

ROCKY POINT.

THE HEAD-QUARTERS OF CLAM-BAKES—THE
ATTRactions OF THE POINT—HOW TO
GET THERE.

From an Occasional Correspondent.

ROCKY POINT, Wednesday, July 30, 1873.

Eighteen miles below Providence, on the western shore of Narragansett Bay, is Rocky Point, the head-quarters of clam-bakes, and the objective point of picnic parties from all over the New-England States. The Point is not a watering-place in the common acceptation of the term. It will never interfere with Newport or Long Branch, for it has no beach, and can boast no surf. It would never enter the mind of a man to go to Rocky Point with his family for the season. A single day with the clams is a rare treat, but to make the Summer one continual clam-bake is more than mortal stomach can endure. The people who come here are those who have but a day at their disposal, and it is safe to say that no other locality is, upon the whole, possessed of so many attractions, and capable of furnishing such a variety of entertainment. Rocky Point is always cool, comparatively. To-day, for instance, when I left Providence, at 10 o'clock, there was scarcely a breath of air stirring. The atmosphere was muggy and oppressive, and the sun shone in that leaden, dog-day style, which is even more uncomfortable and wilting than the brightest glare. But when I reached here the air was cool and bracing, and the wind, blowing a small gale from the south-east, white-capped the waters of the bay, and obliged the numerous pleasure-craft that are always cruising hereabouts to reef. The hotel that fronts the beach at Rocky Point is quite an establishment, three stories high, with Mansard roof, and furnishing accommodations for nearly four hundred guests; but it depends almost wholly upon transient patronage, and it is in reality little more than an immense restaurant, dispensing unlimited quantities of ice-cream and small beer to thousands of customers daily. But the clam is the magnet that draws the people to the Point, and is the leading article in the bill of fare. A Rhode Island clam-bake is a national institution, and the fame thereof has reached to the uttermost parts of the land. The Rocky Point clam-bakes are no small affairs. To furnish the material for a single bake will give a day's work at clam-digging to quite a number of men. The manner of concocting a bake may not be uninteresting information to those unfortunate people who have never visited the Rhode Island shore. A mass of large stones is placed over a roaring wood fire, and kept there until red-hot. Then the stones are spread in a single layer over the ground, and covered with fresh sea-weed. Upon this bed of weed the clams are emptied, and then, covered with the same material, they are allowed to simmer until sufficiently cooked. To see the professional clam-bakers pull over the red-hot stones with their huge, long-handled hoes, while the perspiration pours from their faces in a perfect stream, is quite enough to convince the most hardened skeptic that the furnace experience of Shadrach and his companions was a veritable and by no means remarkable fact. The shore dinner is the meal at which a majority of the visitors to Rocky Point sit down. This dinner is a clam-bake, with a few variations and additions. First, boiled blue-fish, when in season, is served. This is followed by the clam-bake proper, the clams in their native shell being emptied into tin pans of the capacity of half a bushel, which are arranged at short intervals along the tables. Then clam-fritters are served as a sort of dessert. The only side-dish is the "brown bread," that every genuine Yankee becomes acquainted with as soon as he cuts his first teeth, and for which he always shows a decided partiality. All this, unlimited in quantity if not great in variety, is furnished for the small sum of fifty cents, and undoubtedly the cheapness of the entertainment is one cause of its popularity. The building in which the shore dinners are served is 275 feet long, 50 feet wide, and has a comfortable seating capacity of 1,500, which, on occasion, has been stretched to 2,000. Three dinners are served daily, and during the height of the season, from the first of August to the beginning of September, if the weather is at all favorable, the dining-room is filled at every meal. The quantity of clams consumed daily is from 150 to 300 bushels, the latter figure having been reached to-day. Although the patronage of the Point is not of a kind likely to be diminished by the exodus to Europe or the tightness of the money market, it is a fact that the season thus far has not been as profitable as that of last year. The estimated sale of dinner-tickets to-day is 5,000, but previously the largest number sold on any one day was 2,900, that figure having been reached on the Fourth of July. The minor attractions of Rocky Point are by no means few, and the variety of entertainment offered to those who spend a day here includes something to suit almost any taste. Capacious and long-reaching swings are patronized not only by the children, but by a goodly number of grown people. There are flying-horses propelled by steam, which are steadier, more reliable, and to most people more comfortable than the genuine animal. A large rustic cage, stocked with a choice selection of monkeys, is one of the centres of attraction. The gymnastic performances of the monkeys are appreciated by the young people, and the melancholy manner in which they hunt for fleas and the deliberation with which they crack them when caught encourage the old folks who are inclined to believe in the Darwinian theory. The dancing-hall is a prominent feature in Rocky Point life, and well patronized in the most melting weather, probably for the reason that indulgence in terpsichorean exercise costs nothing, the proprietors of the Point furnishing good music and extending a free invitation to all in the hope that they will reap their reward by largely-increased sales of cooling beverages. Other attractions are the tower, to ascend which is exercise enough for one day; a bowling-alley that drives a thriving business, and an old bear, which lives on sarsaparilla contributed by his admirers, and has worn the hair from his hind-quarters by "sitting up" for the amusement of the children.

Owing to the veteran reunion which occurred here to-day, the attendance has been very large, probably not less than 15,000. The boats from Providence, Newport, and Fall River were crowded on every trip, hundreds came in yachts and sail-boats, and thousands by land conveyance. At a moderate estimate there were at least 1,000 vehicles on the grounds to-day. A more quiet and orderly assemblage of people never gathered. There were no drunken rows or disgraceful brawls, for the very reason that no intoxicating liquors are allowed to be sold on the ground. Those who love the beverages that cheer and inebriate must bring a private supply with them when visiting the Rocky Point, otherwise they will be compelled to quench their thirst with poor "small-beer" and very warm soda-water. To-day the dinner arrangements were such as to seriously incommode and disappoint many of the visitors. The second shore dinner, announced for 1:30 P. M., was reserved for the exclusive benefit of the veterans before alluded to, most of whom, judging from their appearance, are veterans by reason of age rather than by virtue of service in the field. In consequence of this arrangement, the crowd indulged in mutterings, both loud and deep, and many hundreds, returning by the early boats, carried home a vacuum which they had anticipated filling with a generous allowance of clams. I heard one man, who looked as though he would make short work of a bushel of clams and then have a few "chinks" left for brown bread and other fixings, say that Rocky Point was played out, and that Silver Spring was the place to get good clams, and plenty of them. But notwithstanding the threatenings of this individual, I am inclined to think that Rocky Point will be king of this clam-baking State for some time to come. The New-Yorker who would come to the Point can take either the Newport or Providence route. If he chooses the latter he will usually find the boats crowded and be compelled to listen to the melancholy fiddle and harp of a couple of full-grown and very dirty sons of Italy.