

Don't Tell Me I Talk Funny

We started, of course, from Orange, VA, went up through eastern Maryland, Delaware and the New Jersey shore, pronounced 'sho-wuh,' around 'Noo Yawk,' up along the coast of Connecticut, into Rhode Island and Massachusetts, past 'Hah-vahd Yahd and its pahked cahs,' up into Maine with their 'lob-stah' and into Quebec where they say stuff like, "Alors, mon vieux, ca frotte ici."

Southern translation: Man, it's cold 'round heah, and it was...mid 60s for highs in July!

Two points to be made right off the bat: I don't want to hear anything more about how we Virginians talk funny. Compared to a cultured Richmond accent, the broad a's of upper New England are positively comical. And then of course, there's the Godzilla of accents, a way of speaking that cops a 'tude...New York. Whadda yoo lookin' at, heee?

And, while I'm at it, I don't want to hear any more about rednecks living in the south either. We ran into some hicks in a campground in Joisey and up thay-uh by the lilac bushes of Maine that would make the worst of us positively blue-blood.

With that say-ud, let me tale yew about...

called a Sandbagger because, although only 20+ feet long, it carried so much extra sail, a crew of 12 men had to shift 1,500 pounds of ballast packed in sandbags every time they came about.

Anyway, Catboats are still out there in their original configuration thanks to a tiny boatyard in South Dartmouth, Massachusetts where the son of the man who rescued them in the early 1960s, carries on a time-honored New England boat-building tradition. Although their hulls are now made of convenient fiberglass, and their masts of aluminum (made in Virginia, by the way), everything else has pretty much stayed the same. One of the workers in the yard has been building these craft for 34 years. They've used the same sailmaker for the past 35. And the overall length is still twice the beam, which makes them remarkably stable. A fifteen-and-a-half-foot boat can easily carry four adults.

So can this monstrous motorboat with the protruding exhaust

ture is 20 and average low is -5, the price of heating oil becomes, well, life-threatening.

And that explains why throughout northern New England, many farm houses are attached to barns. When it's so cold outside that spit turns to ice before it hits the ground, you might want to take the warmer route through a hallway from the kitchen back door to feed the animals in the barn. The trade off: warmth from the animals vs. your kitchen smelling like a barnyard.

Fuel prices everywhere outside Virginia were higher. We dropped a C-note with each fill-up of our diesel-powered 18-mile-per-gallon RV. The worst fuel prices we ran into? \$5.09 in Mystic, Connecticut. Next year, we're sending our postcards from a train.

A Visit to France Sans Ocean Crossing

Have you ever wanted to go to France without having to actually go there? Well, you can. It's called Quebec, in particular, Quebec City.

The people look French. They sound French. They even act French. They can all do that pursed lips "poof," with the arched eyebrows and up-turned palms. And they speak French. All along, I thought the Quebecois, as they're called, ran around speaking English and only spoke French when they didn't want the rest of us to understand. Well, we ran into some Quebecois, who had trouble with English!

That's because French goes back a long way here. Established just one year after Jamestown, Quebec is celebrating its 400th this year. The British captured the city in 1759, but by 1774 had given up on converting the fiercely French populace to the Anglican Church. They passed an act that let them go to their Catholic Church and....speak their native tongue. By 1880, most of the English speaking people had thrown up their hands and moved to Montreal, where, by the way, they speak a version of French that even the native French have difficulty understanding.

Not so in Quebec City. Today, as you wander the bistrolined streets of the walled upper town and trod the cobblestones of the lower Port settlement, you could swear you're in some ancient French city. And looming over everything and visible from everywhere are the familiar multiple mansard and hip roof lines of the gigantic Hotel Frontenac. The lowest price we could find was \$539 per night. Thanks, we'll camp instead.

Postcards from



Sandpipers on Barnegat Bay, NJ



Along the Canada Road...

