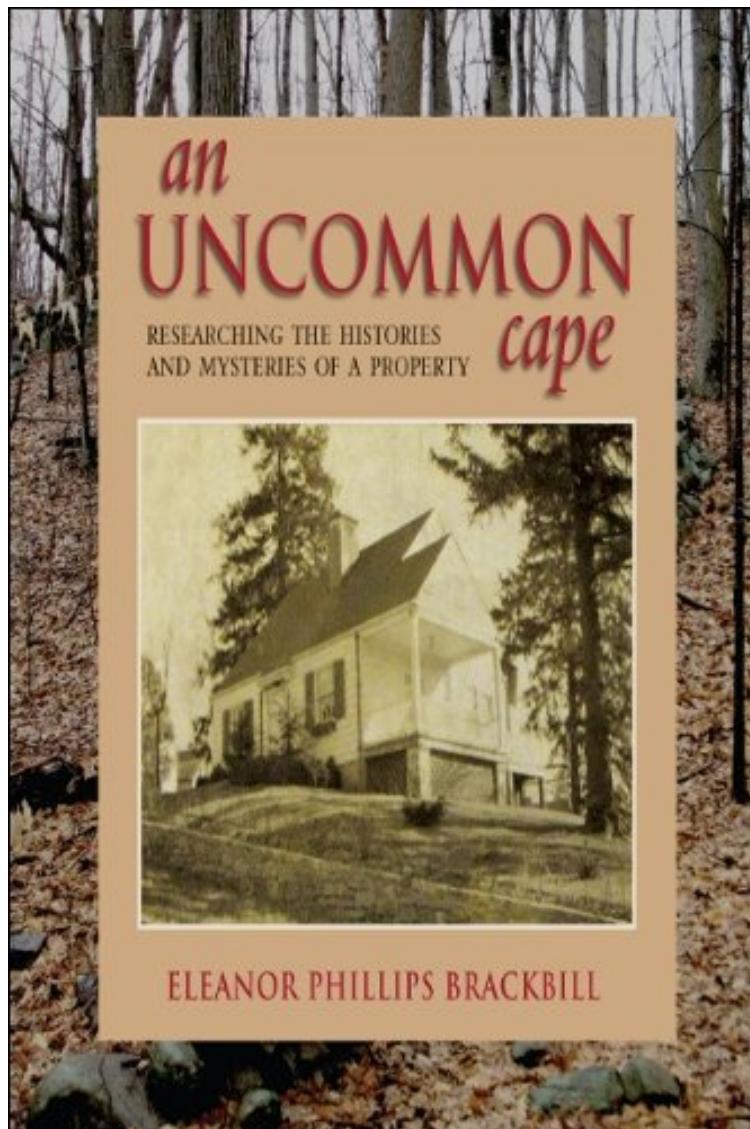


An Uncommon Cape: Researching the Histories and Mysteries of a Property

Eleanor Phillips Brackbill

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Eleanor Phillips Brackbill : An Uncommon Cape: Researching the Histories and Mysteries of a Property before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised An Uncommon Cape: Researching the Histories and Mysteries of a Property:

6 of 6 people found the following review helpful. Loved this book By Jane Ohara I loved every page and every sidebar of this book. It's stunningly researched and engagingly written. The author's willingness to track down every detail with an open mind about the answers to the mysteries of her house and land is truly remarkable. Her account of the

conflict between Westchester County's Loyalists and Patriots during the Revolutionary War was my favorite part, but I also loved the story of how a once rural farming area was transformed into one of the U.S.'s preeminent suburban communities. It's the story that can apply to many neighborhoods in the Eastern U.S. And of course the mystery of the "monkey rock" is truly fascinating! As Brackbill notes, "everyone lives somewhere," and researching the history of the place you live is available to everyone. For anyone curious about who lived in your home before you did, or what took place on the piece of land where you live, *An Uncommon Cape* offers really helpful and inspiring advice. Right after finishing the book, I found myself talking to a neighbor who has lived in my century-old apartment building much longer than I have, and picking up some bits of information that I can now pursue. I think my own journey of discovery has begun!

