



Extensive bramble field (raspberry, blackberry) has taken over the old house site.



Memorial maple dedicated to Ms. Priest



BCT 54

1.44 acre donated by Ruth Priest 1996

Capt. Wetherbee house removed 2000



THE CAPTAIN WETHERBEE HOUSE IN BREWSTER (CASE STUDY #6) IS DISMANTLED BOARD BY BOARD IN ORDER TO CREATE A PUBLIC PARK. THE HISTORIC BUILDING WAS REASSEMBLED ELSEWHERE IN TOWN.

For the full story of the preservation of the historic house and restoration of this property, see the case study on the following 3 pages.

CAPTAIN WETHERBEE HOUSE

Project Name:	Captain Wetherbee House
Project Location:	Brewster, Massachusetts
Project Sponsor(s):	Brewster Conservation Trust
Property Size:	1.5 acres
Developed Use:	Private home
Undeveloped Use:	Coastal wildlife habitat and a public park for passive recreational use.

THE CAPTAIN WETHERBEE HOUSE AWAITS UNDEVELOPMENT ON THE 1.5 ACRE SITE GENEROUSLY WILLED TO THE BREWSTER CONSERVATION TRUST BY RUTH A. PRIEST. —————▶

BACKGROUND:

In most undevelopment projects, raising the necessary funds to obtain a property is the most difficult task a sponsor has to face. In the case of the Brewster Conservation Trust, acquiring the property was the easy part. Removing the dwelling in a manner sensitive to its historical value was the tough obstacle to overcome.

Long-time Brewster resident Ruth A. Priest, in an act of great generosity, wished to bequeath her 1.5 acre property at the end of Breakwater Road to the Brewster Conservation Trust. When Ms. Priest passed away in 1996, the Trust inherited a prime parcel of land with superior views across the street from Breakwater Beach and Cape Cod Bay.

"The charm of this old sea captain's home finding a new location in Brewster's Historic District makes for a great ending to a wonderful story,"
-Jim Maddocks.

VISION:

"Ruth had in mind to create a sort of 'book-end' effect for Breakwater Road," explained Roger O'Day, Ms. Priest's attorney and a founding member of the Trust. "She wanted open areas on each



end. Priest Park would be next to the bay on one end, while the other end at 6A would have 'The Egg,' which is more formal looking than what she intended for her property."

ACTION:

Ms. Priest's will stipulated that the house and small garage be removed from the property, which in turn would be converted back to a natural setting and used as a small public park overlooking the bay. It sounded simple enough, but as it turned out, the home in question happened to be one of the last remaining examples of a late-Federal two-story "narrow" house in Brewster. Built circa-1840 by Captain Isaac Wetherbee, the antique sea captain's home was considered too historic to be demolished.

The only alternative, it seemed, was to find an interested party who would be willing to remove the building from the property and use it elsewhere. After two auctions, the Brewster Conservation Trust thought they had found the perfect new owner for the sea captain's house. However, the prospective owner wanted to move it to Orleans, and the Brewster Historic District Committee ruled that the building must stay within Brewster.

After another search, a second interested individual surfaced. He agreed to pay for the removal of the house to a new location in town, where he intended to use it as an office. The plans for the move were initially approved, but the second prospective buyer backed out of the deal.

excerpt from:

**TAKE BACK
THE CAPE:
Discovering
Opportunities
for
Undevelopment,**

by The Compact
of Cape Cod
Conservation
Trusts, Inc.

(Barnstable MA,
2001).

(pp. 19-21)



BOARD BY BOARD, CARL AHLSTRÖM AND LIZ PERRY ALONG WITH THEIR TEAM OF CARPENTERS
DISMANTLE THE POST AND BEAM SEA CAPTAIN'S HOUSE BUILT IN THE 1840S.

Finally, in late 1999, Liz Perry and Carl Ahlstrom, a couple from Brewster, agreed to take the house apart and move it to their family land along Route 6A.

Nearby residents threatened legal action after hearing about the potential for tree limb trimming during removal of the house. The only way to avoid a lawsuit was to take apart the historic house piece by piece, truck it to the new location and put the puzzle back together. Liz Perry and Carl Ahlstrom accepted the challenge. "They were certainly a very rare couple to come across to continue a project that was going in a difficult direction," said Jim Maddocks, Vice-President of the Brewster Conservation Trust.

An experienced carpenter with local connections, Ahlstrom was in the right place at the right time. Carpenters interested in the 160-year-old house came from Plymouth Plantation and as far away as Virginia to assist in the undevelopment project. The visitors were eager to learn more about timber construction techniques from the 1800s and helped

the ambitious couple hand dismantle the Captain Wetherbee House, board by board in early November, 2000. Carl and Liz paid the Trust \$1 for the house with the understanding that the couple would cover the estimated \$80,000 cost of house disassembly, moving and reconstruction.

Soon the original post and beam sea captain's house would be reassembled on the couple's nine acre piece of land located in Brewster's Historic District along Route 6A. To top it off, the new location of the Captain Wetherbee House neighbors Brewster's oldest house built in the 1640s, the Dillingham House, which was owned by Carl Ahlstrom's grandmother for awhile.

In the meantime, the Brewster Conservation Trust, with assistance from The Compact of Cape Cod Conservation Trusts, developed plans detailing future use of the property. Their proposal required and received approval from the Brewster Conservation Commission because of the site's location near wetlands.

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THE FOUNDATION WAS REMOVED, THE DEBRIS DISPOSED OF AND THE LAND SEEDED WITH NATIVE GRASSES TO START THE HABITAT RESTORATION PROCESS.

After covering expenses for the removal of the tar driveway and concrete debris, the Brewster Conservation Trust proposed to transform the site into a natural landscape by planting shrubs and grasses native to Cape Cod.

The restoration process began with a delivery of fresh topsoil followed by hydroseeded grass to anchor the landscape until more planting could take place over the next year. The Trust plans to maintain the views of Cape Cod Bay. Two disease-resistant American elms have been planted to grace the park.

Although landscaping the property will be paid for by the Trust, they do not anticipate spending any of their normal budget or raising extra money to get the job done. In addition to the 1.5 acres, Mrs. Priest also made provisions in her will for some of her personal property to be

handed over to the Trust. The Trust, in turn, converted it into funds to be used to cover the cost of the landscaping. "It was just a terrific, generous bequest by Ruth Priest," said O'Day.

RESULTS:

Due to a single person's selfless donation and the perseverance of a group of conservationists, one day the townspeople of Brewster will reap the benefits from this very special gift. The historic house will have been saved to be admired nearby and Priest Park will be one of the very few remaining parcels of land near Cape Cod Bay that is not restricted as private property. "The charm of this old sea captain's home finding a new location in Brewster's Historic District makes for a great ending to a wonderful story," remarked Jim Maddocks.



THE GRASS AND OTHER PLANTINGS FLOURISH IN THE FRESH EARTH AS THE LAND EVOLVES INTO PRIEST PARK FROM WHICH VISITORS MAY ENJOY VIEWS OF CAPE COD BAY.

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