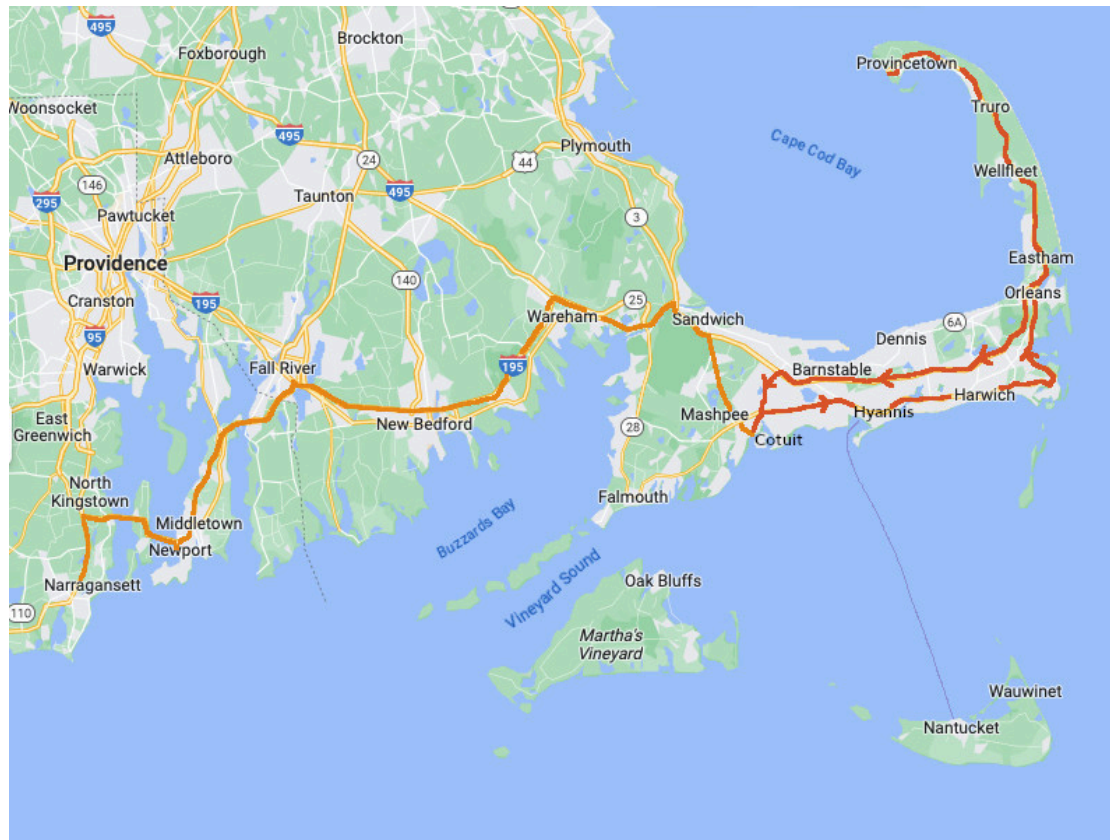


6 – RHODE ISLAND AND MASSACHUSETTS



— 21 October; — 22 October; — 23 October.

Wednesday, 21 October

We woke this morning at about 7.30 after a good night's sleep. It was a cool, though sunny day. As I was ready first, I went outdoors, where I put some of our things in the car and did my exercises. On leaving, I returned the key to the man in charge, gave him \$5 for the maid, and asked him for directions to a nearby restaurant where we could have breakfast. We tried to find it, but as we could not, we drove to nearby Wakefield, where we found a good restaurant. We were given huge bowls of Quaker oats; afterwards I tackled a plateful of sausages and ham, which I could not finish.

Fed and ready for more sightseeing, we left and drove to Newport. The approach via the high toll bridge over the inlet was most impressive. We found our way to the town centre and made for the large visitor centre, where we obtained information about the place from a helpful lady. I asked her about Clarendon Court (a mansion once owned by the von Bülow family); she knew about it but could offer no information. I was not too surprised to discover that this privately-owned and very elegant house was probably not open to the public.

