



Dennis Historical Society Newsletter

Volume 26 Number 4

April 2003

Calendar of Events

Wednesday, April 9, 7:00 PM
Board Meets at West Dennis
Graded School
Open to interested members.

Sunday, April 13, 2:00 PM
Jacob Sears Memorial
Library

23 Center St., E. Dennis
Barns of Dennis

Sumner Perlman, author, will tell of his love of old barns and how he decided which barns interested him enough to be in his book. Refreshments.

Wednesday, April 23, 7 PM
The History of Crowes
Pasture

W. Dennis Graded School
A celebration of the history of Crowes Pasture in cooperation with the Dennis Conservation Trust. **Jim Coogan** will lead an informal program of stories, reminiscences, and maybe even tall tales about this natural land area in East Dennis.

Saturday, May 17, 1-4 PM
Josiah Dennis Manse Exhibit
"Capt. Levi Howes, Master of
the Seven Seas"
Maritime Wing
77 Nobscusset Rd., Dennis

Wednesday, May 21
7:30 PM
Carleton Hall, Dennis
"Lightships of Cape Cod"
Doug Bingham, historian for the US Coast Guard Foundation will tell of the brave men who served in the US Lightship and Lifesaving Services.

This Old House

Captain Levi Crowell House *Phyllis Horton*

Like any old house anywhere this house of Captain Levi's has seen its fair share of happiness and contentment, sorrow and heartbreak, and perseverance. This is one of the few houses in town that has remained in the same family since it was built.

Levi was born in West Dennis in 1793 to Thomas and Ann (Howes) Crowell, the fourth of seven children. As with most young lads who grew up within sight of Bass River, Levi went to sea at an early age. He worked his way up to Master in the coastal trading business and continued in the trade until he had saved enough money to buy his own vessel. He was engaged in the coastal trade between New York, Boston and Portland, Maine. By age 30 he was in good financial shape and decided to marry and settle down.

Levi married young Ruth Hall of North Dennis in 1815 and she had their son, Henry Hall Crowell, in 1816. Unfortunately, both Ruth and her little son were not strong and they died days apart in 1818. Two years later Levi went back across the Cape and married Ruth's sister, Thirza. This second marriage produced a daughter, Thirza Hall Crowell, but poor Thirza, Sr. died soon afterwards and was never able to enjoy her baby. Six years later young Thirza followed her mother. In 1823 Levi married for the third time, Julia Ann Baker of West Dennis, and they had seven children. Two died as infants, one at age seven, one at thirteen. Three sons lived to adulthood. Life is never easy, but Levi's family seemed to have more than their share of sadness.

Levi continued in the coasting trade in a new schooner *Julia Ann*. He also entered into business on shore. He built a wharf and three-story warehouse which contained a sail loft on Bass River at what is now Aunt Julia Ann's Landing. He added an ell onto his house (on Church Street in West Dennis) that came right out to the edge of the street. He stocked the ell with provisions he brought home from his trips and Julia Ann ran a store there in his absence. There were five hitching posts out front for the customers to tie up their horses or oxen. After a few years Captain Levi decided to retire from the sea and stay home to manage his growing businesses. Levi's old account books show that customers came from the surrounding villages as well as Yarmouth, Brewster, and Chatham. He evidently had a well-stocked store. Usually, the wives who



Levi Crowell, around 1830,
from *History of Levi Crowell*

(Continued on page 2)

accompanied their husbands would gather in Julia Ann's keeping room for a cup of tea while the men folk were exchanging their views on politics and the world in general. Quite often one or more of the ladies would lift their heavy skirts and extract a clay pipe from her inside pocket, fill it with tobacco, and sit in front of the fire enjoying her tea, her pipe and some good conversation.

On November 5, 1836, the year his last son was born, Levi fell from his wharf and was accidentally drowned. Julia must have had a constitution of steel to have survived that year. She had a six-month-old, a two-year-old and a nine-year-old—and no husband. Despite having a meager education, which was thought sufficient for a girl in those days, she assumed full responsibility for the store, ran a successful business, kept her home and raised her three sons. When Julia Ann died on October 9, 1872 of consumption, she had lived long enough to see her sons started on prosperous lives.

