



Dennis Historical Society Newsletter November 2018

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The Next DHS Board Meeting will be held on Tuesday, November 13th, 2:00 pm at the Dennis Memorial Library 1020 Old Bass River Road, Dennis Village--Members Welcome

Please send information & stories for the newsletter to Dave Talbott at the DHS Website email address: info@dennishistoricalsociety.org

On the 11th Hour of the 11th Day of the 11th Month of the Year 1918, the War to End all Wars was Over .

One hundred years ago this month, after raging for more than four years, the guns fell silent. Thus, the *Great War* ended. It was up to that time, the most horrific example of man-made carnage the world had ever known. There is no better place to find the history of the men and women of Dennis who served their country during the war than in Nancy Thacher Reid's definitive volume of our Town's History, *Dennis, Cape Cod*, pages (583-590). Everyone is urged to read, or reread these pages on November 11th. As has been said in many past DHS Newsletters, by many editors, and by those who love Dennis' history, *thank you Nancy* for what you have given to all of us!

 *It is fitting that those who served should be recognized and honored here.* 

Dennis Village

Earle M. Davidson, Carleton F. Gray, Frederick S. Hall, Harry Hall, James Hallett, Richard E. Hefler, Edward W. Heymann, Roy B. Heymann, Anson H. Howes, Henry W. Howes, Thomas T. Kelley, William R. Kelley, Edgar L. Lord, John Cole Hayden Richardson, Earle F. Sears, Obed Howes Shiverick, Earle H. Whittemore

Dennis Port

William E. Baker, J. Wilton Berry, Henry W. Brooks, Robert F. Chapman, Henry L. Chase, Michael P. Crotty, Lester H. Edwards, Alton B. Ellis, Leon D. Ellis, Raymon L. Ellis, Lester M. Gilbert, Herbert G. Horton, Harold A. Kelley, Julius G. Kelley, L. Malcolm Kelley, Parker Kelley, Elmore P. Kendrick, Patrick Mahoney, Arthur Rogers Nickerson, Neil S. Smith, Harry Young

East Dennis

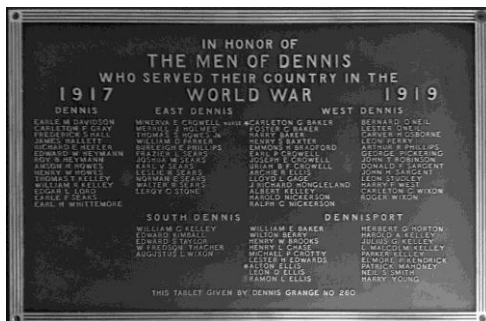
Minerva E. Crowell, Edwin F. Ellis, Robert Russell Ellis, Merrill J. Holmes, Stanwood H. Howes, Thomas H. Howes, Jr., William D. Parker, Burleigh E. Phillips, Frazier Louis Sears, Joshua M. Sears, Karl V. Sears, Leslie R. Sears, Norman E. Sears, Walter R. Sears, Bruce Stone, Leroy C. Stone

South Dennis

Henry L. Chase, Edward F. Kimball, Ernest H. Leach, William B. Marshall, Irving L. Pierce, Ceasar F. Pina, Edward S. Taylor, William Fredson Thacher, Augustus L. Wixon

West Dennis

Carleton G. Baker, Foster C. Baker, Harry R. Baker, Henry S. Baxter, Hobart Austin Beebe, Emmons H. Bradford, Munroe P. Cahoon, Herbert Clinton Chase, Earl P. Crowell, Joseph E. Crowell, Uriah B. F. Crowell, Archie R. Ellis, Lloyd L. Gage, Edward A. Garfield, Henry Garfield, J. Richard Haugland, Albert Kelley, Harold Nickerson, Ralph C. Nickerson, Ira Bernard O'Neil, Lester O'Neil, Carver H. Osborne, Leon Perry, Arthur R. Phillips, George Pickering, John T. Robinson, Donald F. Sargent, John H. Sargent, Harry F. West, Carleton C. Wixon, Roger A. Wixon



