



ASSOCIATED PRESS

A grandfather clock with a casting made of newspapers appears next to a fireplace, partially made of newspapers, at The Paper House in Rockport, Mass. Elis F. Stenman, a mechanical engineer, began building the house in 1922.

The paper house

Dwelling made of old newspapers
stands tall after 78 years

By Jay Lindsay

Associated Press

ROCKPORT, MASS. | There's an old adage in the newspaper business that's meant to keep journalists humble: "Today's newspaper is tomorrow's fish wrapper."

That saying doesn't hold true at The Paper House.

The house proves that today's newspaper can become something far more enduring — a two-room cottage, a lamp, even a grandfather clock. The house and almost everything in it is made of old newspapers.

"Pretty weird, huh?" says Edna Beaudoin, the caretaker and grandniece of its builder, Elis F. Stenman.

Weird, indeed. But this tribute to one man's obsession is also a bit of a historical record. The papers that make up the walls and furniture tell of Charles Lindbergh's flight across the Atlantic, the flight of the Zeppelins, even the disappearance of Amelia Earhardt.

The house, in the seaside town of Rockport, was built in 1922, and Mr. Stenman worked on it until his death in 1941. He originally planned to cover the outside with clapboard and use the newspaper as insulation. But after the newspaper survived the winter, he got curious.

Mr. Stenman, a mechanical engineer, was an amateur inventor who liked fiddling. He even invented a steam iron, though it was never patented, Ms. Beaudoin says.

Why his inquisitive nature became a catalyst for building The Paper House is not known.

Mr. Stenman read three newspapers a day, and that habit became one source of building materials. As his project gained



The exterior of The Paper House is surrounded by trees in Rockport, Mass. The house and almost everything in it is made of old newspapers.

renown, neighbors and friends started supplying papers. In the end, an estimated 100,000 newspapers were used.

Mr. Stenman started with a wooden frame, roof and floor, and installed running water and electricity. The outer walls are pressed newspaper, and covered in varnish for weatherproofing. A porch added in the 1930s provides more protection from the elements.

Mr. Stenman used rocks and boards to press the sheets of newspaper in glue and make the walls. The inner walls are thinner, with upholstery tacks for decoration.

The furniture is made with newspapers rolled tightly on a wire, then used as building blocks. Mr. Stenman's creations include a rocking chair, cot, radio cabinet and electric lamps.

A sign on one desk boasts, "This desk is made of the Christian Science Monitor." Another desk is made entirely of newspapers hailing Mr. Lindbergh's trans-Atlantic journey. The grandfather clock is made from

papers from all 48 states, before Alaska and Hawaii were admitted to the Union.

Even after several coats of varnish, the newspapers are legible and offer a window into the pre-World War II years. Some, like an advertisement for a used Ford for \$1 down, show how much things have changed. A "Sox lose" headline shows how they've stayed the same.

Ms. Beaudoin doesn't run the house for profit, charging admission on an honor system. Several thousand people a year visit, she says. Comments in a guest book include, "Wild!," "Environmentally correct," and "I'm going to make one."

Though Mr. Stenman's motivation is a mystery, Ms. Beaudoin doubts that starting a trend or recycling were among them. Whatever the reason, the fact the house has stood for 78 years is pretty good, Ms. Beaudoin says.

"That's really a long time," she says, "When you consider that it's paper."