



Dennis Historical Society Newsletter

Volume 25 Number 4

April 2002

Calendar of Events

Thursday, April 18

Cape Cod in the Early 1900s

Native Eastham son, Don Sparrow, tells about Cape life in the "good old days."

Refreshments.

7:30 PM

Carleton Hall, Dennis

Saturday, May 18

Blue Water Wives and Mothers

1-4 PM

Opening exhibit in the Maritime Wing 1736 Josiah Dennis Manse How women carried on their everyday lives and raised their children while accompanying their husbands on the seven seas.

Saturday, June 1

Lady Slipper Walk on the Indian Lands

9:30 AM

Reservations requested
(508) 398-0376

Limited to 40.

Narrated walk over the Indian Lands Conservation Area led by horticulturist Shannon Goheen.

Meet at Town Hall parking lot,
485 Main St., S. Dennis



Rebekah Hancock with
Colby Nathaniel

Meet Your Board Members

Bonnie Hempel has, like so many Society Board members, a full plate. She is employed part time in the information technology field and yet is a member of the Dennis Arts and Culture Council, the Dennis Conservation Trust, the Village Improvement Society, the Yarmouth Art Guild, and a private homeowners organization. Bonnie was elected to the Executive Board as recording secretary in September of 2000. Keep in mind that although she followed a common pattern—spending many summers on the Cape--she did not move to Dennis permanently until 1998! Music, particularly the Boston Lyric Opera, is one of her many interests. In her words, serving as a volunteer docent at the Manse is the highlight of her summers in this "special place."

Virginia Lois Devine was elected to the Board as corresponding secretary in September of 2000. Although she was born in a barn apartment at the Belmont Hotel in Harwich, her early schooling took place off Cape. Later she attended Ezra Baker School where Richard Howes' mother was her home room teacher. Valedictorian of her class, Ginny's D-Y graduation was held at the Cape Playhouse.

Ginny attended Tufts University, Bouve Boston School of physical education and physical therapy. With a degree in education and a certificate in physical therapy, she was in the second group to be licensed as a physical therapist in Massachusetts. She married a psychiatrist and lived briefly at a hospital for 2000 mental patients. She and her husband then bought a 1735 house with a barn in Milton, eventually selling it to This Old House. In Milton, Ginny was president of the local League of Women Voters, a town meeting representative, and a church choir member. While raising four children she went back to school and worked for ten years as a staff physical therapist at Boston City Hospital. She moved to Dennis in 1997 where she is an election inspector and treasurer of Pathways Association, Inc., which maintains pathway access to a beach.

Burton N. Derick Burt is a 12th generation Cape Cod native, both sides. Though he spent his early life commercial fishing with his grandfather, Nathaniel H. Wixon, Burt graduated as president of his senior class at Yarmouth High School and went on to earn a degree in engineering physics at Graceland College in Iowa followed by an MS in physics at the University of Maine. Employed as a research physicist at the DuPont Company, Burt was involved in research on plastic optical fibers and laminated safety glass. He was for several years technical manager for the United States, Australia, Japan and New Zealand, building facilities in both Australia and Germany. He retired in 1997.

Burt is a member of the Dennis Historical Commission, the Josiah Dennis Manse Committee, the Dennis Historical Society Executive Board, and the Society's Librarian. He is also secretary of the West Dennis Graded School House Oversight Committee, vice president and genealogist for the Nickerson Family Association, director and vice president of the Swan Lake Cemetery Association, Cape Cod Genealogical Society cemetery project leader, an amateur archaeologist and an author. Burt and Ruth have been married 28 years and have a daughter, Rebekah, who recently gave birth to their first grandchild. (In our last Newsletter we inadvertently named him Colby Nathaniel Derick, when of course it should have been Colby Nathaniel Hancock!)

(Continued on page 2)

SAD NEWS

contributed by
Burt Derick

The Historical Society Library now has a computer copy of a whole series of letters dating 1850 - 1880. Transcribed from the originals (now in the possession of Edmond Nickerson of South Dennis), they constitute all of the correspondence received during those years by Susan F. Baker (daughter of Alpheus Baker) of South Dennis, including her school years (at Brooks Academy), her young adulthood (a milliner and seamstress), the letters from her only brother (a Captain of vessels), and from her husband, Reuben Whelden (who died young, at sea). The letters form a vignette of life of those times, and the South Dennis village happenings on a daily basis. They also contain gossip of local families, as well as true news and intrigues that never made the pages of the *Register* newspaper. These letters, fully transcribed by this author, are now being organized into a book, which will be fully annotated and illustrated.

