

Monomoy Schools Author, Diplomat, Nickerson Descendant, William Walker Is Glad To Be On The Cape

by Debra Lawless

William Nickerson Walker's third spy novel, "Target Switzerland," will be released later this month.

In retirement, Walker, 82, is a prolific writer, an indefatigable golfer and an energetic vice president of the Nickerson Family Association, Inc. (NFA). In the past he was an international businessman and financier, diplomat, government official and partner in a large Wall Street law firm.

Two years ago, Walker and his wife Janet moved from their home in New York to West Yarmouth. As a 12th generation descendant of William and Anne Nickerson, the 17th century founders of Chatham, Walker was familiar with the Cape. He spent childhood summers living with his grandmother in Harwich Port; later, as a teen, while playing baseball, he roomed in Chatham in a house behind the Chatham Squire. So the Walkers' move to Cape Cod was a homecoming — one that was observed by the entire Cape.

"It's kind of a funny story," he said during a telephone interview last week. On one of the first evenings in their new home, the couple ventured out to a Yarmouth-Dennis Red Sox game, the first of the night season. Walker chatted with a man who turned out to be the league's publicity director. Walker told the man that in the summer of 1957 he had played for the Chatham Town Team of the Lower Cape Cod League and had "a terrific" season. (Walker's 1957 season has, in fact, been dubbed "amazing" and "magical.") The man arranged for Walker to throw the first pitch for the Chatham Angler's in June 2018. Walker ended up on the front page of the regional daily newspaper and on local radio.

"So I immediately became a bit of a celebrity," Walker says.

In his new community, Walker set out



William Walker. REBECCA ARNOLD PHOTO

to make "a whole new circle of friends." He took up golf at Bayberry Hills. And he donated an old dictionary, then a set of old crockery to the NFA. He was voted onto the NFA's board in early November 2019, and became vice-president in May of this year. Of late he has been working with local historians to preserve the oldest part of a house on Shell Drive that has just been purchased and is slated for demoli-

tion. The NFA is looking into moving the house's one-room addition, which is said to have been built by William Nickerson's son William in about 1700, to its property in North Chatham.

"I'm very excited," Walker says. "If it is what we think it is, we want to preserve it, make it a part of the Nickerson tradition."

Now, to get back to Walker's writing career — an author he loves is Alan Furst, who writes historical spy thrillers.

"His first dozen or so were just wonderful and I would devour them when they came out," he says. "He has an inventive novelist's ability to create plot lines that I didn't think I could emulate."

Walker, in turn, looked for a historical narrative that would give his book a focus. In his writing, he specializes in creating the "rich atmosphere of the epoch." Walker's first novel, "Danzig" (CreateSpace, 2016),

takes place in Central Europe during the 1930s as "the looming menace of Nazi oppression hung like a dark cloud over the free city of Danzig." He followed this in 2018 with "A Spy in Vienna," set in Austria in 1938. Both novels were well-received by Amazon reviewers. "Reader27" wrote, "I would rate Walker's two novels... at the top of the genre." Another reviewer wrote, "I had tears at the end."

The third novel will also feature Walker's spy Paul Muller.

Helping Walker create his sense of place were the two years, from 1975 to 1977, that he and his family lived in Geneva. President Gerald Ford had named Walker director of the Presidential Personnel Office. Later, Ford named him deputy special trade representative, serving as U.S. Ambassador and chief U.S. trade negotiator in the Tokyo Round of GATT Multilateral Trade Negotiations in Geneva. (GATT is a post-World War II tariff agreement entered into by many countries.)

Before working under Ford, Walker had served as a senior economic adviser in the Nixon administration during the Watergate era. He describes Nixon as awkward, "very uncoordinated" and even "uncomfortable" in interpersonal relationships — a "peculiar" trait in a politician. In contrast Ford, with whom Walker met twice a week in the Oval Office, was "very athletic, with an athletic bearing." Walker has written a memoir of that period for his family.

Now that they have lived here for two years, the Walkers are "very pleased with the Cape." Of their three grown children — Gilbert, Helen and Joanna — one lives in nearby Providence. Although he doesn't relish being shut in during the pandemic he, like many others of Nickerson and Mayflower descent, is happy that he has returned to what you might call his ancestral land.

"It's a privilege to be a part of the descendants," he says. But he says he believes the town's rich history is for everyone to enjoy. "I hope other members of the Cape Cod community who aren't blood relatives will embrace the historical legacy as well."

"Target Switzerland" and Walker's previous novels are available through Amazon.com and AuthorWilliamWalker.com.

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