

cut and shaped to look like blocks of stone. When painted to the proper color and still wet, workmen threw fistfulls of brownstone sand on the paint till it stuck. This was so successful that in the early days people really thought it was made of brownstone. These stories were passed down in the family by each generation.

"Grandma Lancy," who was born in Provincetown July 3, 1812, not only wanted the finest, largest, but also the "tallest" house with a "widow's watch" where she not only could keep account of the goings and comings of all ships in the harbor but could look down on all the neighbor's yards as well, (where she could keep track of them too). It must be remembered that there was nothing between the Lancy brownstone mansion and the water but a sandy front yard to Lancy's own wharf, for he owned a small fleet of ships—some for fishing and some for cargo. I still have one of the logs to a fishing boat off the Grand Banks.

Well that top widow's watch became a problem while in construction. "Ben" Lancy couldn't find a carpenter on the Cape or Boston that could build the small hanging stairs safe enough and artistic enough to suit the Lancys. Quite by accident,

Lancy found an old ship's carpenter repairing ship's stairs in one of the Lancy's vessels. It was the only kind of stairs he ever built. So he built ship's stairs into the cupola of the Lancy mansion.

It was strong and safe. Mrs. Benjamin Lancy Sr. watched her son "Bengie" sail in and out of the harbor most everyday for he had an office in Boston and commuted from Provincetown.

Her grandchildren loved climbing up and down the small stairwell as much as looking out to sea. Bread and honey was served in the afternoon to the children (to keep them quiet, I suspect) while searching the sea and sidewalks from the "top of the world" as they named it. Eating bread and honey was one of the Victorian graces with a ritual. It had to be one slice on a fancy glass plate. After honey from a silver "pot" was "run" over it, the bread was cut into little perfect squares all at once using just four cuts with a knife. Then it was eaten with a fork without getting a drop on

clothing. Sometimes molasses was used instead of honey. This wasn't just a treat. It was considered good for you. It made strong bones.