Following Colm's directions, I drove carefully through the busy town centre and turned down the famous Bellevue Avenue, along which the Gilded Age 'cottages' of

the rich and famous had been built. We quickly found Rosecliff and drove into the car park. We arrived at about 10.45, when very few people were about. The fine mansion looked very familiar, for it had appeared in *The Great Gatsby* film starring Robert Redford. It now looked very elegant in the bright morning sunshine.



Rosecliff, Newport, Rhode Island

We went in immediately and bought tickets for this house and The Breakers, at \$14 per person. As we had about fifteen minutes to kill until the next guided tour, we went outside and walked through a small garden to the back, where we enjoyed a fine view over the sea. I then ran back to the car, fetched my camera and took some photographs. We agreed that the house looked very elegant from the outside. At the back, a huge awning had been draped over the conservatory.



The view from behind Rosecliff, Newport, of the garden and the sea

We then went inside to join a small group that had gathered in the lobby, and were taken off on a conducted tour by a young lady. As expected, the interior was luxurious; the white Great Hall with the painted ceiling, which I recognized from the film, was very impressive indeed. It was wonderful to see it now for real. There was a delightful lightness and freshness about this huge room that really appealed to me. Our guide told us all about the owners, Mr and Mrs J. Edgar Munroe, and

described a ball that had once taken place here, when everyone had been asked to wear white; the food and the flowers were also white in colour, and a fleet of white boats had been moored in the sea for the occasion.



The Great Hall of Rosecliff, Rhode Island; courtesy of Yelp: Rosecliff Mansion

Although the other rooms were darker, they were quite elegant. Much of the décor throughout the house was French, or in the French style; occasionally it was excessive, though not vulgar. The staircase was very imposing and the rooms upstairs were very fine.



The Breakers, Newport, Rhode Island

After the tour was over, we emerged back into the bright sunshine. We now drove to The Breakers, a mansion built for the famous Vanderbilt family, which we found after a little bit of confusion. This mansion looked rather intimidating by comparison with the previous one and, as we were about to discover, the décor inside was much heavier and more lavish; indeed, it was quite excessive. Here a lady with spectacles and a very dramatic manner introduced herself to us and the other tourists who had gathered inside, and took us off at great speed to see the

enormous rooms. Her idiosyncrasies were rather amusing, though one was rather irritating: every introductory remark was preceded with 'Yes...'

Here one could only be awestruck by the lavish décor; everything was on the large scale and designed to impress. The most pleasing part of the mansion was the elaborate loggia, built in the Italian Renaissance style, at the back. When we had seen everything, we returned to the car park, took out some food that we had bought, and had our lunch. This gave us a chance to give our brains a rest!



Marble House, Newport, Rhode Island

We then drove back to Bellevue Avenue and began our visit to the next mansion that we intended to visit: Marble House, built in the late 1800s for the Vanderbilt family. At the ticket booth was a pleasant Scots lady who chatted to us for a while before we went indoors. We joined a group of tourists that included three people whom I heard speaking Mandarin Chinese, and were taken round the house by a cheerful girl named Tara. When I asked her about her Irish name, she told me that her background was Italian and Greek. She took us through several grand rooms, the first few of which were quite elegant. A Gothic room at the back of the house, however, was quite ugly. Upstairs, however, there was a lot of French influence to be found in the fine rooms, although the style of Consuelo Vanderbilt's bedroom was a little heavy. There was one very fine room that had been transported from France and installed in the house. In the great room at the front were a couple of portraits: one of King Louis XIV by Pierre Mignard and one of Louis XV by Van Loo. Having been shown the kitchens, we descended to the basement where, as Tara said jokingly, the gift shop was strategically placed. As in the gift shop of the previous mansion, a music box was playing a tune; this time it was 'Somewhere Over the Rainbow'. From here I went outdoors and wandered around while Colm bought a souvenir for his sister.

