

April, 1979

Our Changing Peninsula

Last month Mr. Donald Eldredge brought to the Dennis Historical Society his usual fine presentation, this time explaining the geology of Cape Cod. How the Cape changes, grows, and disappears made a fascinating study accompanied by photographs, maps and drawings. We thank Mr. Eldredge for giving DHS members and guests a most informative and interesting evening.

V.I.C. Hall

The meeting at which Mr. Eldredge spoke was the first that the Society has held in V.I.C. Hall, Depot Street, Dennisport. The Hall stands on the site once occupied by the Dennisport Grammar School. This was one of the District Schools built in the 1860's in each village, and it was destroyed by fire on March 17, 1929.

The money to build a meeting hall for Dennisport was raised by the Willing Workers, a group dedicated to the improvement of the village. This same group erected the elaborately inscribed stone archway around the main entrance to Swan Pond Cemetery and is responsible for the erection of the War Memorial at the northwest corner of the intersection of Sea Street and Route 28. The group was connected to the Village Improvement Club, which owned the hall now known as V.I.C., until it was purchased by the town in March 25, 1974.

Most of the labor involved in the building of this Hall was voluntary, and among the volunteers were Alton Robbins, Edward Chase, Emery Nickerson, John Long and Stanley Sweetser. One of the fund raising projects was the sale of pictures of the old school for \$1.00 each.

The Hall was used from its beginning in 1930 to present for card parties and has been the scene of dances, socials, and concerts as well as the home of a Little Theater Group (led by Ellen M. B. Shaw), Girl and Boy Scout Troups and 4-H Clubs. During World War II, it was used by the Red Cross for First Aid Classes and Sewing Groups. In the fifties it was Teen Town for Dennis young people. Most recently it has become the center of Dennis Head Start Program for pre-schoolers.

By the way, the DHS would welcome contributions of programs, clippings or other memorabilia of affairs held at V.I.C. or any of the other meeting halls in our series. These will be filed at the Manse in fireproof file cabinets and can be used for reference by anyone. Please mail to W. Jeremiah Burke, librarian, Box 607, South Dennis 02660 or call 398-8842. (Thanks to Phyllis Robbins, Pauline Nickerson Kennedy and Mrs. Stanley Sweetser for help with this article.)

Cape Verdean Distinctives

Dr. Williston Holbert will speak to the DHS on May 3 at the V.I.C. Hall at 7:30 PM about our Cape Verdean citizens and their interesting cultural heritage. Harwich Historical Society will be guests and we hope many folks of Cape Verdean descent will also attend. This should be a most interesting program. Mark this on your calendar.

What is Pewter

A soft metal, easily molded and very popular for tableware formerly and now. Mr. Barry Cliff of Pewter Crafters of Cape Cod will tell us more about American Pewter--what it was and what it is today--when he speaks for the DHS on April 11 at Carleton Hall at 7:30 PM. As usual, guests are welcome.

West Dennis Tour Starts Cycle Season

Bicycle riders, join our first tour of the season in West Dennis. The trip will start at West Dennis Community Building on School Street at 2:00 PM Sunday, April 29th. Gail Hart will guide the group again this year as the group travels through the village, up to the cove, around Kelley's Pond, and down to West Dennis Beach. A highlight of the tour will be a stop by Marion Crowell Ryder's home where she will talk on her book, Scuttlewatch, and its setting in view of the real scuttlewatch.

A new bicycle tour is being written which will include stops at Corporation Beach, the Indian Burial Ground, Scargo Lake, and the theater. The first run of this tour will be on Sunday, May 20th. There will be more information on this next month. For details on either tour, call Paula Bacon 394-5739.

April Calendar

- April 2 Ezra H. Baker Field Trip Group will meet at the Manse, 10 AM
- April 11 7:30 "American Pewter" talk by Mr. Barry Cliff of Pewter Crafters of Cape Cod, Carleton Hall, Guests Welcome.
- April 17 Regular Board Meeting
- April 19 Patriots Day (O.S.) Old Farmer's Almanac says "Cape Cod alewives start to run"
- April 20-22 National Park Service, Seminar on Historic Preservation. Cape Cod National Seashore. For information call Mr. Peirce 385-9135.
- April 29 2 PM Guided Bicycle Tour of West Dennis Historic Sites. Meet at West Dennis Community Building at 2 PM
- MAY National Historic Preservation Month
- May 3 7:30 PM "Cape Verdean Distinctives" Dr. Williston Holbert, VIC Hall
- May 5 2 PM House dating class, Mrs. Pauline Derrick, Jericho House.
- June 17 Town Birthday Luncheon, Lighthouse Inn, West Dennis

Selecting Our Selectmen

On May 7, Dennis voters will again have the opportunity to elect a member to the Board of Selectmen, who mind the business of the town and see that the decisions made by the town meeting are carried out. Cape towns have been traditionally run in this way since 1662 when Plymouth Colony decreed that its townships should choose three to five "Celectman" out of the freemen in each town to manage town affairs (subject, of course, to the approval of Plymouth!). The selectmen's duties included settling all differences betwixt any Indians and the English, settling debts and differences person to person, not exceeding 40 shillings, and remanding to the General Court at Plymouth (in the name of His Majesty) all more serious offenses.

From time to time other instructions and duties were given to the selectmen--one stating that they must warn strangers who had no permission to be in their town, that they must appear before the court and secure approval. (It was even tougher in those days to be accepted as a new comer!)

The first Selectmen recorded from Yarmouth (and therefore of Dennis) are listed in the Plymouth Colony records of March 6, 1666/67. One wonders why Yarmouth took so long to select their leaders? The records of town meetings from 1639 to 1676 were lost when fire destroyed the dwelling of Edmund Hawes, town clerk, so we know nothing of the procedure by which they were chosen. The selectmen were Mr. Anthony Thacher, Mr. Edmund Hawes, James Matthews, John Miller and Joseph Howes. The term of office was for one year, and this is the oath administered: "You shall according to the measure of wisdom and discretion God hath given you faithfully and impartially try all such cases between party and party brought before you, also give summons respecting your trust according to order of the Court, as a Celectman of the Towne of Yarmouth for the present year, so healp you God."

We can ask no more from our Selectmen today than that they exercise such wisdom and discretion as they have done in the past in making decisions for our town. Let us hope that the electorate will likewise use wisdom and discretion. Take this seriously, voters, for you are continuing a tradition of three hundred and twelve years. Let's make this board of Selectmen the best yet in "wisdom, discretion, and faithfulness".

Reports from our Busy Committees

The Ezra H. Baker Field Trip Committee has visited Jericho House and will meet on April 2 at the Manse for a guided tour and planning session. A script is being edited for a slide presentation for the children, and Mr. Walter Morley is busy taking pictures. We have a sewing committee working on costumes, a group learning sea chanties and a steering committee trying to pull it all together in time for the children's field trips in late May and June. Thanks to the two house committees and the school for their wonderful help and cooperation. We aim to have the best local history program in any school on the Cape. Call Paula Bacon 394-5739 if you would like to be involved.

The House Dating Committee is also busy working on standardizing and cataloguing the information on each of our dated houses. If you are interested in learning how a house can be dated, the committee will hold a class at Jericho on Saturday, May 5 at 2 PM, led by Mrs. Pauline Derrick. Remember we are now dating houses of 100 years or older. It's fun and a real education to go over old deeds and tax records. For more information call Mr. Edmund Nickerson, 398-3174 on weekends, or come to the class!

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

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