



CUTTYHUNK HISTORICAL SOCIETY

PENIKESE ISLAND CEMETERY

A SELF-GUIDED WALKING TOUR

by Thomas Buckley

(Revised Spring 2002)

Penikese, one of the Elizabeth Islands, is located off the southeast coast of Massachusetts and is part of the township of Gosnold in Dukes County. It is situated in Buzzards Bay, one mile north of Cuttyhunk Island, seven miles south of New Bedford and southwest of Woods Hole. A little known seventy-five acre island, it has been designated a Massachusetts historical site.

In 1904 the Commonwealth of Massachusetts purchased Penikese for the purpose of isolating the state's residents with leprosy (Hansen's Disease). The Penikese Island Hospital was open from 1905 to 1921.

There are fourteen people buried in the cemetery. They died as a result of having leprosy. The Cuttyhunk Historical Society has taken on the responsibility of maintaining the cemetery.

It is difficult to reach Penikese as you can only get there by boat. All are welcome, but keep in mind that the island is a bird sanctuary in care of the Division of Fisheries and Wildlife. Also, the Penikese Island School for troubled teenage boys is in operation there year-round.

As you approach Penikese, you can see the dock and small harbor; there you can anchor your boat and walk to the cemetery, which is probably less than a half mile away. There is a path all the way and it goes past the school's residence. Continue on past the chicken coop and barn, always going in a northeast direction.

Soon after you have passed the barn, you will see a large glacial erratic. It is called "The Plow" as it appears to be plowing the earth. This is the second largest bedrock on Cape Cod and the islands.

Just over the next rise, you will suddenly see the cemetery. It is startling how quickly it appears, as it sits hidden in a small depression. This spot was chosen by the early patients because it was not visible from their cottages.

(They did not want to view a cemetery where they might soon be.)

Before you go into the cemetery, you will notice a large natural stone with a bronze plaque to your right. The Cuttyhunk Historical Society placed that monument there in 1981 to honor Dr. Frank Parker and his wife, Marion. The Parkers supervised the island for fifteen years, taking great care of their patients. Dr. Louis Edmonds was the superintendent for the first year. The plaque also lists all the deceased patients who are buried in the cemetery.

Originally, those patients without a gravestone had their graves marked with a wooden cross. These soon deteriorated and were replaced with cast iron markers with the patients' initials and number. Over time some of these were replaced by cast aluminum markers. Now many of those

are missing. In 2001 an incomplete plot chart was found. Using this chart along with bits of scanty data, it is believed the graves are in the order that follows. Upon entering the cemetery, note the center aisle with graves on both sides. Begin with the graves to the immediate right.

This first grave, belonging to Yee Toy, is marked with an original cast iron marker and with a granite marker placed by I. Thomas Buckley of Chatham, Massachusetts.

Yee Toy

Yee Toy, single, came to the United States from China in 1900. Nothing is known about his life or family in China; he was just one of the thousands of Chinese who immigrated at that time.

Toy operated a laundry in Newburyport for four years before being diagnosed as leprous. He was first sent to a quarantine station at Gallops Island in Boston Harbor. He was held there until being sent to Penikese on November 18, 1905, as one of the first five patients to enter the island leper



The cemetery as it appeared while the colony was in operation.

Source: I. Thomas Buckley's Penikese: Island of Hope.

colony. Here on Penikese, Toy worked in the island laundry and Dr. Parker described him as a “good worker, spirited and courageous.” Yee Toy was a patient for twelve years and died October 23, 1917.

Beside the grave of Yee Toy is the grave of his friend, Goon Lee Dip.

Goon Lee Dip

Goon Lee Dip claimed to have been born in the United States and then went to China to be married and to have a child, a son. He then left his family in China and returned to this country to live in Roxbury, where he worked in a laundry. In 1904, at the age of twenty-three, he was found to have leprosy and was sent to Gallops Island to await the opening of the Penikese colony.

Dip was one of the first five patients to enter the colony on November 18, 1905. At first he was recorded as Goon S. Dub, later changed to Goon S. Dip and then changed to Goon Lee Dip. On the island he was known as “The Chinaman,” “Willie Goon” or “Lee.” He was a very amiable man, a hard worker and very popular with the other patients and staff. For most of his years on the island, Dip worked in the laundry.