Together again, we walked around the back garden to see a Japanese pavilion with a *torii* gateway beside it. Afterwards we returned to the front of the mansion, where we admired the fine façade. Before leaving, we spoke to the Scots lady again. I asked her about the whereabouts of Clarendon Court; like the lady in the first house, she had heard of it but was not sure where exactly it was.

We now returned to the car and drove it to the end of Bellevue Avenue, at the regulation speed of 25 m.p.h., so that we could have a glimpse at some of the other 'cottages'. We then returned to the town centre and parked the car. We walked northwards and eventually found the Art Museum. We arrived at four o'clock, just

as it was closing, and found that Pamela Staneh, John Murdock's daughter, had left. (John had encouraged us to pop in and say hello to her.) We therefore continued walking and passed many fine buildings, such as the Redmond Library and the Brick Market. Colm popped into the State House to use the men's rest room, and I posed for a young couple who took a photo of me taking a shot of the building.

Afterwards we returned to the car and drove out of Newport. However, we took a wrong turn and found ourselves going in the wrong direction, crossing the bridge again. Because of the mistake, we envisaged having to pay \$2 to get off the bridge and \$2 to get back on. Colm, who was at the wheel, pulled in to one side with the aim of making a U-turn; fortunately a helpful man appeared and put us right. He even gave us a good map of the area. We turned around, crossed the bridge for the third time today, and headed off in the right direction for Cape Cod. The highway made for easy driving and the subsequent roads were easy to find. However, as we had left Newport a little later than we should have, we had to complete the journey in the dark. As Putnam Avenue in Cotuit was on our map, we had no difficulty in finding it, but discovering John Murdock's house was another matter. We drove too far down the road, turned back, and Colm parked the car in a side street. I walked to the nearest house, trying to discern a number, looked in a window and saw John using his telephone. I tapped on the window and he opened the door, all smiles. He explained that he had been speaking to his son about us.

I then directed Colm in and, after we had unloaded some of our luggage, we went into the house. It was quite large and was tastefully furnished; I could discern a woman's touch, for everything was in its place and every room had been kept scrupulously clean. John seemed to be intensely pleased to see us.



Inside John Murdock's house, Cotuit, Cape Cod, Massachusetts

When we had seen around the place, we dropped everything and went out to eat. John brought us to his garage, and we squeezed into his flashy 1988 Buick, which had an on-board computer and a rather irritating chiming signal that was activated any time he used the indicators or opened the doors: *bing, bing, bing, bing...* John talked, told us jokes and laughed as we drove to the 99 Restaurant not too far away. As the place was packed, we were given an electric bleeper and asked to sit outside. Soon the little gadget was activated and we went in to eat. John joked with the waitresses while we enjoyed a good meal. We did not order a dessert, for John had ice cream at home. He insisted on paying the bill, which we reluctantly allowed him to do.

Back at the house we unloaded the rest of our luggage and were brought upstairs to a pleasant bedroom that contained two beds. We then sat with John at the kitchen table and chatted for some time. It was obvious that John was relishing our company; as he said, he loved talking and he loved people, or 'warm bodies' as he called them. He regaled us with many bawdy jokes and stories; his manner was direct and unapologetic. I could understand why an uncle of mine and he had got on so well together. John told us that he had been a heavy drinker and smoker until some years previously, but now he never touched any alcohol.

We eventually were given our promised bowls of ice cream before we said goodnight. Colm and I took much-needed showers before going to bed.

Thursday, 22 October

Having slept well in John's comfortable beds, Colm and I got up at 7.30 and joined John later in the kitchen for a simple breakfast of Kellogg's Special K cereal, bananas, a slice of toast, and tea. Afterwards John put some of our dirty clothes into his washing machine which, like most things here in America, was quite large.

When ready, we set off in John's car (I sat in the back) and were taken off for a tour of the Cape. Unfortunately John drove along Route 28, which offered little in the way of scenery; all we saw was a succession of towns and villages. As the car was hot and stuffy, I was inclined to fall asleep, and consequently the journey was something of a disappointment.