Levi, Jr. became a sea captain and sailed coasters in the South American and European trade. He was captain of several vessels, among which was the famed schooner *Jacob M. Haskell*. He served with the U. S. Navy during the Civil War on the *Sumpter* in the blockade of Charleston in 1862 when he was taken prisoner. After being transferred from prison to prison he was paroled and returned home for a period of recuperation. Returning to duty he acted as master of the supply ship *Union* and served for three years and 52 days.

After the war he returned to sea as master of the *Jacob M. Haskell*. In 1883 he chartered her for a cargo from Brunswick, Georgia to Europe, making the voyage in 25 days. Then back to Sydney, Cape Breton to load coal for New York. Coming around Cape Cod in fog he ran aground on Shovelful Shoal where he remained for 24 hours. Men came out from Chatham to help throw 50 tons of coal overboard to lighten the ship, and then a big tugboat came and towed them off the shoal. They proceeded to New York. That was his last foreign voyage in the *Haskell*, though he continued in general coasting until 1888 when he retired to West Dennis. He spent his time in cultivating his garden and in caring for the old homestead. In 1911 he exhibited a collection of dahlias at the Barnstable County Fair and received a premium for them.

Julia's son, Howes Crowell, became a sea captain but died at the young age of 23. The other son, Thomas Y. Crowell, went to Boston and established a printing firm which was transferred to New York after the Boston printing shop was lost in a fire near the turn of the century.

When Levi, Jr. died the house passed into the hands of his son, Julius, and then to his daughter Marion Crowell Ryder, who wrote books about the family and early life in West Dennis. Her two books *Scuttle Watch* and *Cape Cod Remembrances* as well as the *History of Levi Crowell* are available from the Dennis Historical Society at Jericho Historical Center or the Josiah Dennis Manse.

Crowell family members still reside at the old homestead. Perhaps Levi and Julia Ann are pleased to keep a spiritual eye over their descendants in the house they built in 1827.

CROWES PASTURE HISTORY PROGRAM

Thanks to Beth Finch

The Dennis Historical Society and the Dennis Conservation Trust are co-sponsoring "Celebrate the History of Crowes Pasture" on Wednesday, April 23 at 7 PM at the West Dennis Graded School. Jim Coogan will lead the program with a talk on the history of this special place at the very northeast tip of Dennis on Quivet Neck. All historians and residents are invited to bring stories and reminiscences of Crowes Pasture to share in a story swap. Our DHS ladies will serve refreshments.

Now primarily a recreation site, Crowes Pasture modestly conceals its economic past. The specimen trees obscured in the oak/pine woods hint of the former pasture. Aquaculture sites just off shore echo the trap weirs of the 19th and 20th centuries. The rock on the high hill is the same one a child would climb to scan the open field looking for the family cow to bring home for the night. The cranberry bog, worked til the 1950s, might still yield an occasional berry. Hunters still go out for ducks, but not in the numbers that provided food for the Boston market and added income for local families. Only old maps tell of the salt works along the shore.

Ask your friends and neighbors to enjoy this informal evening of history and storytelling with you.

LIBRARY HONORS RICHARD HOWES, CAPE CRAFTSMAN

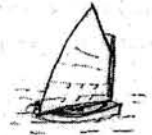
In addition to all the work Dick has done at the Manse and for the DHS, he is now recognized for his restoration work on the Dennis Library cupola. The original cupola was given to the library by Mildred Nye in memory of her husband Willis in 1958. Time and weather took their toll and restoration was 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

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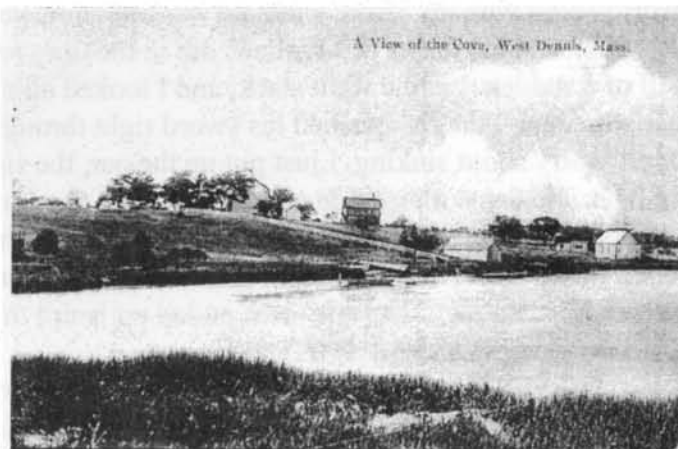
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THE WAY WE WERE

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*