

Description provided by Orleans Historical Commission

As you drive on South Orleans Road, you might notice a house on the east side at the intersection with Namequoit Rd. The view is partially obstructed by trees and shrubs, but if you look closely, you will see a home build circa 1800. What is not so obvious is that this home embodies nearly every thread in the fabric of the history and heritage of our Town of Orleans. The house is known as the Kenrick House and as the Sparrow House, and is on the Town's Historic Inventory on file with the Massachusetts Historical Commission. Our heritage in seafaring, agriculture, commerce, education, government, religion, and our outsized role in our nation's wars are all ingrained within the walls of this house.

The home's first resident was John Kenrick (born 1781). He married Rebecca Sparrow, thus initiating the dual family lineage of the house. Kendrick went to sea as a young man, and was given his first command at age 23 as Master of the Primrose when it sailed from Boston to Curacao to Madeira. After at least 7 more commands, Captain Kenrick returned to his South Orleans home and began new careers in salt making, farming, and as an arbor culturist

During the War of 1812, Kenrick is reported to be among those involved in the decision of the Town to refuse to pay the ransom demanded by the British. He is also on the roles of the militia that responded to the British attack on Rock Harbor in December of 1814, driving the invaders back to their ships.

Kenrick also served Orleans as a Selectman for 13 years and as a representative on the General Court, as the State Legislature was then called. He and Rebecca were among the founders of the Baptist Church and later, in the organization of the Universalist Church where Kendrick was a lay preacher until his death in 1849.

Kenrick's son, also John, was born in 1819 and was the next to live in the homestead. He became a teacher at age 19, served for 25 years on the Orleans School Board, and was Superintendent of Schools from 1880 to 1888. He owned and operated the South Orleans Store, which also became the South Orleans Post Office, serving as Postmaster for 33 years. The store and post office stood in front of the present house and across from the Town Pump as a sort of South Orleans center. John Jr. also served as a Selectman, Assessor, Overseer of the Poor, State Representative, member of the Governor's Council, Justice of the Peace, and Trustee of Cape Cod Five Savings Bank.

John Jr.'s son, also John, was the third John Kenrick to occupy the homestead. Born in 1857, he served as a State Representative and a State Senator becoming the third consecutive Kendrick generation to serve in the Legislature. He was also Postmaster of South Orleans, succeeding his father, a Selectman, Town Moderator, and Trustee of Cape Cod Five.

When the homestead passed into the Sparrow Family, Arthur Sparrow inherited the house from his uncle, John Sparrow. Arthur was the owner of the A. Sparrow Survey Company in Orleans.

He left the house to his son Kenrick Sparrow, who was a lawyer and was elected Town Moderator in 1941. After serving in World War 2, he was again elected Moderator in 1946 and was appointed as a Judge in the Barnstable County Probate Court in 1953.

Thus, we have a microcosm of Orleans history in one property. The present owner has filed a notice of intent to demolish the house. To be fair, the property has suffered the ravages of time and is not in good condition. The Orleans Historical Commission, acting under the Town's Demolition Bylaw, has imposed a one year delay on demolition on the property with the exception of two non-contributing additions that were added later. We hope to use the year to work with the owner to find some alternative to total demolition. This house is one of a dwindling number of buildings that provides a tangible reminder of what makes Orleans special. As we have said previously in this column, "once it's gone, it's gone for good."