

DENNIS MEMORY DAY

You probably have already read about our nice day in Dennis village, where, despite a mix-up in meeting places, we had a most enjoyable afternoon with old friends. Over a hundred were there and we deeply appreciate the cooperation of the Dennis Union Church which accommodated us at the last minute. The tape made at this meeting will preserve for us and posterity many interesting stories of Dennis as it used to be, as told by those who remember or have heard stories from their elders. Thanks to all who came, to Josh and Elinor Crowell and Richard and Nancy Howes, who recruited some of the long-time residents, and to Phyllis Horton and Margaret Maher, who served donuts and cranberry juice to all. And as always, we are indebted to Ben Thacher of Old Sound Museum for recording the entire afternoon. Next village to have its memories shared is West Dennis. That will be on Sunday, April 29, at the West Dennis Community Building at 3 P.M. Be sure to be there.

MARCH GOES OUT LIKE A LION

The winds of March brought a real northeaster to our shores and with it a genuine shipwreck. Once a common occurrence, now a vessel sitting high and dry on Nauset is something of a tourist attraction. Fortunately, all of the crew are safe. Shipwrecks and loss of life in great storms were frequent happenings here on the Cape, and although each such event brought its share of sadness, it was accepted that such dangers were an inevitable part of life which centered around the sea. Not all lives lost to the sea were the result of storms such as that which battered us last month. Jessie Hall of Dennis was knocked overboard by the boom from the Packet Sloop Sally, just a few hundred yards off Nobscusset Point in 1816. And this entry is found in the Yarmouth Vital Records: "Simeon Hawes, bound a-fishing with Capt. David Howes, sailed the 4th of May 1791, came up on the quarter deck, pitched overboard and was drowned the night he went from home,". One of the most mysterious sea tragedies I know about occurred on a calm, sunny day in Sept. 1844. The fishing Schooner Commerce was spotted at anchor off Truro, having been away some time on a fishing voyage. The spotter spread the word, and the families prepared to welcome back their menfolk. But no crewmen appeared, and after a time, a townsman rowed out to the vessel and found no one aboard. After an interval, the schooner's boat was found floating upside down with a plank stove in. Then the grim reality - one by one the bodies of the 10 crewmen were washed ashore, along the beaches from Wellfleet all the way to Barnstable. Some were recovered on the beaches of Dennis over the course of more than a month, and the citizens of the town tended to the corpses and carried them home to their families for burial. No explanation was ever found as to why 10 healthy young men, all swimmers, drowned such a short distance from the shore on a day when hardly a ripple disturbed the waters of the Bay.

A COURSE IN CAPE COD HISTORY

As we go to press, final arrangements are being made for D.H.S. to sponsor a course in Cape Cod History. The course will be offered on five consecutive nights starting on Thursday, April 26, at 7:30 P.M. at the VIC Hall in Dennisport, and there will also be week-end field trips. It will be taught by Robert Barlow, Science Coordinator for the D-Y School System, who has previously taught this course at Evening School, and a more detailed one for Worcester State College. If you are interested, call Mr. Barlow during the day at 398-7600 or send a postcard with your name and phone number to "History Course", P.O. Box 607, So. Dennis, MA 02660. Cost is \$12 per person, or \$20 per couple. We know that Bob has a wealth of experience and information that will make this course interesting, so let's hear from you.

THE OLDEST FARM IN TOWN

Coming up at the Annual Town Meeting in May is consideration of the purchase for conservation of a tract of land between Route 6A and Sesuit Harbor, now known as the Whitfield Johnson land, but formerly land of the Chapman and Worden family. It has a beautiful vista and it seems that it would certainly be to the town's advantage to keep it as open land. Historically, it is probably a part of the oldest farm within the boundaries of the present town of Dennis. At the time that the town was settled as part of the grant to the proprietors of Yarmouth, Old Peter Worden and his son were already farming this piece of land, as well as many more acres to the south of 6A. The proprietors took exception to his being there, but that didn't seem to bother Peter, nor his son, Peter Jr. They just kept right on farming. Old Peter died soon after the proprietors received the grant, and has the distinction of being the first white man to be buried within the town's boundaries. His grave and that of his son and grandchildren are in a small family burying ground on the south side of 6A. A portion of the Worden's large farm is now the Community Gardens. The family name has died out in town, subsequent generations having moved away, probably seeking better farming conditions. One relic of the name remains in Worden Hall, now the art gallery of Donn and Nancy Devita. This fall, members of the Worden family will hold a reunion here in Dennis, as the present generation visits the place of their earliest roots. There was another private reunion of a member of the Worden family and a Dennis resident, which I will tell you about next time.

