

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Summer House Books

William Zinsser · Thursday, July 28th, 2011

There's nothing like the library of a summer house to reverse the tides of literary improvement. How the nation's English teachers must sigh, having assigned as summer reading such edifying works as *1984* and *Lord of the Flies*, to think of their charges curled up with the glorious chestnuts of yesteryear that line the shelves of cottages by the sea and cabins in the woods. Never weeded out, they are an archive of American popular taste in the earlier years of the 20th century.

Our first summer house was on Long Island, in the village of Westhampton Beach. It was a shingled structure that had seen many additions and also many subtractions, some inflicted by the historic hurricane of 1938, which left a three-foot-high watermark in the parlor. The house came furnished, as many summer "cottages" then did, and some of its tables and dressers were known as "hurricane furniture," having floated across the bay, unclaimed, from the beach houses on Dune Road that were blown away by the storm.

But beneath the insults of time and weather the house had the charm of early American summer-by-the-sea architecture and décor: bay windows, wicker settees, marble bathroom sinks, a glider on the front porch. The elaborate dinner sets owned by the original matron—fish platters and cruets and soup tureens, which we never used—were part of our daily landscape.

The house also came with a library of summer-house books...

More...

Re-posted with permission.

This entry was posted on Thursday, July 28th, 2011 at 6:28 am and is filed under [Fiction](#). You can follow any responses to this entry through the [Comments \(RSS\)](#) feed. You can leave a response, or [trackback](#) from your own site.

