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THIS WAS ALWAYS HOME

A new documentary chronicles the Kennedy family's salad days in Hyannisport.

"I always go to Hyannisport to be revived, to know again the power of the sea and the master who rules over it and all of us."—President John F. Kennedy

It's no secret that the late John F. Kennedy loved Cape Cod. During his fewer than three years as president, the Kennedy Compound became the summer White House and the tiny village of Hyannisport entered the national lexicon. The compound grounds fostered some of the era's most iconic scenes: the Kennedy children running to greet the Marine One helicopter, John and his brothers Bobby and Ted playing touch football on the lawn.

More than 45 years later, *At the Center of the World: Hyannisport and the Presidency of John F. Kennedy* brings the particulars of the era into focus. The documentary by Andrew Fone illustrates the role the Hyannisport small village in Barnstable played on the world stage, the importance the place has had for the Kennedy clan, and the impact of a president's presence on a close-knit residential neighborhood.

The idea for the film came from the John F. Kennedy Hyannis Museum. "The shorthand title of my idea was 'Friends and Neighbors,'" says Rob Sennott, president of the board of directors of the John F. Kennedy Hyannis Museum Foundation. Sennott wanted to have the film completed

sooner rather than later, many of the friends and neighbors with vivid memories of JFK were aging. In the months since the film was completed, Senator Edward Kennedy has been battling brain cancer and Patrick Butler, a well-known Hyannis attorney who shares his childhood memories of the president in the film, died of surgical complications in January at age 54. "I felt like the clock was ticking, and I wanted to get something down to capture firsthand memories and anecdotes of that time," Sennott says.

In 2005, the museum hired Fone, a Centerville resident and documentarian who had previously completed *Lady of the Sound*, a documentary about the Wianno Senior sailboat, to bring the project to fruition. Fone, who is married to the niece of a foundation board member, was up to the task. He had covered his share of politics as a news producer for CBS and Fox networks, and as a child he read dozens of biographies of John and Robert Kennedy. He relished the opportunity to chronicle a memorable and uniquely American setting through the stories of those who experienced it.

JFK and Jackie frequently returned to the Hyannisport water-front home, opposite, where the president spent many happy hours as a young man.

BY DONNA V. SCAGLIONE | PHOTOS COURTESY OF JOHN F. KENNEDY HYANNIS MUSEUM



JFK and members of the famed WWII PT 109 crew play an impromptu football game.



In 1948, Ted catches a toss from JFK on the compound lawn.



The documentary features some rare photographs and film footage, showcasing JFK's love for Hyannisport.

To satisfy a public hungry for an up-close look at the handsome family, JFK and Jackie pose for the media during a Hyannisport photo shoot.



When Fone first considered the project, he wondered whether he could access enough footage for an entire movie, but a visit to the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum in Boston relieved his concern. There, he was given tape after tape to review. He discovered that defunct movie reel companies had donated films to the National Archives, which subsequently distributed copies to the presidential library, that he could use as sources. His CBS News connections also helped. "Honestly, if I tried to make this film 20 years ago, I think it would have been an uphill struggle," he says.

The movie, which had its local premiere last fall at the Hyannisport Club, is built around an interview with Senator Ted Kennedy. "He is the last of the four brothers, really the last of a political dynasty that's captured the American imagination for a century," Fone says. "I knew if I was able to sit down and do an interview with



In 1931, the boisterous Kennedy family gathered on the beach for a Hyannisport family photo, including from left to right, Bobby, John, Eunice, Jean, Joe Senior, Rose, Pat, Kathleen, Joe Junior, and Rosemary.

The village's significance to the family . . . is stated succinctly by Senator Kennedy early in the film. "There were times when we were scattered, but this was always home."



In 1948, John, Jean, Rose, Joseph Senior, Ted, Pat, Robert, and Eunice reunite in Hyannisport.



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JFK drives young Caroline to her horseback riding lessons at an Osterville stable.

him ... I could weave the interview with [other interviews] and the pictures, and it would be an all-encompassing film about Hyannisport. Senator Kennedy was really key to the movie."

The film's chronology opens on a high note—Election Day 1960—and continues through the despair of JFK's assassination and funeral roughly three years later. The footage in between is wide-ranging: joyful, poignant, ordinary, and history-making. The movie depicts what was in some ways a simpler time, with the family riding in their own car to St. Francis Xavier Church on Hyannis's South Street only to be surrounded by an adoring crowd after Sunday mass. President Kennedy would graciously mingle with people until Barnstable Police cleared a path for the car to head back to Hyannisport. "They were a very public family, but I also found that they were a very private family," Fone says.

"The Kennedys were always really savvy when it came to portraying a public image," he continues. "... I just think they were very clever the way they ran campaigns and marketed themselves. But I also think the country took joy in seeing the little children." The film includes many pictures of the president with his children, John Jr. and Caroline. We see the usually reserved Jackie Kennedy waterskiing, we observe the sportsman president golfing and sailing the *Honey Fitz*, and we watch him driving a convertible to the Osterville stables where Caroline rode her pony, Macaroni. Weekend dinners were held at the different houses of the Kennedy brothers in and around the compound.

Hyannisport was also the scene of serious government

business. Brambletyde, a home on nearby Squaw Island which the president rented for his family, was where he received news in July 1963 that the Russians had agreed to the Limited Nuclear Test Ban Treaty. On the Brambletyde lawn, veteran newsman Walter Cronkite interviewed the president about his political future, his last interview on Cape Cod. Several local newsmen, part of the compound's press entourage, shared their memories with Fone on camera. *Cape Cod Standard-Times* photographer Gordon Caldwell remembers seeing an inexperienced summer police officer trying to prevent a man from entering the compound. "This man looked over at me and said, 'Hey boy, tell him who I am,'" Caldwell says. "It was [Vice President] Lyndon Johnson."

Overall, Fone says the project surpassed his expectations. In addition to being a vehicle for preserving history, Fone and Sennott hope the film will be used to educate younger generations about the issues that confronted the United States during Kennedy's tenure as well as a way to see Hyannisport when the president put it on the map.

The village's significance to the family, on the other hand, is stated succinctly by Senator Kennedy early in the film. "There were times when we were scattered, but this was always home." 🏠

For more information about the documentary, visit www.jfkhyannismuseum.org or call the museum at 508-790-3077.

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