

# Dennis Historical Society

## Newsletter

P. O. Box 607, South Dennis, MA 02660

E-mail [dennishs@cape.com](mailto:dennishs@cape.com) Attn. Lura Crowell, Ed.

Volume 29, number 4

April 2006

### Calendar of Events

**Sunday, April 23**  
**3:00 P.M.**

#### **"Before the Mast"**

**Author Burton Derick** will provide a fascinating account of a sailor's life at sea drawn completely from historical real-life accounts.

Refreshments.

**West Dennis Library**  
**260 Rt. 28, W. Dennis**

---

*Same time, same day*

*HSOY is hosting*  
*Home From the Sea*  
*an afternoon of Music*  
*and Drama* at the  
**Bangs Hallet House in**  
**Yarmouth Port.**

Reservations required.

508-362-3021

\$25 admission,  
seating limited.

Refreshments

---

**Sunday, May 7**  
**3:00 P.M.**

**Cape Cod Shore**  
**Whaling**

**Author Duncan Oliver** explores this fascinating industry. **Dennis Memorial Library**  
Bass River Rd.

### *Farming Cape Cod*

It's Spring! Time for planting and cultivating and growing things! That's why the publication of an address titled *Cape Cod Agriculture; Past, Present and Future* caught my eye. It was delivered on the occasion of the twelfth annual Old Home Week Service on July 25, 1943 by the Rev. Alfred Ray Atwood, Pastor of the East Dennis Wesleyan Methodist Church. His friend, Professor Henry C. Kittredge of Barnstable, wrote to Dr. Atwood,

"I have a paper on Agriculture on the Cape which was intended to be a chapter in my first book. But the publishers said 'Take It Out' and I did so. If you have any use for it you may take it and do with it what you will." So Rev. Atwood began his talk with Kittredge's *In the Past*:

"The Cape has never been a farmer's paradise. Cape Codders chose the sea not because the soil was useless, but because no one who lives beside salt water can long rest content with following a plow. Much has been written about the possibilities of Cape soil; marshes, we are told, may be reclaimed; proper fertilizers will make poor ground rich. But Cape men let their marshes stay salt and their soil remain thin while they followed their genius and went to sea. ....

At first, of course, the settlers had to farm... or starve. They spent their time clearing land and planting corn, and once cleared, the virgin soil produced satisfactory crops. Soon they branched out with other crops until wheat, rye, flax and onions were all doing their share toward making life easy.

Sandwich went in for luxuries by raising tobacco, but as her citizens followed the sea less than those of other towns, all sorts of grain were raised there, and the son of Rev. Gideon Hawley got about 200 pounds of good flax from 77 rods of loamy land. Barnstable in 1794 was sending 18,000 bushels of onions to Boston and other places every year. Dennis also exported onions though not so many as Barnstable. Eastham at the end of the Colonial Period had the best land on our Cape and exported 3,000 bushels of corn a year. Orleans, after the Revolution, shipped 500 bushels of corn annually to Boston.

But neither wheat nor corn, flax nor onions, could do much in the light soil of the Cape without fertilizer; and fertilizer in the shape of seaweed and horseshoe crabs was ready at hand for anyone who would take the trouble to drive to the beach for it. ....The seaweed was spread over the field before planting or allowed to rot in the pigsty before being plowed under. Beside

being a fertilizer seaweed was thought to be a preventive against worms.

The settlers learned from the Indians how to plant horseshoe crabs with their corn; one-quarter of a crab to a hill on fair soil and one crab to a hill on poor soil. Thus enriched, even very sandy soil would yield 20 bushels of corn an acre; without them, the same land would produce only half as much. But there were fields in Eastham that yielded as high as 45 bushels of corn an acre. The custom of fertilizing fields with herring, which Squanto taught the Pilgrims, was also practiced on the Cape.

Beside crops, Cape farmers raised cattle and sheep. Most of the Cape pioneers drove their herds before them when they came here to settle. Cattle were a drug on the market in Plymouth in 1640, so there were herds of cattle and flocks of sheep for the settlers to take with them to the Cape, which offered plenty of pasturage and acres of salt marsh where hay was to be had. ...Cattle on Cape Cod fared better than sheep, for the latter were exposed to the dangers of the woods. Forest fires and wolves took heavy toll among the sheep. Wolves were a constant source of annoyance as shown by the town records."