A Bit of Cape Cod History of the Great War

James S. Smyser (1871-1930) was my mother's uncle, one of three brothers who graduated from MIT in the class of 1896. One, Albert E. Smyser, was my grandfather. A fourth brother, graduated from Harvard Medical School the same year. I still smile when I think of how my grandmother used to always refer to MIT, as "Tech." Members of the Smyser Family summered, or lived on Cape Cod, beginning in the late 19th century. The name "Smyser" no longer has a presence here, except on headstones in *Island Pond Cemetery* in Harwich. I am the only living relative on the Cape.

"Uncle Jimmie," as my mother always called him, was the third youngest of the brothers. How the three were all in the same graduating class, ranging in age in 1896, from 23 to 27 is a bit of a mystery. Maybe my great grandparents got a special 3-fer rate? No one ever explained it to me. However, you can see by James' birth year, he was not yet 46 when the United States entered the World War on April 6, 1917. The cut off birth date for the Selective Service Act was September 13, 1873. Despite being exempt because of his age, "Uncle Jimmie," volunteered for service and was commissioned an officer, primarily due to his engineering degree and background. A Captain in the Ordnance Department of the United States Army, he sailed for France from Boston on the *USS President Grant*, departing on Sept. 23, 1918, and arriving in St. Nazaire, France on October 7, 1918. For many, the *War to End all Wars* was almost over. For Captain Smyser, the danger and the horrors of war were about to begin.

Because of his expertise in armaments, he remained in France after the war ended to help disarm and dispose of the bombs, shells and weapons left after the carnage ended. He served with the Second Army of the AEF, the American Expeditionary Forces in the St. Mihiel Sector of France, until May 15, 1919. Although he did not see combat in the war, he spent three days in Army Hospital No. 91 at Commercy, France recovering from injuries from a "bursting shell."

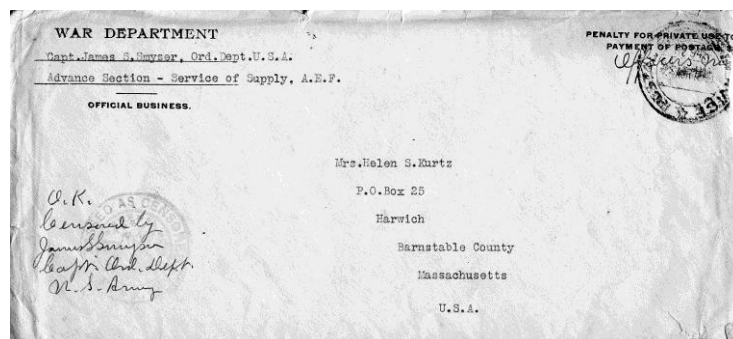
In a letter, addressed to his sister, Mrs. Helen S. Kurtz, written to her and his mother on April 22, 1919, is one of the most moving descriptions of the horrors of war which I have ever read. The letter was posted to P. O. Box 25, Harwich, Barnstable County, Massachusetts, U.S.A., and after he OK'd it himself, as the censoring officer, it was mailed from France. It is almost impossible to believe that the war had been over for more than five months when the letter was written. It is quoted here, in part, and that part is being shared for the first time to commemorate the 100th anniversary of *Armistice Day*.

"Yesterday, Major Cecil, of the Regular Army, invited me to go with him to inspect the Citadel, and also the outer defenses of Verdun. I had been to Verdun before, but had not visited the outer defenses. Each time I try to describe some of the things I have seen, I feel the utter impossibility of doing so in language that will convey anything like the horror with which they are filled. Try to image a whole countryside in which every village is a heap of ruins; where the ground has been churned up, over and over again by bursting shells; where hundreds of acres of fine forest have been killed by gas and torn by battle; where leg bones and woolen socks protrude from leather boots, and ribs lie scattered about amid broken guns and unused rifle ammunition; where black wooden crosses meet the eye on either side of the road, mark the graves of French soldiers, not by hundreds, not by thousands, but by hundreds of thousands. Then, as if to complete the picture of woe, imagine scattered groups of women and girls in black searching among the ruined landscape for graves of those they have lost. 'Oh, I could weep my spirit from mine eyes.' Poor France has suffered so much."