Dip was devoted to Dr. Parker and lived in the hope that Parker would find a cure. When it was learned that the island hospital would be closing and the patients sent to Louisiana without Parker, Dip gave up his will to live. He did not want to leave his friend or his home of fifteen years and prayed he would die.

Goon Lee Dip died on December 6, 1920, a few months before the hospital would close. It is unknown who installed his gravestone.

Beyond Dip’s grave is probably that of Joseph Needham. His marker was placed by the Cuttyhunk Historical Society in 2002.

Joseph Needham

Joseph Needham, a clerk, arrived on Penikese in 1907 at the age of twenty-three. He had immigrated to New York from Trinidad, West Indies and then moved to Montreal and later Somerville. He may have changed his name upon entry to the island to protect his family. The name Frank Fanuvela has been mentioned as a possible real name.

Needham’s life on Penikese was much like the others. Soon after his arrival he began to improve, but over the years, the disease took its toll, leaving him very sick and blind. He died on August 8, 1913 at age twenty-nine and was buried as he requested by a Catholic priest instead of by the island chaplain, Nathan Bailey.

Julia Ellen Lowe

Julia Ellen Lowe, 60, was married and had one child, a daughter. She was a life-long resident of Key West, Florida. Apparently her family had enough influence to have her hospitalized on Penikese. Because it was considered a great

social stigma to have a leper in the family, friends and family were told that Lowe had gone on a trip to Canada and died there.

Like most patients, her health improved in the first few years and then gradually failed until she died on December 20, 1920. Mrs. Lowe was the last person to be buried in the Penikese Island Cemetery. Her marker was contributed anonymously in 2000 and installed by the Cuttyhunk Historical Society.

The next grave belongs to Nicholas Cacoulaches. Part of the island’s puzzle is how an immigrant dishwasher could afford such an expensive gravestone.

Nicholas Cacoulaches

Nicholas Cacoulaches had been born in Greece. In 1911, he immigrated to the United States via New York. Cacoulaches moved to Boston where he was employed as a dishwasher in a local restaurant.

Cacoulaches, at age twenty-seven, arrived on Penikese November 18, 1915, the tenth anniversary of the island hospital. Upon entry his case was described as “very obvious.” He did not respond well to treatment and died on March 12, 1920.

The next grave is probably that of the only patient to escape the island.

Iwa Umesaki

Iwa Umesaki came from Japan and entered the United States in Seattle where he helped build a mansion. Moving across the country, he eventually settled in Boston where he reported he worked on the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum. He was an accomplished cabinet maker and was quite well educated.

At the age of twenty-six Umesaki was sent to Penikese after being diagnosed as leprosy. He was very unhappy on the island because he wanted to go back to Japan to be taken care of by his family. Umesaki made several attempts to get the Japanese government to allow him to return to Japan, but was refused each time.

Out of desperation, he escaped Penikese by rowing a boat about 14 miles across Buzzards Bay to the mainland. Umesaki then took a train to Boston where he appealed to the Japanese Consul to allow him to return to Japan. Again he was refused and sent back to Penikese. However, he did earn the distinction of being the only patient to escape.

Umesaki became quite antisocial and was allowed to live in a cottage by himself until he died on January 7, 1916. He was a Buddhist but his funeral service was conducted by Reverend Nathan Bailey, the island chaplain from the New Bedford Baptist church. In 2001 a grave marker for Umesaki was contributed by Preethi A. Varghese and D. George Joseph of New Haven, Connecticut. At that time a service was held by Rabbi Raphael J. Kanter of New Bedford.

The last grave on the right side is indicated by a marker which was purchased by members of the Keene family and

installed by the Cuttyhunk Historical Society in the year 2000. This grave is that of the hospital's oldest patient.

Walton E. Keene

Walton E. Keene was born in 1843, married, had one child and was a resident of Bourne. He had had a very active life: hunted for gold in the West; was in the shoe business; explored South America; was a sailor on the Pacific Coast; was a storekeeper in Bourne; and was employed by the town of Bourne. It was impossible to determine where he contracted leprosy.