Among these letters is one sent to Sarah (Percival) Baker, wife of Alpheus Baker Jr., and sister-in-law of Susan Baker. It was the document by which Sarah found out about the death of her husband. One can only imagine the feelings one would have in receiving such a piece of news - unexpected - with the knowledge that the loved one would never be seen again. In the modern era, we have closure in death by the funeral process, where there may be a memorial service, and a viewing, and an interment. In this case the interment was weeks before the news was received, and in a place far from home. Alpheus Baker left not only a young wife, but four small children.

To familiarize our readers with a bit of geography, Sourabaya (now spelled Surabaya), is on the island of Java in the East Indies, now Indonesia.

*On board Bark "C. C. Leary",
Sourabaya Aug 15th 74*

Mrs Baker

It is my painful duty, to write you the sad news of the death of your "Husband," on the 7th of this month at 7 P.M. on board of this vessel. He had been ailing almost since leaving "New York." at times, he would be better, and we would talk, so pleasantly about home. but for the last two weeks, he was entirely out of his mind. he could not take any nourishment hardly at all. As soon as I could get where a "Doctor" was to be had, I got him, but he said nothing could be done, that he might live, three or four days, and as we were only two days sail from this place. that I had better get him. as soon as I could. we left early in the morning, but he "died". that night. I was with him, when he "died." and was holding his hand, and he went off so easy. that I scarcely knew it. I laid him out, and dressed him. myself. with the help of the "Boys." and sewed the body. up in canvas. and painted it. for I was determined. it should be buried on shore. We came to anchor, here at noon of the 10th, at that evening. I followed the remains of my good "Friend." to the "Tomb." I bought a "Tomb." so that at any time, we can send a stone to be placed upon it, and that it can be identified. A day or two, before he died, he called for you, "Sadie. Sadie." nigh? As soon. as I heard him call. I came at once. he took my hand, and whispered. "Sadie! it was the last intelligable word.

The "Consul." has appointed me "Master of the Bark." I shall endeavor to get home. as soon as possible with all the "Captain's" property, and you may rest assured, that I shall do every thing I possibly can. for your interest. You can have one comfort. with your loss, that there was a kind "Friend" with your "Dear Husband." when he died, and that every thing I could possibly do. was done for him. that he is buried in consecrated ground. And now. my Dear "Mrs Baker," you must excuse me. if I have not. broken. this matter. to you. in so delicate a manner. as some might do it. for I hardly know. what I am writing. nor can I hardly see the paper for crying.

Respectfully

Henry H. Field -

LIBRARY HONORS RICHARD HOWES, CAPE CRAFTSMAN

In addition to all the work Dick has done at the Manse and for the DHS, he is now recognized for his restoration work on the Dennis Library cupola. The original cupola was given to the library by Mildred Nye in memory of her husband Willis in 1958. Time and weather took their toll and restoration was badly needed, but it had to look as it did when it was new. Not many of us have the time and patience and contacts to accomplish such a job, but leave it to Dick! Using original parts for templates he rebuilt the cupola from the base up. Calling on local talent and equipment for help, he has restored the cupola to its former glory. John Griffin helped turn the new columns on his lathe. Bob Wennberg supplied the wood and cut out blanks for the new capitals, and Richard Halvorsen turned the capitals on his antique lathe. Dick and his wife Nancy donated a new copper roof along with the cost of other materials and hours of Dick's labor to see the job properly finished. Their donations are given in memory of Dick's parents, Anson and Esther Howes. With the addition of a copper weather vane which is the gift of Mary and Bill Raycraft, the project will be complete. In honor of Dick's fine work and his and Nancy's gifts, the library cupola will be known as the Howes-Nye Memorial Cupola.