Three mysteries precipitate an investigation into an otherwise ordinary suburban property, revealing a past inextricably woven into four centuries of American history. When Eleanor Phillips Brackbill bought her suburban Westchester house in 2000, three mysteries came with it. First, from the former owner, came the information that the 1930s house was "a Sears house or something like that." Thrilled to think it might be a Sears, Roebuck Co. mail-order house, Brackbill was determined to find evidence to prove it. She found instead a house pedigree of a different sort. Second, and even more provocative, was the discovery of several iron stakes protruding from the property's enormous granite outcropping, bigger in square footage than the house itself. When queried about them, the former owner told her, "Someone a long time ago kept monkeys there, chained to the stakes." Monkeys? Was this some kind of suburban legend? A third mystery came to light at closing, when a building inspector's letter contained a reference to the house having had, at one time, a different address. Why would the house have had another address? Her curiosity aroused, and intent upon finding the facts, Brackbill gradually peeled back layers of history, allowing the house and the land to tell their stories, and uncovering a past inextricably woven into four centuries of American history. At the same time, she found thirty-two owners, across 350 years, who had just one thing in common: ownership of a particular parcel of land. *An Uncommon Cape* not only tells the story of an eight-year odyssey of fact-finding and speculation but also answers the broader question: "What came before?" and, through material presented in twenty-two sidebars, offers readers insights and guidelines on how to find the stories behind their own homes. Eleanor Phillips Brackbill is former Curator of Education at the Neuberger Museum of Art, Purchase College, SUNY.

A detective story set in her own backyard, Eleanor Phillips Brackbill's book shows the rich stories even our own homes can tell us if we take the time to hear them. What to most looks like a common residential Cape-style home in a suburban neighborhood can tell us more about ourselves as New Yorkers than anything we learned about in school. This book is a testament to the value of historic preservation and an appreciation of all that is our past, including our victories, our failures, and our faults. Jay A. DiLorenzo, President, Preservation League of New York Eleanor Phillips Brackbill's in-depth genealogy/biography of the house in which she lives and the land on which it sits is a brilliantly written model of superb research and storytelling. It recognizes the opportunity, perhaps the responsibility, to learn and record and pass along to future generations all that can be found out about the history of property for which we are transient stewards. Her *Uncommon Cape* is a perfect vehicle for bringing back to life four centuries of enthralling regional (and American) history while allowing many interrelated, but yet unsolved, mysteries to live on. Brackbill ably succeeds in convincing us that the past is not even past! Charles Duell, President, Middleton Place Foundation and author of *Middleton Place: A Phoenix Still Rising* Home ownership has become, for better and for worse, a profound part of contemporary American identity. Eleanor Phillips Brackbill delves into this terrain quite literally by piecing together the genealogy of her home, which she reconstructs through diligent archival detective work (and even the occasional late-night trek through the woods). As such, her study is as much about the craft of historical inquiry as it is about the vicissitudes of a particular chunk of real estate. With sidebars that offer research tips placed throughout the text, the book will be a useful guide for those interested in pursuing their own historical investigations. Michael Lobel, author of *James Rosenquist: Pop Art, Politics, and History in the 1960s* A page-turning read. I got totally caught up in the history of a county, a country, and a sturdy little house. Brackbill's meticulous research fascinates and will cause me to dig into my own house's story its moves, its occupants, and its alterations. Lucy Hedrick, author and publishing coach "A detective story set in her own backyard, Eleanor Phillips Brackbill's book shows the rich stories even our own homes can tell us if we take the time to hear them. What to most looks like a common residential Cape-style home in a suburban neighborhood can tell us more about ourselves as New Yorkers than anything we learned about in school. This book is a testament to the value of historic preservation and an appreciation of all that is our past, including our victories, our failures, and our faults." -- Jay A. DiLorenzo, President, Preservation League of New York "Eleanor Phillips Brackbill's in-depth genealogy/biography of the house in which she lives and the land on which it sits is a brilliantly written model of superb research and storytelling. It recognizes the opportunity, perhaps the responsibility, to learn and record and pass along to future generations all that can be found out about the history of property for which we are transient stewards. Her *Uncommon Cape* is a perfect vehicle for bringing back to life four

centuries of enthralling regional (and American) history while allowing many interrelated, but yet unsolved, mysteries to live on. Brackbill ably succeeds in convincing us that the past is not even past!" -- Charles Duell, President, Middleton Place Foundation and author of *Middleton Place: A Phoenix Still Rising* "Home ownership has become, for better and for worse, a profound part of contemporary American identity. Eleanor Phillips Brackbill delves into this terrain--quite literally--by piecing together the genealogy of her home, which she reconstructs through diligent archival detective work (and even the occasional late-night trek through the woods). As such, her study is as much about the craft of historical inquiry as it is about the vicissitudes of a particular chunk of real estate. With sidebars that offer research tips placed throughout the text, the book will be a useful guide for those interested in pursuing their own historical investigations." -- Michael Lobel, author of *James Rosenquist: Pop Art, Politics, and History in the 1960s* "A page-turning read. I got totally caught up in the history of a county, a country, and a sturdy little house. Brackbill's meticulous research fascinates and will cause me to dig into my own house's story--its moves, its occupants, and its alterations." -- Lucy Hedrick, author and publishing coachAbout the AuthorEleanor Phillips Brackbill is former Curator of Education at the Neuberger Museum of Art, Purchase College-SUNY.