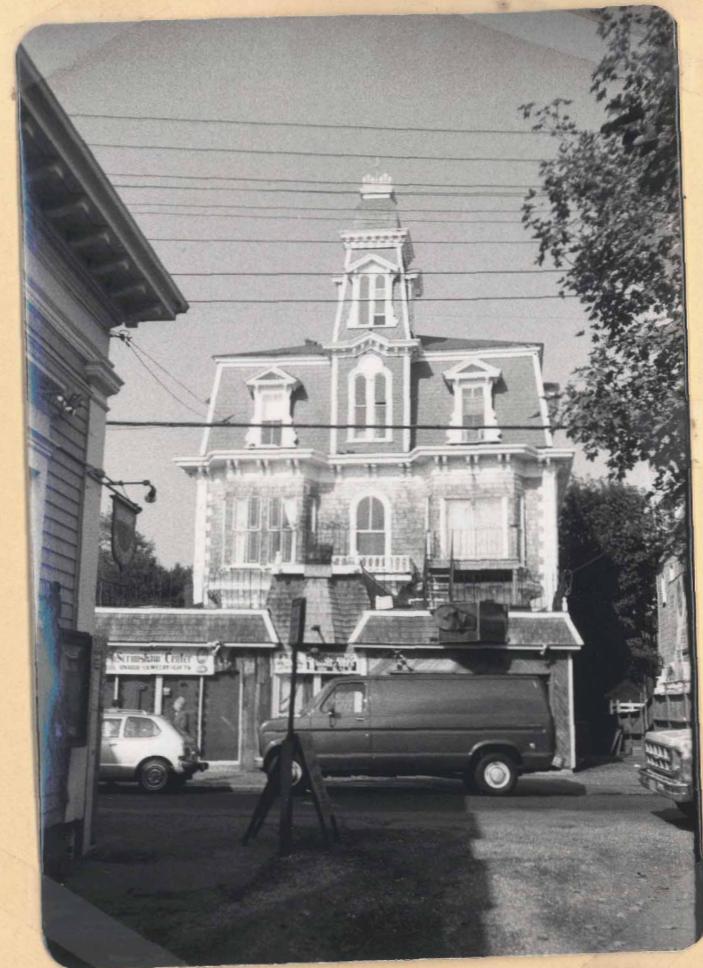
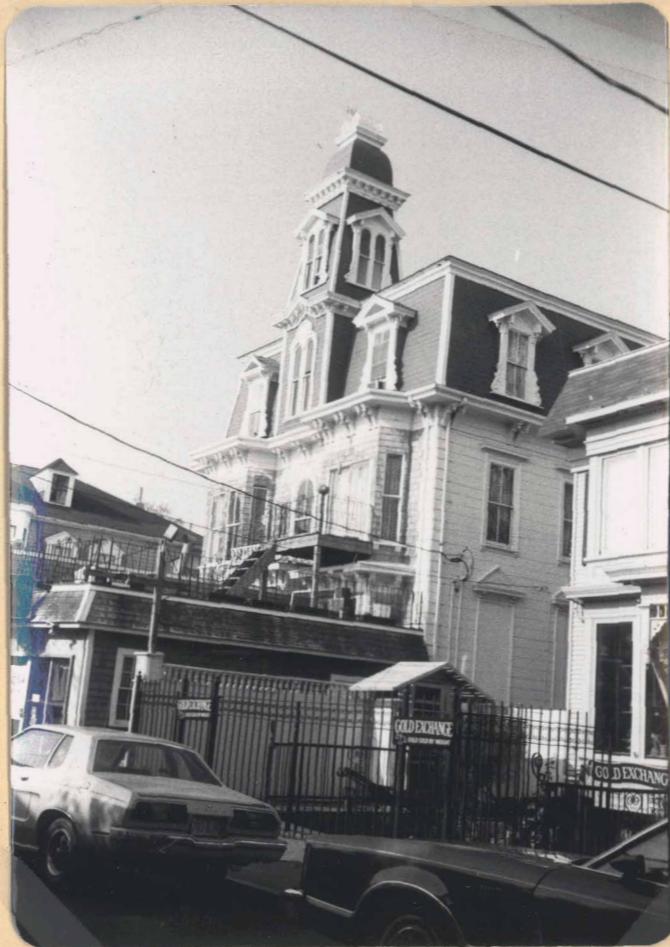
When Grandma Lancy sent the grandchildren home, it was a dash down the side yard and up a few stone steps at the embankment at the end of the backyard to 90 Bradford Street where they lived. (Now the so-called Fairbanks House Museum).

Mrs. Lancy was greatly loved by all her family (most of them lived in the mansion with her). So everyone was most distressed at her death on a cold day in February (27th) 1896. Yet they were even more disturbed to have her taken from them and put on the cold cemetery because a grave could not be dug in the frozen ground. So they opened the windows and "kept" her very well in her own bedroom, where they visited her every day, combed her hair and even cut her nails when they thought it necessary. Days passed into weeks. When spring came the body was still in its upstairs front bedroom still being visited by doting family and friends until the neighbors complained. Family tradition relates that due to public pressure they finally buried their beloved mother, three months after her death. This must have been the longest wake in Provincetown.

Old "Ben" Lancy, Jr. outlived his mother and even married the nurse that cared for him during one of his illnesses. The family did not approve, of course. But Mr. Lancy Jr. never got used to Provincetown becoming crowded. He was used to going swimming when he felt like it, sans bathing trunks. Even when he was an old man, he would come out of his Lancy mansion, walk straight down to the water, take off his clothes, and swim nude. But no one paid any attention in 1912. When I read of the nude bathers on the Cape, I think of old Ben Lancy.

Perhaps they let him do what he wished because he was very kind and very generous. The Methodist Church not only started meeting in his home, but he gave them the land on which to build the church, plus money.

I thought that retelling some of the family stories about the Lancy homestead (yes, there are lots more) might gain interest and attention in saving this landmark



3 Views of the Lancy House
- October 1980 -

.. The 3 Towers, Lancy House, left,
Universalist Church and Pilgrim
Memorial Monument

for the town and even help acceptance in the register of National Historic Landmarks.
Louise Holbrook
Whitman, Mass.