Dave Talbott



Captain James S. Smyser,
taken outside Paris just
before returning home from
Brest on August 20, 1919.



**The envelope of the letter
posted from St. Jean-lez-
Buzy, France on April 23,
1919.**

Going, Going, Gone!!

The Society's storage space is becoming taxed to the limit. In an effort to free up some space we have decided to dispose of a large collection of bibles. In the 1800s every family who could possibly afford one had one prominently displayed in the front parlor. Many were beautifully embossed with gold leaf and almost everyone had a family chart between the Old and New Testament and each one weighed five pounds, more or less.

Our dear friend and DHS Librarian Burt Derick never met a Bible he didn't want to keep. He faithfully copied each family chart and those are in a folder that we will keep. We have found homes for several, but still have eighteen of local provenance. If you are related to any of the following, or would just like to have one as a conversation piece, I would be delighted to pass it along to you.

I have consulted with four members of the clergy about how to dispose of them and they each said they just threw them out as everyone read the same. Please contact me. **Phyllis Horton**, my telephone number is 508-394-0017.

*Benjamin P. and Olive Sears 1855, Southworth Nye 1847, Jacob Stone Howes 1801,
Heman Sears, Kelley 1857, W. Powell 1858, Cora Cahoon/Thaddeus Brown 1850, Obed Howes 1818
Oren Howes 1818, Eben Hall 1809 + 1849 Testament, Lydia C, Hall 1792, Paul Sears 1801,
Eben Sears 1827, Urial Howes 1827, Heman Baxter 1821, Heman Baxter Ca. 1844,
Nathan Sears 1844, James Berry/Charles Saunders 1873, Seth Crowell 1830*

Editor's Notes:

Our own Digital Archives threw all of us a bit of a curve! Last month's "*This Unknown House*" has been positively identified by DHS and HSOY member Bob Kelley. Many will remember Bob from his wonderful talk last March, *Saltworks in Dennis and Yarmouth During the Federal Period (1775-1825)*. Along with the identification, Bob sent an article he wrote about the house which will appear in a future newsletter. Here is a tantalizing bit from his article:

"The so-called Grapevine house, a classic full Cape structure, sits crookedly on the corner of Pleasant Street facing Union Street, formerly the road leading to the Ferry at South Yarmouth."

"This Unknown House"



DHS Glass Plates from Joanne & William Crowell. There are 8 boxes of 4x5-inch glass plates, most of which have a list of contents. The plates have now all been mixed, and there is no positive identification of them

(Photo & information from the Dennis Historical Society's Digital Archives)

This month's "Unknown House" picture is from Photo\Album 05\Glass Plates\Box 9\09, the DHS Digital Archives. No other information available, except what appears under the picture, and it may be a school house. If anyone can identify it, or provide any information, please email Dave Talbott at: info@dennishistoricalsociety.org.

With the identification of last month's house, readers are now batting a revised .600!

Dennis Historical Society
P.O. Box 607
South Dennis, MA 02660-0607

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***Happy
Thanksgiving***



*The Board of the
Dennis Historical Society
wishes everyone a
truly wonderful day*

*We all have so
much for which to be
Thankful*



Coming in December

Coverage of our Annual Meeting

Your New Officers and Directors

*Posters of our December Events:
(by Kevin)*

*Christmas at the Manse, December 9th
1-4 pm*

*Dennis Maritime Museum Christmas
Open House, December 15th,
11am - 4 pm*

*DHS Christmas and Afternoon Tea at
Captain Baker's House
December 15th, 1-4 pm*

'This Unknown House'