecticut

We then walked back to the car and drove down to Route 1, heading eastwards. We stopped at an inlet and lunched on the food that Flo had given us: muffins, the gooey leftover cakes taken from the restaurant on the previous evening, and some bananas.

When we finished our meal, I drove along Route 1 and soon we entered Rhode Island. Somewhere near Narragansett we turned off on to Route 1A, and soon afterwards found ourselves a nice little motel, which cost us just \$43 for the night. We unloaded our luggage, I made a phone call home and later I washed my hair.

In the evening we left for a restaurant that the owner of the motel had recommended, even though it was quite a distance away. We had an excellent and very filling meal in a dining room that overlooked a pretty little harbour full of boats. The young waitress who served us was very good humoured.

Unsurprisingly, returning to the motel in the dark proved to be difficult, but we eventually found our way. Once back, I tried telephoning John Murdock (a friend of Larry and Flo whom my parents and I had met in Dublin some time previously) and succeeded in getting him. He was delighted to hear that we were on our way to his place in Cape Cod, and told me that we could stay in his house. I then spent the rest of the evening bringing my diary up to date.