



MORE ON CRIME IN DENNIS

Exploring the annals of crime in Dennis has turned up some interesting and sometimes tragic facts. One thread that seems to weave through the years is the consequences of having a close relationship with old John Barleycorn.

In seafaring days rum was a common beverage on board ship and at home, and we must assume problems arose in those days just as they do now. The temperance Movement which began here in the 1830's under Rev. John Sanford in South Dennis was the result of years of overindulgence. Every church in Dennis had a temperance group whose aim was to stamp out the evils of demon rum. Their efforts had an influence on many people as Temperance was a strong theme for about 100 years. State and local prohibition came from this movement. An early state directive restricted sale to a minimum of 15 gallons at a time, which put it out of reach of most local residents. That did allow a few local entrepreneurs to make a little illegal profit. One such was a person who operated through the stage coach driver (perhaps it was the driver himself, who knows!?) who would stop at the corner of now Rte. 134 and Satucket Road and retrieve some empty jugs from the bushes on his trip west and deposit full jugs on the return trip. I don't know how this transaction was paid for but it surely must have been paid for in advance. For years that location was known as Rum Crossing by some or Jug Corner by others.

Year after year expenses for "detecting illegal sale of liquor" was included in the annual budget and an article would appear in the warrant to "vote by ballot 'yes or no' in answer to the question 'shall licence be granted for the sale of intoxicating liquors in this town'". It was voted 'no' until the 18th Amendment was enacted in 1920 when federal prohibition became the law. Rumrunners flourished on our shores during the 1920's and early 30's, and "bathtub gin" was produced in a few Dennis kitchens and barns (but that's another whole story!). In 1933 the "Noble Experiment" ended with the passage of the 21st Amendment which repealed the 18th, and after a "lengthy hearing" our Selectmen Clarence M. Nickerson, Owen B. Murray, and William Crowell issued the first licence for the sale of beer and wine in Dennis, with a full licence following in several years.

In 1915 temperance was a solid fact in our village of West Dennis, however there were a few back-sliders. On March 24, 1915 Elliott Wixon, 28, lured Winfred Cahoon, 24, and Frank Chase into the swamp with the promise of liquor he had hidden there. Upon reaching the swamp Wixon produced a rope and ordered Chase to tie Cahoon to a tree. He then pulled out a pistol and announced his intention of shooting both Cahoon and Chase. Cahoon sprang at Wixon hoping to disarm him, but Wixon fired and the bullet entered Cahoon's temple, killing him instantly. With that, Chase started running for home with Wixon in hot pursuit. Chase reached home and locked the door. Apparently that action made Wixon aware of the enormity of his deed. He then went to Cahoon's home, told the father what he had done, offered to lead him to his son's body, and turned the pistol over to him and said, "Shoot me now if you wish."

It opportunely happened that Deputy Sheriff Richard S. Gage was passing through West Dennis at that time. He placed Wixon under arrest and locked him up at Barnstable County Jail for the night. Wixon was taken before Judge Walter Welsh (grandfather of the present Judge Robert Welsh) at Second District Court in Harwich Center where he was remanded to the Grand Jury sitting in April. He pled not guilty and the case was continued to the October sitting where he then pleaded guilty in the second degree. He was sentenced to "the term of his natural life at hard labor, one day thereof at solitary confinement, and the residue of said term at hard labor". He was paroled in 1944 and his sentence terminated in 1957. Where liquor enters into this story is this--even though there had been bad blood between these men for a considerable length of time the promise of a drink was enough to overcome Cahoon and Chase's dislike of Wixon--and led to that tragedy.

And of course there was the "Pink Tea Altercation" down to Punkhorn. A man "from away" named Mr. Stone had come to Dennis seeking employment. He found a job and took a room at Mrs. Keziah Walker's in Punkhorn. After paying his board and buying his necessaries he usually had enough cash left over to purchase some illegal liquid refreshment. One Saturday evening Mr. Stone invited a few local young men to his room for a "pink tea" as such affairs were called. The tea took a nasty turn when the host, who obviously had overindulged, brandished a pistol. He was disarmed by a guest and the gun was thrown out of the room, whereupon he broke a chair over this friends head. Needless to say, the conviviality of the evening had passed and the party broke up with everyone heading for home. However, one of the guests, William McAnistan, found he was being pursued. Mr. Stone had grabbed a rifle, retrieved the pistol, and was shooting at trees and houses as he followed McAnistan, shouting threats of dire consequences. William reached home, took the family shotgun and fired at Stone's legs. This no doubt had a sobering effect on Mr. Stone and the altercation ended. Dr. Hart was called and he removed 30 pellets from Mr. Stone's legs. After a brief recovery Mr. Stone left town--hopefully a wiser man, and quiet little Punkhorn settled down to more peaceful times.

