

Three sketches by Michael DeCiantis in which he  
talks about various aspects of life in Natick,  
Rhode Island. They are entitled:

TROLLEY CAR  
O'MARINARA  
BAND CONCERT

## TROLLEY CAR

I was always fascinated by the trolley cars. I loved to watch the motorman at the controls and listen to the conductor make his own special whistle - a signal for the motorman to close the doors.

While most of the trolley car conductors and motormen were arrogant, irritable and cross, I knew two of the friendliest men on the Old Crompton-Hope line, Lou Foley was the motorman and his conductor was "Puggy" Bicknell.

I'll never forget Puggy Bicknell when we were kids and his one-man stage shows. He used to charge one penny to see his show. The show lasted about five minutes. Puggy held these in the middle of a four-seater outhouse on a rainy day. All gathered around and in would come Puggy dressed as a tramp and holding a stick hobo style. He would mount a chopping block and say: "Give me a chair. I have a stone in my shoe." He then sat down on the stump, took off his shoe, peeled off his sock and removed a pebble. That was the

end of the show.

Then one night when I got my usual free ride on the last run from Crompton to the car barn at Clyde, I got up my nerve and asked Lou if I could run the trolley car. To my surprise he acquiesced right in the middle of the Centerville Bridge. He gave me some brief instructions. I took his place. He released the air brakes and I was on my way in full charge. All went well until we reached Arctic, then the steep incline began. With my eyes straight ahead, thrilled at running the car, I did not notice that it began to gather speed. Soon the old car trampled and swayed, bearing down the tracks at top speed. It was going hell bent for election. I was so scared, I didn't know what to do. Lou behind me was yelling to deaf ears and reaching for the controls. Finally with a jolt that landed my head in the window sash, the car came to an abrupt halt. Lou had managed to seize the brakes. Puggy at the rear of the car could have cared less. Maybe he was thinking about the days when he was the star of his own show.

O'MARINARA

Some of the people in Natick formed an amateur theater group and put on plays at St. Joseph's Hall. All of the theatrical enterprises took place there because the hall was equipped with a stage.

I remember one play very vividly because I was chosen to be what actually amounted to being a live prop. The play was "O'Marinara", based upon a Neopolitan song by that name.

At one point during the performance the stage was cleared and a rowboat was placed in the center. The wheels were attached to the boat so that it could be moved easily were very carefully concealed. A man came out and sang O'Marinara. To enliven this solo I was placed, dressed in short pants and a sailor's blouse, directly in front of the boat. I had to sway back and forth in rhythm with the song. Behind me the boat was pulled by two ropes worked by two men concealed behind the curtains. The ropes, however, remained in full view. As I swayed, the boat swayed. The two men working

the ropes felt that they had accomplished a great feat to keep time with the music.

Weeks of planning went into these performances. They could put on about six shows a year. Everyone looked forward to the next performance. They were fully discussed at home, in the mills, and in the various stores around the town with great pride. The actors felt their important role in providing such pleasure to the community.

## BAND CONCERT

People made their own social life in Natick. One of the key events occurring twice a week was the band rehearsals which took place in a hall on Baker Street. Everyone who loved music would go to hear the band.

When a player struck the wrong note, the conductor would bang his baton to stop the playing. This is when the fun began.

"I heard that, it was Tony", one man would say.

Tony was \_\_\_\_\_ "No, that was Joe. Tony is the best trombone player in the band". On and on it went. Everybody got into the act - playing resumed. A whole piece was played without a mistake. Then you heard the crowd: "Ah, that was good", as if they were in some way responsible. Without their participation the band couldn't go on.

When the bandmaster would compliment the band with a rare "Bravo", the crowd basked in the reflected glory and went home completely satisfied.