We made just two stops on our way to Provincetown, which is situated at the north end of the Cape. First of all, John drove us to a friend's house so that we could see it. However, we were not invited into the house but were brought into a large garage, where we were shown a workroom full of car registration plates, a section containing a large boat, a living area, and finally another section that contained a beach buggy and a large luxurious Buick car. Although the buggy was used regularly, it was kept immaculately clean. The Buick, however, had never been used as the man's wife did not wish to travel in it as the seats were covered in velvet and not in leather.

After we had admired everything that we had been shown and had left, John joked about his friends, saying that they lived a very shallow kind of life and needed to have everything absolutely perfect.

On we drove, with John talking non-stop and pointing things out to us, and shortly afterwards we stopped briefly at the town of Chatham, where we got out at the seaside to admire the view.



Chatham, Cape Cod

We set off once again and eventually arrived at Provincetown (or P'town as it was known here). We drove through picturesque streets full of shops and tourists, and finally stopped at the bay, where I took a couple of photographs. In order to stretch our legs and get some fresh air, Colm and I walked down a long breakwater that had been made of large rocks. Here the sea air was delightfully fresh. John, who stayed put, was obviously not a walker. Colm and I would have loved to have walked around some of the villages that we had been driven through.



The breakwater at Provincetown, Cape Cod, Massachusetts

We then climbed back into the car, drove to a restaurant and sat down to have some lunch. Colm and I chose fish and French fries. The food was very welcome, for both of us were hungry. This time John allowed us to pay for the meal.

We then set off again, with me now sitting in the front and Colm in the back. Weary of talking to John by this stage, Colm shut his eyes and dozed. I did my best to sound interested in what John was saying. We made a couple of stops: one near a beach, where my late uncle had once walked to the water's edge and put his hand in the sea. Out of respect for him, I followed suit and Colm did likewise. The second stop was at a lighthouse that had a souvenir shop beside it. Colm and I would have enjoyed climbing to the top of the lighthouse but, as expected, John was not interested. I took some photos and we moved off.



A lighthouse on Cape Cod

As time was getting on, John decided not to return to his home via the supposedly scenic 6A route, and took the highway instead. I was disappointed because of this, for I had been looking forward to seeing some of the historic towns along the northerly route.

We arrived back at the house by five o'clock. Colm and I woke ourselves up by taking showers, then changed into more respectable clothing, for we were to be introduced to a couple of guests this evening. John had invited his lady friend, Barbara, and she was bringing a man who very much wanted to meet Colm and me, having heard all about us. They duly arrived and we were introduced. The man, who had been to Ireland many times, was pleasant and very chatty. I sat beside Barbara, who was very well dressed and refined. I found her very agreeable and easy to talk to. While drinking a glass of Pepsi with ice, I nibbled at some bread and cheese, which John had prepared. During the conversation, Barbara telephoned a restaurant and made a reservation.

Soon afterwards we said goodbye to Barbara's friend, who would be unable to join us for dinner, and we set off for the restaurant. Barbara went in her fancy Mercedes and John brought us in his Buick. The 'restaurant' turned out to be a hall belonging to an Italian society; on Thursday evenings they served dinners. We had a good meal of a pasta dish with salad. We declined the offer of dessert, John paid the bill and we left. We said good night to Barbara at this point and returned to John's house, where we sat for a while in the kitchen and chatted. Colm was direct with John and encouraged him to marry Barbara, whom we both praised. Indeed, she was a very pleasant lady; we felt that she would have a good influence on him. The promise of ice cream for dessert disappeared, and we left for bed after we had bidden John good night.

Apart from this evening, the day had been slightly unsatisfactory, for Colm and I would have preferred to have toured the Cape by ourselves.

Friday, 23 October

We rose at 6 a.m., got ourselves ready quickly, spoke briefly to John, skipped breakfast and set off in our car for Hyannis, arriving there before seven o'clock. We left the car outside a motel that was run by a friend of John's and walked to the ferry bound for Nantucket island. Our tickets for today's round trip cost \$22 each. As we found a restaurant in the building where we bought the tickets, we had a quick breakfast of a bagel filled with cream cheese, and a cup of tea. We just had enough time to consume this before boarding the ferry, which was large enough to accommodate several huge trucks as well as cars.