AHOY SNOWBIRDS

As all you travelers return from wintering in sunny climes please remember to keep our Membership Chairman Isabelle Flynn up to date on your change of address. Isabelle does a remarkable job keeping up with you, but she's not clairvoyant--so drop her a note and she'll send your newsletter to the correct address. Thanks and welcome home!

CALENDAR

- Apr. 13 7:30 P.M. DHS board meets with Brendan and Maureen Joyce. (For you old timers--that was Dean S. Sears' home.)
- Apr. 17 2:00 P.M. Program on the Native American experience as it relates to the Wampanoags by Dr. Gloria S. Brundage. Carleton Hall. Refreshments.

THE FIRST FAMILIES OF CAPE COD

Our program for April will feature Gloria S. Brundage, Ph. D. who will talk on the Native American experience as it relates to the Wampanoag Tribe. Our NobsCUSSETS were part of the Wampanoag Nation, but they could not survive the cultural shock and diseases brought by European settlers and by 1797 the NobsCUSSETS were all gone. The only remnants of their existence here are the peaceful, little NobsCUSSET Burying Ground just off Rte. 6A overlooking Scargo Lake, NobsCUSSETT Road, and some artifacts which were discovered on Dennis lands. Some of these will be on display. Dr. Brundage is an Adjunct Professor at Cape Cod Community College and is the Native American member of the Cape Cod Commission. Come and learn about the people who welcomed our first white settlers to Dennis. It will be held on Sunday afternoon, April 17th at Carleton Hall, Dennis Village, at 2:00 P.M. Refreshments will be served. Bring a friend!

MARITIME WEEK 1994

The Josiah Dennis Manse will participate in the Maritime Celebration Week scheduled for May 7-15. This week will feature walking tours, lectures, maritime displays, light-house tours, and other events to highlight the rich maritime heritage on Cape Cod. Dennis has played an important role in that heritage. Ichabod Paddock of Dennis, who learned about whaling from our NobsCUSSETS was called to Nantucket to teach them his art--and we all know what happened after that! The salt works was invented by Capt. John Sears of East Dennis, and the Shiverick Shipyards produced some of the finest clipper ships in the world. The Maritime Wing at the Manse will be open on Sunday, May 15 from 2-4 P.M. featuring our "Shiverick Ships" slide show at 2:15 and 3:15. Look for the brochure which should be out about the time you receive this newsletter. A few attractions will be available on the Cape that are not usually open to the public. Do take this opportunity to see some of the historical treasures on the Cape--and, of course, do come to the Manse on the 15th!

ANCESTRAL ANECDOTE

Our prolific guest writer, Josh Crowell, is back with another story. He'll be getting his own by-line if he keeps this up!

My paternal grandfather, Joshua Crowell (1843-1922) was a life long resident of East Dennis. Basically he was a farmer, but turned his talents in many directions. He was a land surveyor, bank president, town official--having served as selectman, school committee member and auditor, elected and re-elected as Representative in the Legislature, and was a member of many sub-committees. Additionally he prepared wills, deeds, and other legal papers, and was a member and officer of the Grange.

"Gramp" was interested in genealogy and apparently conducted research regarding his forbears. I have a few notes that were amongst his belongings and will share one with you. This will show that the public records of the 17th century were quite complete. The following is entitled:

Extract from Charlestown Records

- 1634 Mrs. Crowe whose husband, Mr. John Crowe arrived the year following, was admitted as an inhabitant. She bought Mr. Jennings house same year.
- 1635 Mr. John Crowe was admitted as an inhabitant. Mr. Crowe and others named allowed hay ground. On the 22nd of February was warned to put his cattle with the Town herd.
- 1638 Allotted lands on Mystic side on ye 6th day of ye 11 month. Town agreed to have Mr. Crowes Bull for the Town's use for this year allowing him in consideration three cow commons for this year and liberty to work his bull two daies in a week.

Thanks, Josh. This was the same John Crowe who left big city life in 1639 and settled in Yarmouth (now Dennis).

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