It is difficult to imagine why a man seventy-two years old, very sick and with only a short time to live would be sent away from home and family to die. However, Keene was diagnosed as leprosy at the Massachusetts General Hospital and, as required by law, sent to Penikese where he died the next month on January 23, 1916.



BEFORE GOING up the next side, you may want to make note of how close the cemetery is to the edge of the cliff. How many years of erosion will it be before the graves become exposed?

It is the opinion of some that the bodies of the patients were buried in quicklime so that their bodies would deteriorate faster and the bacteria would be destroyed. Otherwise, it was felt, the bacteria would reach the surface through plant life, then spread to animals and back to humans.

Now let's start up the other side of the aisle, keeping those you have already viewed on your left. The first grave is unmarked, but is certain to be that of Soloman Goodman.

Soloman Goodman

Soloman Goodman immigrated from Russia in 1889 with his wife and two children. The family settled in the North End of Boston where Goodman taught Hebrew to children. It must have caused a near panic situation when parents learned that their children had been taught by someone with leprosy.

Goodman arrived on Penikese on March 27, 1909. Like most cases, his health improved and he was described as having a rugged constitution and was rarely depressed. Over the years his health worsened and, at the age of seventy-one, Soloman Goodman died on August 16, 1916.

On August 29, 2001, the Jewish Federation of Greater New Bedford placed granite grave markers for Soloman Goodman and Morris Goldblatt. Rabbi Barry Hartman and Rabbi Raphael J. Kanter, both of New Bedford, conducted services for these two Jewish men. The service was attended by members of the Federation and the Cuttyhunk Historical Society.

Beyond Goodman's grave is the grave of Morris Goldblatt. It is believed that the Parkers, whenever possible, buried friends side by side.

Morris Goldblatt

Morris Goldblatt and his family immigrated from Russia in 1903. He was the father of five children, and the family lived in Lynn where Goldblatt was employed in a leather factory. Four years later he moved to East Boston where it was soon discovered that he had leprosy. Two days after the diagnosis he arrived at Penikese and Dr. Parker wrote that Goldblatt had a well-advanced case.

In 1915, a Boston Globe reporter visited Penikese and reported Dr. Parker as saying that Goldblatt's family had visited him once and had never been heard from again. Parker is further quoted as saying that Goldblatt just sits in the corner and cries while waiting for a letter.

Morris Goldblatt died on October 27, 1915.

The next grave may contain the remains of John Roderick. It is impossible to tell just where Roderick is buried because he was the first to be buried and records begin with the second burial. His grave marker was contributed and placed in 2002 by the Penikese Island School.

John Roderick

John Roderick (Roderiques, Rodergross) was single, a sailor and had immigrated from the Cape Verde Islands. Very little is known about this man. He was first diagnosed as leprosy in 1904 and sent to Gallops Island, where he escaped a short time later. In January 1905, he was apprehended and returned to Gallops Island, where he stayed until being sent to Penikese as one of the first five patients on November 18, 1905.

Roderick had known another patient, Frank Pina, in the Cape Verde Islands, and they shared a cottage here. His case was described as well advanced and, during his stay on Penikese, he did not improve. At the age of thirty-five, John Roderick died on June 21, 1907.

Moving along we see a grave marker for Frank Pina. This marker was placed there in 1998 by members of the Pina family.

Frank Pina

Frank Pina was from the Cape Verde Islands. He, his wife and two children immigrated to the United States via New Bedford. They lived a short while in South Dennis and then moved to Harwich where they raised eight children.

In 1904, Pina was diagnosed as leprosy by Dr. Louis Edmonds who later became the island colony's first superintendent. Pina's wife and children were removed from the house where Pina remained under quarantine. When the Penikese colony opened, Pina was transported to the island on November 18, 1905 as one of the first five patients. He shared a cottage with John Roderick.

Under treatment Pina's health improved and he helped in the building of some of the island's structures. In 1908, his health began to fail and he became very sick and blind. Frank Pina died on November 19, 1914.

The next grave is that of the youngest patient to enter the island hospital. In 1999, the marker was donated by the Upton Historical Society and placed there by members of the Cuttyhunk Historical Society.