M.A.I.N.E

The North Country



Greetings from...Orange County, Vermont



The Hotel Frontenac

Quebec City

The Nautical Pick-Up Truck

One of the purposes of this trip was to research a story about Catboats, in particular the Marshall Sandpiper. Possibly dating back to 18th century England, these beamy little gaff-rigged sail boats plied the shallow waters of inland bays and estuaries from Cape May to Cape Cod during the 19th century. Hauling everything from oysters to mail, from commercial fishermen to casks of fresh water, they were the nautical pick-up truck of the time.

Then, in the immortal words of Jimmy Buffett, "I watched the men who rode you, switch from sails to steam," and the Catboats, like horses, became purely recreational. In fact we saw a turn-of-the-last century racing Catboat at a museum in Mystic, Connecticut. It's

stacks that we saw tied up at a marina on Barnegat Bay, New Jersey. Apparently the owner had just filled the fuel tanks of this behemoth to the tune of, (are you ready?), \$2,300. The craft gets seven-tenths, that's .7 of a mile to the gallon.

The Marshall Sandpiper might be slow, but it'll get you there for free!

"Oil and Gas"

Which brings us to the universal question I asked of people I met in the various Oranges we visited, namely, what is foremost on your mind? "Oil and gas," they all blurted. Some things are the same, no matter where you are in the country.

But in New England, you must understand that when they say "oil," they're talking about heating oil. In a part of the country where the wintertime average high tempera-

the three ORANGES



The Oranges not picked

All in all we found something like six Oranges in New England. But the Oranges in New Jersey, New York and Connecticut were all located within that spider web of Interstates that lead to and around New York City. We waved as we sailed past their exits. Nothing for us here. No, we were interested in the rural Oranges of Vermont, New Hampshire and Massachusetts.

Orange, Vermont

"Welcome to Orange," reads the sign; "Chartered in 1781." Well, 47 years after us, we sniffed. Still, we Virginians tend to confer a mantle of authenticity on anything with an 18th century date, and so we paid our respects.

We're in Orange County, north central Vermont... lots of conifer and hardwood forest, lakes, hills, and the ubiquitous New England bogs where we desperately hope for, but never get to see, a moose. The village of the same name is not the county seat; that's in Chelsea. Still, Orange has a town clerk's office and a town hall, and a population of 965 hardy souls.

It also has an automobile dealership of sorts, a few houses, an elementary school, and a church that was built in 1847. And it's there that we run into local native, Sanford Johnson.

He tells us this area is coming off the wettest summer in memory. In some places, it rained two feet in less than a week! It is also coming off the snowiest winter in recent memory. "We had a ton," says Johnson succinctly, adding however that the winters aren't as cold as they used to be. Still, roads in New England have such



Sanford Johnson in Orange, Vermont

wide paved shoulders they could almost be confused for having two extra lanes, until you realize they need the extra room to push walls of snow to the side. Mom and Pop ski areas, some with just one lift, crop up like golf courses around here; in other words, they're everywhere. And something you'll never see here at home: moose and snowmobile crossing signs.

Asked what's on everybody's mind in Orange, Vermont; Sanford Johnson responds, "the election."

Then he pauses to correct himself; "fuel, the economy, and the election, in that order." As we travel through this scenic rural county we keep seeing signs that say "Take Back Vermont." A little research reveals that this is an issue that cropped up some time ago when the Vermont Supreme Court pressured the legislature to enact a statewide property tax and school funding system, resulting in a general educational equalization that settled for the lowest common denominator. And, get this, according to Johnson, students in Orange County, Vermont can choose which of its four high schools to attend; they just have to provide their own transportation. Busses only run for K-8; after that you're on your own. Hmhmhmhm.

It also turns out that "Take Back Vermont" has morphed into an anti gay marriage and civil unions movement...basically a battle between conservative "been heres" and liberal "come heres." Sound familiar???

One more observation: in front of Orange, Vermont's only



A house attached to a barn in Orange, New Hampshire

Orange, New Hampshire

It's just not fair! These guys have a speedway, and we don't. Dirt on Fridays and asphalt on Saturdays; I'm so jealous. But these folks also live in a black hole. At the nearby campground where we spend the night there is no TV reception...none. And just forget cell phones.