The ferry set off at half past seven; we stood out in the cool morning air, watching the port of Hyannis recede. It was a beautiful day: the sun shone from a clear blue sky and the sea was extremely calm.

Once the mainland had disappeared from view, we went into the restaurant, where we ordered tea and a muffin; the prices here were much higher than the previous place. We then sat back to enjoy the rest of the journey, which lasted a little over two hours. We saw an English man wandering around and ended up chatting to him after he had handed us his binoculars so that we could look at some seals when approaching the island.

We reached Nantucket soon after half past nine, and were off the ferry in minutes. We walked towards the town from the harbour and stopped at a bicycle rental shop, where we picked up a map of the island. We walked on a little farther, following the map; when we turned a corner, we were hailed by our English friend from a minibus. He and some other tourists were about to set off on a tour of the

island; the man had spoken to us about this bus tour and had told us that it promised to be worthwhile. I dithered, thinking that we might try it later, but Colm made up his mind instantly and dragged me on board. The lady who was both the driver and guide spoke with a southern drawl; she was pleasantly informal, told us to pay the \$10 fee at the end of the tour, and introduced us to the others in the bus. We sat next to an Italian couple, and a couple from Texas (I think) sat in front of us.



A street in Nantucket town, Nantucket Island, Massachusetts

As it was now ten o'clock, we set off immediately. Ara, the guide, drove us first of all through the narrow streets of Nantucket town, pointing out various landmarks and elegant houses. I was itching to get out and photograph everything, for it all looked fabulous in the early morning sunshine. The town exceeded my expectations; having seen photographs of the houses and their interiors, I was expecting something agreeable, but I had not realized that all the streets and houses were of equal prettiness. Bud had told us that he had worked here many years previously and had hated it – probably because it was winter and the work had been very hard.



A cranberry bog, Siasconset

Having squeezed our way through the narrow streets of the town, we headed out of it, passing the oldest house on our way. We then drove around the rest of the island; as it was very flat and not particularly interesting, we were glad that we had not rented bicycles. We stopped to look around at the most northerly point of the island, then dropped down to Siasconset, which the locals shortened to Sconset. On our way back to the town we stopped to look at a cranberry bog but, as the

cranberries were not in season, it was rather unremarkable. John had promised to bring us to a bog like this, but now our curiosity had been satisfied.



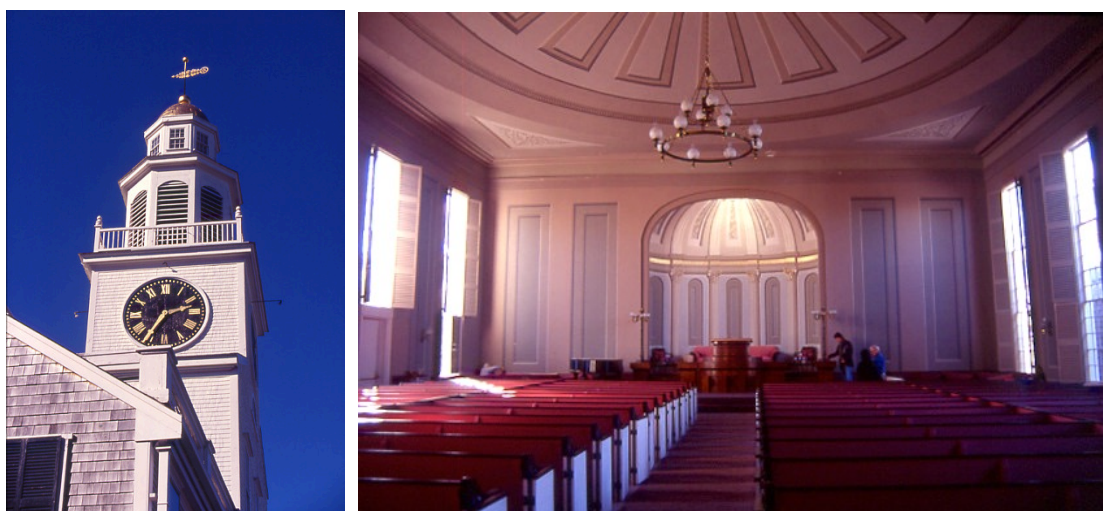
Nantucket town, Nantucket island, Massachusetts

