

His Adopted Town Fond of Gray

By JOHN M. CREWDSON

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STONINGTON, Conn., March 25.—One of the favorite gathering places on Saturday afternoons here is Keane's News Shop on Water Street. The old men of the village like to stand and gossip outside, while other citizens prefer to talk to the owner, Frank Keane, as they wait for the afternoon papers to arrive. Yesterday, Mr. Keane, like nearly everybody else in Stonington, was talking about Louis Patrick Gray 3d, who, he recalled, used to drop in often to pick up a paper when he was a year-round resident of the town. That was before he moved to Washington in 1968.

The Talk of Stonington

“He's a very honest man — everybody that ever talks about him says that,” Mr. Keane was saying just before he was interrupted by the arrival of fresh copies of The New London Day.

Mr. Keane helped the driver unload the bundles, then frowned for a moment at a front-page headline speculating that the Senate would not approve the nomination of Mr. Gray to head the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

'A Funny Thing'

“I don't think so,” he said slowly. “I've got a feeling that he's going to be confirmed. I think he's proved himself, been honest with his answers. But, as I say, politics is a funny thing.”

The Grays keep more to themselves these days, the townspeople say—not out of snobbishness, but because the family's time together in Stonington is, more limited than it used to be.

Mr. Gray, who has been the F.B.I.'s acting director for the last 10 months, lives and works five days a week in Washington, but flies here almost every Friday night to spend the weekend at his large, modern A-frame house on a hill above the village's harbor.

Mrs. Gray, however, is a frequent visitor to the shops along the six-block section of Water Street that amounts to the town's business district. And one woman, who, like many, asked not to be named said that Mr. Gray could always be counted on to make at least one appearance each weekend.

“If you come to 7 o'clock mass tomorrow morning,” she said yesterday, pointing across Wadawanuck Square to St. Mary's Church, “you'll see him.”

No Shortage of Talk

At exactly five minutes to seven this morning, Mr. Gray's red and white Pontiac LeMans pulled into the square and he and his wife Beatrice, both Roman Catholics, walked briskly into the church.

There was no shortage of talk this weekend about Mr. Gray. He came to Stonington Friday after three days of testifying before a Senate committee. Many of the Democratic members are trying to block his nomination, and there are indications that the White House is displeased with the frankness of some of its nominee's answers.

A visitor to a gift shop down the street from Keane's who had been discussing with the woman behind the counter the purchase of a birthday present for a small boy, shook his head sympathetically about “that poor guy.”

“Gray's really put Stonington on the map, though,” he said after a moment's reflection. “I listen to WEZE in Boston, and all the time it's ‘L. Patrick Gray of Stonington, Connecticut,’ not ‘L. Patrick Gray of Washington, D. C.’”

“They ought to let him off the hook or give him the appointment,” the woman said.

After customers had left, she confided that although most of the people in Mr. Gray's tiny adopted home town had been following his plight closely, no one would think of embarrassing him by making a fuss if he appeared on the street.

“You see how we treat our celebrities,” she said, “just like one of us. That's why people come to Stonington — they can come to a small place and be themselves.”

A Barber's Recollections

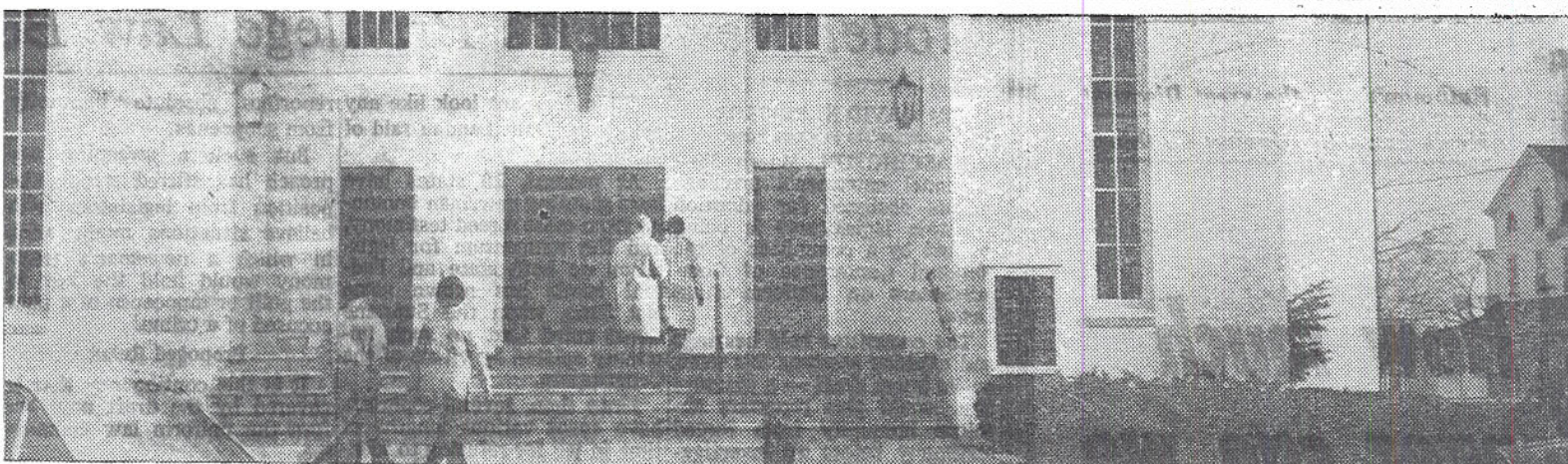
One man who remembers Mr. Gray from the old days is Edwin D'Amico, a retired barber who recalled that Mr. Gray used to come into his shop in nearby Mystic “every other Friday night.”

Mr. D'Amico said that even after Mr. Gray's retirement from the Navy as a

captain in 1960 he used to ask that his hair be cut “to military length — maybe a little tighter” than regulation.

“A barber can tell in a minute whether a man wants to talk or not,” Mr. D'Amico said. “Pat Gray was very quiet — one of the quietest men I've ever met, but always friendly and cordial.”

“That's why I was so happy when I heard he was going up for the director. From what I knew about him, I figured he wouldn't have any trouble getting confirmed.”



L. Patrick Gray 3d, acting F.B.I. director, and his wife, going to service at St. Mary's Church in Stonington, Conn., yesterday