

DENNIS HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER Vol.22 No.4 April 1999

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A NEW LOOK FOR THE NEWSLETTER

After reaching the ripe old age of twenty-two, Dennis Historical Society
Newsletter Vol. 22 No. 5 will look very different from this edition. We're going
modern, with a newsletter which will incorporate graphics and pictures, as well as a
whole new format. We're sure you will love our new look. Board members Tom Moran
and Beth Deck will be our new editor- and- compiler team. If you have news or items of
interest you wish to have included, please mail to Tom, at 44 New Boston Road, Dennis,
or Beth, P.O. Box 93, East Dennis. News should be received by the staff by the fifteenth
of each month. Now, watch your mail really carefully at the beginning of next month, as
you won't recognize the DHS Newsletter if you don't! And please, we want your comments.
Let us know how you feel about the new format by addressing Dennis Historical Society,
P. O. Box 607, South Dennis, MA 02660

AUNT ALICE

Once upon a time--long, long ago--when I was a little girl--it was the custom for the folks in each of our villages to produce, in the early days of spring, a stage presentation at the local Social Hall, (in our village Totten Hall, now known as Liberty Hall,)- a so-called "Old Folks Concert." I don't know for sure the origin of this terminology. Was it because the "old folks"--like my father who was all of forty-five years of age- took part? Or was it because the music featured in the performance was from an era long past? I can't say. But I do remember some of the featured acts. Powell Taylor, I think it was, played a few melodies on the musical saw. If you have never heard a tune performed on this primitive so-called "instrument," you have missed a unique experience! Then Mr. Bill Kelley would sing "Lost in the Cradle of the Deep". We all held our breaths, and then burst into wild applause as he reached the very deepest of those deep, deep notes. My dad sang in a quartet, which included the talented Mr. Taylor, Irv Whelden and Bill Kelley, although I can't recall their exact presentations. You must remember, I was very, very, young at the time.

However, etched in my memory is a number which was always met with enthusiastic and sincere applause. It was a duet by Aunt Alice and Mr. Frank Lewis. To my young mind, these were not just "Old Folks." These were very, very ancient folks--a miracle of longevity! How could they still be up and about at their advanced ages! (Mr. Frank Lewis was, in fact, only 74 when he died in 1943. Aunt Alice survived him by 10 years, and was 81 when she passed over in 1953.) No matter--in the early 1940's they seemed to this young attendee to be "Old Folks," indeed.

Their song was a beautiful rendition of "When You and I Were Young, Maggie." Mr. Frank Lewis had a fine tenor voice, and he crooned to his tiny wife as if he were courting her again. And, as I recall, Aunt Alice would join with a soft alto on the lines of the refrain: "Let us think of the days that are gone, Maggie, when you and I were young." They did seem like long ago days.

What I didn't know then, but know now, about the days when Aunt Alice was young! For Alice Maude (Baxter) Lewis was one of several folks living in South Dennis when I was young who had traveled around the world in sailing ships. Aunt Alice had accompanied her father, Captain Obed Baxter, on a journey to Hong Kong in 1882 when she was only 10 years old. Aunt Alice and Mr. Frank were brought to mind recently when Burt Derick shared a letter in his collection written by young Alice to her school teacher here in South Dennis, giving her impressions of life in the Orient.

On the return voyage, her father became ill and died, leaving her mother and the First Mate to navigate their way home. What tense days these must have been for young Alice, her sister Helen, and their grieving mother! I wish that when I was young, I had asked Aunt Alice about her adventures. I will have a belated opportunity to learn something about her voyage, however. A great-niece of Aunt Alice (Baxter) Lewis has promised to let me read Alice's diary, when the niece returns to Dennis from the South. I will be able to tell you more about the days when Alice Maude Baxter was young and sailed across the Pacific Ocean in 1882.

CALENDAR

April 14 7:00 P.M.

DHS Board meets at Jericho House

April 22 6:30 P.M.

Dennis 2000 Forum at West Dennis Community Building

Question to be addressed:

Going in to the millennium, how can the future of the Town of Dennis be directed in a way that will protect and preserve our environment and historical assets?

April 25 2 P.M.

DHS Membership Meeting at West Dennis Community Building

"Yesterdays in Dennis" Narrated Slide Show (see article)

Coming in May

May 7 and 8

Maritime Symposium Sturgis Library and Sheraton in Hyannis

May 12 7:00 P.M.

DHS Board meets at Jericho House

May 15 1-5 P.M.

Dennis Sea Captains in the China Trade

Josiah Dennis Manse Special Exhibit and Interpretation

Ezra H. Baker School field trips to the Manse will be held in May. If you can help, call Nancy Howes 385-3528

APRIL SHOWERS BRING MAYFLOWERS (AND HERRING)

April 15th means many things to many people. It is NOT the Ides of April. For some reason unknown to me, the 13th is the Ides of April. But it is the day when you can be almost sure you will find herring swimming up the Cape Cod streams, and mayflowers in blossom under the oak leaves and pine needles in Cape Cod woods. The schedule for the arrival of the herring depends on water temperature. This having been a warm winter, we can expect the herring to be on time. The arrival of the alewives is most exciting at the brook at the Brewster water mill. But we hope that herring will also run in Bound Brook, East Dennis, Quivet Creek in East Dennis and Dennis, and maybe into Kelley's Pond in West Dennis, due to the efforts of our Conservation Commission to return herring to our ponds.

Mayflowers don't depend on temperature. They depend on the number of hours, or really minutes, of daylight, so their arrival is more predictable. Look for them along the Rail Trail. If you find them, leave them for others to enjoy, for if you disturb the delicate root system, they will not grow another year. But do take a deep sniff before you depart. Both of these seasonal residents of Cape Cod, coincidentally, are called by names which are not precisely correct. Our "herring" is properly called an alewife. And our "mayflower", technically Trailing Arbutus, is, on Cape Cod, an aprilflower. But a rose by any other name, etc. I guess what I am trying to tell you is that April is a good time to get out and about and enjoy the beauty of Cape Cod. (I think there is something else about the 15th of April I should remember. Perhaps it will return to me!)

YESTERDAYS IN DENNIS

Our April meeting at West Dennis Community Building will feature a slide presentation of scenes of Dennis in by-gone years. This type of program has been very popular in years past and we hope many of you will be there to see scenes of a Dennis long vanished. Refreshments will be served and you will have the opportunity to visit with other folks who are interested in our town's fascinating history. See you there on April 25 at 2 P.M.

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