

ALL SORTS . . . . . By Joe Harrington

Want Ghost Town Dead

. . . Modern Living Shunned Here



THE PROSPECTS are bright for keeping Cape Ann's ghost town—Dogtown Common—respectably dead due to the efforts of some intensely alive people.

They want these 600 acres on the fringe of Gloucester free from development and hot dog stands because it is the last available tract of historic rough country where the exploding populace of the area can get close to nature.

"It's got to come," remarked Elliott C. Rogers, "Mayor of Dogtown," with the same quiet assurance he'd tell you Sunday follows Saturday. Thirty years ago, says he, the problem wasn't so acute. There were herds of cattle keeping the brush down. Now it's growing thicker every year and in 10 years the paths will be blotted out.

John Kieran, nationally known naturalist, author and Rockport resident, put it another way, reflecting his newspaper background. He wrote sports for the New York Times when he wasn't sneaking up on sparrow hawks and blue buntings.

"A short time ago," Kieran related, "we were walking one of the Dogtown paths and were stopped by a growth of cat briars. Maybe a dog could get through them. In a few years only a rabbit could get through."

ROGERS is one of the lucky people God has smiled on. He's 75; looks 55; thinks 25. He's been spark-plugging the Dogtown Foundation, Inc. This group wants the city of Gloucester to take the land in the tract it doesn't own, by eminent domain, then lease it to the Foundation for a public reservation.

Though he chafes at the ponderous progress of the legal and municipal machinery in getting his pet project off the ground, Rogers has a couple of valuable factors going for him . . . and the public.

He's been promised subscriptions amounting to \$50,000 to maintain Dogtown as a reservation. Also, there's the lowering of the water-table, and the city needs more water. In the area are brooks and a swamp that would produce a new supply.

Meanwhile, Rogers, Kieran, Dr. Melvin T. Copeland, retired head of the Harvard Business School, and Dr. Samuel F. Haines, former head of the Mayo Clinic, tramp the Dogtown Common or some other reservation like Cranes Beach in Ipswich.

Promptly at 8:30 every morning Kieran calls Rogers and they set up the day's hike.

Should it be raining the naturalist says in his crisp voice: "Game called. Doubleheader tomorrow."

QUITE A FEW PEOPLE have written books on the history of Dogtown Common and most of them have wondered why as many as 100 families set up their homes in this desolate area of rocks and brush. Among these authors is Kitty Parsons of Rockport, a valued contributor to this space, whose husband is Richard H. Recchia, the noted sculptor. Fessden S. Blanchard gave it a chapter in his recent book, "Ghost Towns of New England."

The settlers lived there before, during and for a time after the Revolutionary War, shunning the more comfortable villages nearby. The last house disappeared in 1840, having like the others fallen down through neglect. (They weren't preserving many antiques in the last century.)

Rogers believes that the timber in the area was what attracted these first settlers. Certainly the land is too rocky for farming. (During the depression Roger Babson hired a stonecutter, John Talvitie, to carve mottoes on the huge rocks in the tract, little apothegms like, "If Work Stops Value Declines"—"Be On Time"—"Keep Out of Debt.")

There was a lot of shipbuilding at Lobster Cove, Annisquam, in those days. The yards needed lumber and when the Dogtown timber was cut off, the people drifted away.

BUT THE SOURCE BOOK of all recent publications is "The Story of Dogtown," a little volume written by Charles E. Mann, and privately printed 64 years ago. It has been long out of print and a copy was loaned to us by the gracious Kitty Parsons. ("Sugar" Nelson, the Rockport fishman, should be proud of the way she broils his smelts.)

Mann lists the property owners of the original Dogtown (so-called because the widows kept packs of dogs for protection), including Joseph Riggs whose descendants have title to a parcel of land there. He tells of the characters—the man who dressed like a woman; a woman who wore men's clothes, and the alleged witches quoting an old-timer who said in 1896: "Any person who sawed a barrel in half and made two tubs was a witch."

With "Rick" Recchia we made a short pilgrimage into Dogtown Common from Cher-

ry Pt., Annisquam, and recalled a line in Mann's book. He said before James Witham's house was demolished it was a great resort for young people for "mirth and

jollity."

There was evidence the area is still used for the same pur-

pose by the same age group. . . . Lots of empty beer cans along the sides of the road.