April 12 7:30 P.M. Executive Board, Home of Nancy Reid.
 Beginning April 26 Course in Cape Cod History with Robert Barlow. See article.
 April 27 Bus Tour to Bristol, Rhode Island. Call Paula at 394-5739.
 April 29 3:00 P.M. "West Dennis Memory Day" at West Dennis Community Building.
 Refreshments and reminiscence. Please share with us.
 MAY IS HISTORIC PRESERVATION MONTH.
 COMING ATTRACTIONS: Lady Slipper Walk, Bike Tour of Dennisport, South Dennis
 Memory Day and The Annual Birthday Luncheon.

CUP PLATES ARE MOVING FAST

Since the kick-off at the Mid-Winter Luncheon, the sale of our first cup plate depicting the Town Seal has been brisk. They are now available in teal and light amber, as well as the original pressing in clear. We anticipate that our final color will be cobalt. Price is \$7, mailing costs \$1.50 additional. A limited number of seconds are also available in each of the colors at \$3. Plates may be purchased at Town Hall on Mondays and Wednesdays, 1-4 P.M., or by mail, from: Joshua Crowell, P.O. Box 963, Dennis, MA 02638. This will be a limited edition, and the mold will be broken in the very near future.

A PILOT BOAT ROUNDS THE HORN

It's time to start talking about getting the boat in the water again. O, happy day! Our boat is called Padre, which is a nickname which my husband has acquired over the years. As we cruise slowly in and out of Bass River (6 MPH, Leave No Wake!), I like to read the names of other boats and try to guess why they are so called. Some are very clever, some sentimental and some romantic, especially for the sail boats. My very favorite name for a sailing vessel is an old one, Dancing Feather. Doesn't that bring a delightful picture to mind? The Dancing Feather was a pilot boat, whose duty was to escort larger vessels in and out of the tortuous channel leading through the many islands in Boston Harbor. Pilot boats were small schooner-rigged, two-masted vessels, dependable and highly maneuverable. When wealth and leisure allowed retired seamen and merchants to indulge in sailing for pleasure, the sailing yacht was developed along these same lines, with hull trimmed and masts sheared for speed. The Dancing Feather was a very special pilot boat to me, not only because of her fanciful name, but because she carried one of my ancestors on a great adventure. When gold was discovered in California in 1849, Dennis men, like those in all parts of the world, were infected with gold fever. Among those men was Capt. Stephen Hall. Capt. Stephen came from a sensible family of farmers and fishermen. He had married a neighborhood girl, Jerusha Howes, and they had three young children. But the possibility of striking it rich lured Capt. Hall and some of his neighbors to Boston, where they bought or hired the Dancing Feather to carry them in search of gold. Equipped for mining and outfitted for a long and hazardous journey, they set sail for the West Coast. I do not know of any log or personal account of the voyage. We can only guess at the discomforts and dangers encountered as wind and waves battered the little Feather. She was less than 100 tons in burthen about 58' on the keel, with a 20' beam and 7' depth of hold. In fair weather, she undoubtedly danced gracefully before the westerlies, but rounding treacherous Cape Horn, how she must have struggled to stay aright. However, in spite of her tiny size and the overwhelming difficulties of the Horn, her voyage was successful, due to good luck as well as expert seamanship, I'm sure. But in California, the good luck ran out. There was no rich strike of gold. Back home in Dennis, Stephen's wife Jerusha died, leaving their children in the care of relatives. Stephen himself fell victim to one of the diseases which were epidemic among the speculators on the West Coast due to poor sanitary conditions. In 1857, Capt. Hall returned to Dennis in failing health, and in May of that year he died. What became of the Dancing Feather I know not, but she lives in my memory as a graceful, tiny craft, dancing before a gentle breeze.

DOINGS OF THE BOARD

Watch next month for an announcement of plans to celebrate the town's 191st birthday....The Board plans to announce the decision on the logo contest in May.... Field trips for the Ezra Baker School children are being planned....We are inventorying our belongings. If you have any property of the D.H.S. in your possession, please notify Phyllis Horton 394-0017....We seek an expert typist who can transcribe our tapes of Memory Days - will anyone volunteer?

Dennis Historical Society
 P.O. Box 607
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