Archibald J. B. Thomas

Archie Thomas and his mother immigrated from Barbados, West Indies in 1902. Mrs. Thomas was employed in Upton where Archie attended school. He was considered a good student and was very interested in wireless telegraphy.

On March 22, 1909, Archie was diagnosed with leprosy. After five days of great anguish, the doctors, as required by law, sent sixteen-year-old Archie Thomas to Penikese. After a vigorous campaign, Mrs. Thomas was allowed to go to Penikese to live with and take care of her son.

The Women's Club from New Bedford gave Archie a telegraph set which was later improved upon by the Marconi Company. With this set Archie was able to have "conversations" with people on Cuttyhunk and New Bedford and with telegraph operators on ships passing through the Cape Cod Canal.

Archie's youthful exuberance, his "conversations" and the publicity he and his mother received gave cause to the general public to lessen their animosity toward the people on Penikese. Archie Thomas died on February 17, 1915 at the age of twenty-two. Soon after his death his mother left the island.

Beyond the grave of Archie Thomas lies his mother's friend, Isabelle Barros. Her marker was placed there by members of the Barros family in 1998.

Isabelle Barros

Isabelle Barros immigrated from the Cape Verde Islands and lived with her husband and two children in Wareham. When she was diagnosed as leprosy on April 24, 1905, her children were taken away and placed in a foster home. Mr. and Mrs. Barros were placed in quarantine in their home until she was sent to Penikese on November 18, 1905. She was one of the first five patients, the only female patient at the time. She shared a cottage with a female attendant.

When Mrs. Barros arrived at the colony, it was discovered that she was four months pregnant. Later she gave birth to a healthy baby boy, whom she was allowed to keep for twenty days. He was then placed in a foster home with his brother and sister.

After nearly a year on Penikese, Mrs. Barros was told that she was cured and would be going back to Wareham. Later, it was proved that she was indeed not cured, and she remained on the island. Several years later her husband drowned.

Isabelle Barros died on March 13, 1915. She was thirty-seven years old.

Once again, a friend is buried next to a friend. Lucy Peterson's grave is marked by a granite gravestone, but it is unknown who purchased or placed it.

Lucy Peterson

Lucy Peterson immigrated from the Latvia area of Russia. Her parents and three sisters remained in Russia, but a brother and uncle preceded her to Massachusetts. Miss Peterson worked as a domestic in Concord and later in Brookline. On July 22, 1907, at the age of twenty-seven, she was diagnosed with leprosy and sent to Penikese two days later.

On arrival she was described as "pretty and well-formed." Miss Peterson helped the other patients maintain their cottages, often acted as nurse and sometimes as interpreter. She was very friendly and encouraged others when they were in despair.

Leprosy gradually took its toll and Lucy Peterson, friend to all, died on November 5, 1916. Reverend Nathan Bailey conducted the service.



WHEN THE island first opened, it was considered a leper colony—a place to put away unwanted people. Dr. Louis Edmonds was superintendent and resigned after one year.

Dr. Frank Parker and his wife Marion came from Malden to replace Dr. Edmonds, with the intention of staying only one year. They stayed for fifteen years. During those years, they raised the quality of life for their patients and raised the status of the island from "leper colony" to "world class leprosarium."

The Parkers worked very hard to improve living conditions, health and attitudes of their patients. Above all, Dr. Parker continually and diligently tried to find a cure for leprosy. He never did, and no one has to date.

When the leprosarium closed in 1921, Dr. Parker was a world-recognized expert on leprosy. He had received a salary of \$2500 a year, and Mrs. Parker had received a stipend for working as postmistress for the island post office.

Frank Parker was sixty-five years old when he retired. After fifteen years of devoted care to his patients, Dr. Parker was refused a pension by Governor Cox. The Parkers moved to Hamilton, Montana, to be with their son. Dr. Parker died during a whooping cough epidemic, and Mrs. Parker lived several more years. They are buried together in Hamilton.

Before leaving, do not forget to look south toward Cuttyhunk. You will see what is left of the "Toy-Lee Chinese Laundry." Have a pleasant walk back.