Richard Howes and Library Cupola
Photo Dave Talbott

WALLACE GARFIELD, A REAL FISH STORY *Thanks to Dean and Kay Garfield for permission to use these stories recorded by Betty Dean Holmes from an interview taped by her sister Priscilla.*

Born in 1905, Leverett Wallace Garfield grew up on Center Street in Dennisport. He started swordfishing with his father when he was only nine years old. One day they harpooned a 400 pound swordfish and his father put Wallace out in the dory to tend the fish and pull him in. In Wallace's words "All of a sudden the line went slack, and I looked all around the outside of the boat and couldn't see the fish. Suddenly, the fish pushed his sword right through the bottom of the dory, right between my legs! I didn't worry about sinking, I just put up the oar, the signal for Father to come get me. Father was in the big boat. He came along side and said, *What's the matter?* I answered *I've got a sword up through here.* The bottom of the dory was 3/4 inch thick wood. Father cut off the sword and we pulled the fish into the big boat by putting a rope around his tail and used the boom, so the wind helped us." The dory was pulled on board the big boat and the hole in the dory was plugged and patched.

When he was only twelve, Wallace sailed alone in his 14-foot Cape Cod catboat, fishing in Nantucket Sound off Dennisport. These small boats were inexpensive and specially designed for sailing and fishing in Cape waters. Wallace hooked a huge tuna—he thought it weighed as much as 800 pounds. That fish took him on a wild ride before it tired out. Wallace finally lashed the fish to the starboard side of his boat. He had no winch but he was determined to bring his trophy ashore. As he sailed with the wind coming across the boat and with the weight of the fish, the boat listed to one side. Heeling to the starboard side close to the ocean surface, Wallace was able to come about with the wind blowing against the sail. Now with wind at the stern Wallace had the leverage he needed to flip the huge fish right into his boat. The rounded bottom of the catboat meant the fish rolled toward the centerboard and acted as ballast, stabilizing the little boat. Wallace later told his children and grandchildren that "It was hard work being a fisherman." Sounds like the understatement of the year!



Dennis Historical Society

P.O. Box 607

South Dennis, MA 02660-0607

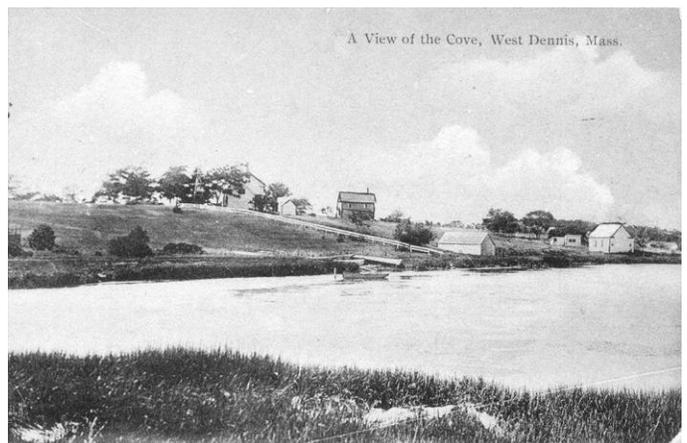
ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

Non-profit
Organization
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
Permit No. 2
South Dennis, MA
02660

THE WAY WE WERE

Levi Crowell, Jr. wrote in his autobiography:

My mother (*Julia Ann p. 1*) had a spinning wheel and a loom. I well remember seeing her spin yarn and weave cloth, and I assisted her in making candles by pouring the hot tallow into heavy iron candle molds and letting it harden. Tallow candles and oil lamps were the only means of lighting our houses then. At first we used whale-oil lamps, which made only a pretty poor light and gave off a strong, oily smell. When coal oil came into use, it was a welcome improvement. The row of bedtime candles was still lined up on the kitchen shelf, while the cheerful oil lamp on the sitting room table was the center of family activity. Some families put up oil lamps on posts near their gates to light their door-yards but, for the most part, the streets were pitch dark at night—unless there was a full moon. My mother always kept a lamp burning in a kitchen window that overlooked the Cove when we boys went



View of Grand Cove DHS Postcard collection

eeling at night, so that we could have a range to guide us home in the darkness. At night, on going to bed, the fire in the kitchen would be banked with ashes to keep the fire until morning. ...Every family had a tinderbox with flint and steel and tinder by which they got fire. pp 2-5