We arrived back in the town by 11.30 and happily paid for our tickets. The trip had been worthwhile as it had given us a good overall view of the island. We now wandered around the streets that we had seen from the bus, delighted at being able

to see and appreciate everything at our leisure. As the sunlight was still strong, and as many of the exquisite buildings were lit with dappled light filtering through the trees, I clicked away happily with my camera. I would have loved to have photographed everything, for I wanted to record every nook and cranny of this enchanting place. We stopped to examine details such as fanlights, knockers made in the shape of whales (we had seen hedges sculptured into whales at the opposite end of the island), and peered through windows at exquisitely furnished rooms. Near the harbour were fascinating shops containing goods that could be bought at astonishing prices. We went into a shop that sold chocolates and preserves made from fruit such as cranberries; I had thought of buying something for Rita and Bud here. Nearby, an unusual art gallery displayed humorous paintings of dogs and their owners, and had clever pieces of furniture that featured doggy motifs.

Feeling hungry by now, we went off in search of a restaurant. We chose a small, quiet place where we enjoyed an appetizing bowl of minestrone soup, bread, and salad. Later we wandered outside and found the tourist centre, where I managed to make a quick telephone call home. We ambled around some more streets, passing a house that rested on four pillars made of concrete blocks, which were situated in a large hole that had been dug underneath the house.

We then approached the striking Unitarian church, the spire of which we had seen from a distance. We went in by a side door and met a young lady who was waiting for students in a room that contained a piano. We chatted to her before going up a flight of steps to the church proper, which turned out to be very elegant. The windows on both side were very tall and narrow, and *trompe l'oeil* architectural details had been painted on the plaster around the altar.



The Unitarian Church, Nantucket town, Nantucket island, Massachusetts

While we were in this fine church, a man and his twin brother introduced themselves to us and showed us what they were working at: they had just finished replacing all the upholstery on the pews. The man who had first spoken to us showed us fragments of the different layers of cloth that they had discovered; they had now laid down the fifth level. We both felt very pleased at having met these two men and having learned of their interesting discovery.

From here we went off in search of the shops that we had found earlier. In the cranberry shop I bought a box containing three jars of preserves for Rita and Bud and, in a clothes shop, Colm bought a tee shirt for his sister's companion. We then

drifted back to the harbour, where we met our English friend once again. Chatting to him, we boarded the ferry, which set sail at 3.45 p.m. As it was by now quite chilly out on deck, we sat inside at a window. After a while, however, the stuffiness and motion of the ferry began to make me feel queasy, and so I went outside, leaving Colm and the English man dozing. I walked to the aft of the vessel, where it was more sheltered, and joined a young American couple. They were both musicians who specialized in playing Scottish music. We fell into easy conversation and spent the remainder of the journey together. The young lady was widely travelled; she had been in several European countries, including the Czech Republic.

We arrived back in Hyannis as the sun was setting. As I had been out in the cold sea air for a considerable time without a jacket, I was glad to get into the car, return to the comfort of John's house and take a hot shower.

Later, when we were ready, John took us in his car to a packed restaurant in Hyannis. As before, John laughed and joked with the waitresses. We had an excellent meal: I had lobster bisque, a salad, crumby schrod (a type of small cod or haddock) with rice and carrots, then cheesecake with strawberries. I paid for everyone using my credit card; the check came to \$48 and I added \$10 as a tip. Colm gave me half of what I had spent when we returned to the house, and then we went to bed. It had been a most pleasant day, for sailing to Nantucket island was something that I had wanted to do for a long time.