The next morning we find the Orange Town "House" with the date 1769 on it. It is open every Tuesday evening for two hours and for another two the first Saturday of the month. The selectmen (town council) meet the second and fourth Mondays. Posted on the door is the name and physical address of everyone who participated in the Presidential Primary last spring.

This place has a population of 299 people. One of them left a pair of spectacles on a stone bench under a maple tree at the Orange Town House. It's a safe bet those glasses will still be there when the owner comes back for them.

New Hampshire's somewhat dire motto proclaims "Live Free or Die." This is the first colony to declare independence from Britain and the first of the 13 to outlaw slavery. It was also the ninth and deciding state to ratify the Constitution. Folks take individual rights, their township form of municipal government,



The first cutting of hay comes in July in Orange, New Hampshire

church stands a granite war memorial. And on it are inscribed the names of 29 veterans of the Civil War. Common names are Minard, Peake and Goodrich. Could it be that some of these men clattered down Main Street, Orange, Virginia during a battle between the 1st Vermont and 7th Virginia Cavalry August 2, 1862? Did some of these men fall at the Battle of the Wilderness...born in one Orange County to be killed in another?

and their long standing tradition of equal and fair representation seriously here. This is the birthplace of the town meeting.

We are suitably impressed.

Then we see a sign on a filling station/convenience store in a nearby village that just cracks us up. "Eat Here and Get Gas," it heralds in all seriousness. So much for Freedom of Speech.

Orange, Massachusetts

The happening place here is OHOP...stands for Orange House of Pizza. Melodie takes our order and comes back with the best Italian Sub (they call 'em Grinders) we have ever tasted. The walls are adorned with a rather obsessive collection of autographed photographs of the cast of the West Wing, flanked by the usual Boston Red Sox memorabilia.

But the real stunner is this: like us, they have a parachute club. And apparently it's a pretty darn big one because hanging on the wall is a photo of 81 linked skydivers free falling over "Jumptown, Orange" taken on August 19th 2003. They claim it's a northeast record!

So, what's on everybody's mind here in Orange, Massachusetts, when they're not worrying about the rip cord doing its job.

"Oil and gas," responds Melody without hesitation. "Delivery Boy," (that's all he's ever identified as), nods



Melody and "Delivery Boy" at Orange House of Pizza



Downtown Orange, Massachusetts

somberly in agreement. Well, we all knew that; it's the same with us.

This town is the most similar to our own that we've encountered anywhere. They have streets and businesses and some empty storefronts and a fire department and town police who patrol in cruisers. They've also have the same problems that most small towns have. What Melodie terms "Hooligans from the city," hang out on the corner. A few nights ago, there was a double stabbing at a local bar. But that was a big deal...certainly not something that happens every day.

The biggest employers are Erving Paper and the Rodney Hunt Company. We think we may be

onto something here. According to its website, this company specializes in "the control of water and wastewater in municipal, hydropower, and industrial environments." Now wouldn't that be ironic, if machinery manufactured in one Orange turned up in the other's water treatment plant. We checked, but no such luck.



Two signs you'll never see in Orange, Virginia

Norman Rockwell

About an hour from Orange, Massachusetts lies Sturbridge Village, the storybook New England town immortalized by that most American of artists, Norman Rockwell. In the museum there you can see all 300+ of his Saturday Evening Post covers.

During World War II, following a speech by FDR, he came up with the iconic images of the four freedoms: Freedom from Want, the kindly grandparents serving the Thanksgiving turkey; Freedom from Fear, the parents tucking their sons into bed with Pearl Harbor headlines screaming across the folded newspaper; Freedom of Worship, showing people of various races and faiths at prayer, and finally Freedom of Speech, the common man, who looks faintly like Abraham Lincoln, standing up at a town meeting voicing his convictions. Well, we know where Rockwell got that last one from.

Norman Rockwell, the quintessential American artist, the man who gave us so many memorable images... some corny, some poignant, some humorous...images of an America that is mostly gone now, except perhaps, for a few Oranges that we know.