

Ralph A. Horne:

In 1975, Ralph A. Horne, our CNA unofficial historian, penned his history of the South end, excerpts of which will appear on the website over the upcoming months. See his work on South End architecture in the January CNA website. In addition to his historical research and writing skills, Ralph is an expert in chemistry, marine chemistry, history of atomic theory, philosophy, painting, theology, and first amendment law.

He taught at MIT, and has been a minister, lawyer, painter, Victorian antique expert, and the designer and engineer of his own, hand-built car. Today, at 76 years of age, he's busy writing short fiction, poetry and self-published novels on everything from New Orleans' seedy underbelly to an autobiography of John the Beloved Disciple. To the left are some facts about Ralph, our column's author and our favorite modern-day renaissance man.

Degrees or Certifications:

B.S. Chemistry, MIT

M.S Chemistry, University of Vermont

M.A, Philosophy, Boston University

PhD. Chemistry, Columbia University

Art History studies, San Francisco Art Institute

Museum School at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

Ordained Church of Life Minister, Universal School of Life

Suffolk Law School, LLD

Reason neighbors love him: The wisteria vine growing at the base of his homemade chapel in the alley behind his Wellington Street home. Every June, if you look, its huge hanging purple blossoms crown the South End roofline, 40 ft. in the sky.

Seen around: Taking his daily walk to the Victory Gardens, weather permitting.

Surprising facts on a surprising man: Ralph wrote the entry on "Water" for the Encyclopedia Britannica, had the USSR purloin his textbook on marine chemistry, constructed the kiosk outside the BCA, has paintings on exhibit at the Boston Public Library, and built (from scratch) his very own car out of wood, caning, and linoleum. Also, one of the last to see Janis Joplin alive.

Most famous relative: Ralph is descended, on his mother's side, from the Coffin family of Nantucket. The Coffins were a great seafaring family, manning many of the whaling ships setting forth from the North Atlantic in the 18 th century, including the Essex. Both the Essex's Captain Pollard and the ill-fated cabin boy, Owen Coffin, are great, great, great, etc. relations of our Ralph Horne. When a

particularly vengeful sperm whale attacked the Essex in the South Pacific and destroyed the ship, Captain Pollard sent the survivors out on life craft. With no food or water, many of the ship's crew died. But some survived after lots were drawn as to who would be dinner. Pollard cannibalized his nephew (Owen Coffin). The Essex and its nemesis, the legendary whale, were made famous by Melville's version of the story in "Moby Dick."

Best hobby, among many: Ralph is the proud (original) owner of a 1953 MG TD 2 seat convertible roadster which he occasionally takes to car shows along with his other showstopper, the 1929 "Ralph mobile"—a vehicle he built out of wood, caning, and linoleum.

Strangest brush with the law: Aside from a youthful brush with the law incident to a panty raid at Barnard College, Ralph's strangest brush with the law occurred several years ago. When Ralph arrived at his antique double-barrel shotgun house in New Orleans he found two dead bodies in his yard. Weeks later, back in Boston, he received a citation from the City of New Orleans for the crime of littering!

South-ender he misses most: Betty Gibson, the original visionary and real estate broker who saw the South End's charm before anyone else dared. "She was the right stuff: a southern belle with chutzpah. I liked her presence. She was strong, and I like strong people."

Favorite buildings in Boston: Horticultural Hall on Mass Ave; The old Museum of Natural History, now Louis Boston on Newbury Street; City Hall; The Procter building at 100 Bedford St; and I.M. Pei's John Hancock building—says Ralph, "It's elegant to look at—and at every angle."

Favorite place in the South End: Worcester Square for the balance between the buildings and the greenery and its serenity.

~This Spotlight was compiled and written by Jim Milke and Roberta Benjamin.