Kittredge goes on to remind us that both cranberries, asparagus and strawberries became important commercial crops for later Cape farmers and wrote to Rev. Atwood, "I am much interested to read what you say about the cotton experiment at Follen's Pond." Rev. Atwood replied, "A group of Quakers settled in the northern part of South Dennis, on the east side of Follen's Pond, where for several years they raised cotton and built a meeting house in which for 80 years Friends from Yarmouth, Dennis and Harwich held services. With the depletion there of the soil, cotton growing ceased."

So far we have been reading about the earliest days of farming on Cape Cod, but when Dr. Atwood gave his address in 1943, listed in the bulletin under the Events of the Week we read **Victory Gardens Inspected!**

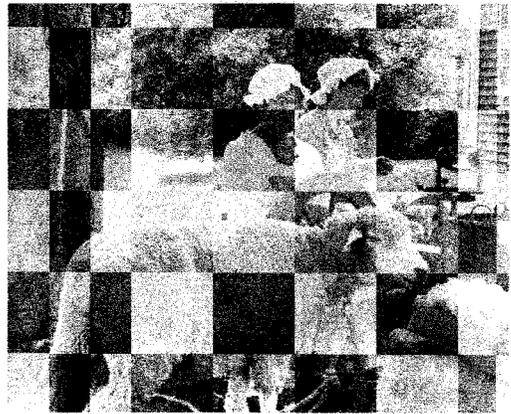
*Twenty-four Victory Gardens of East Dennis were inspected July 26 by Bertram Tomlinson, County Agricultural Agent. These gardens were judged on their value to the War Program as determined by the staples raised, as spinach, chard, cabbage, snap beans, lettuce, carrots, potatoes and tomatoes, being of high nutritive value. Some of these gardens were especially prominent for an abundance of soy beans which have not only high nutritive value but can be used as shell beans, baked beans or made into a meal for cooking.*

*Ribbon prizes were awarded.*

*In the Quivet Neck locality first prize went to Mrs. Elizabeth King and Miss Daisy Beatty; second prize was given to the George Canham household; third prize to Louis Crowell, and honorable mention to Henry Finley.*

*On Sesuit Neck Nathan Crowell was awarded first prize; the joint gardens of Nathan S. Crowell and his father, Seth Crowell, drew second prize; the Dr. Harriet Hyde garden, third prize, and honorable mention went to Marcus L. Crowell.*

"Summer crops are only half the answer to the food shortage problem, the other half is that vegetables should be home-canned or stored dry for winter."



*Susan Kelley and Beth Deck at the Manse  
with Joanne Crowell's sheep Rachael  
Photo by Richard Howes*

## Not More Farm Stuff!

Now don't go blaming me! It all began with a note from member Barbara Hart of Yarmouth Port. *Recent history, but thought it might be worth passing on to you. We lived on Palmer Lane in East Dennis then and cows and horses and a pig made daily trips through our yard.* Enclosed with Barbara's note was this news article from the *Cape Cod Times* written by Peggy Eastman in 1975:

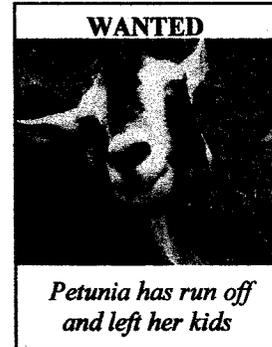
### Ranchers, watch your strays: Dennis is planning a roundup:

Those residents who are of the opinion that Dennis is no longer a rural community may have to reassess their thinking in light of the selectmen's appointment last week of a "field driver." According to health director and animal inspector Theodore A. Dumas, a field driver is an animal officer empowered "to round up loose farm animals and impound them."

Dumas reported to the selectmen that a number of complaints have been made recently by East Dennis residents concerning cows, horses and pigs running loose through their land and gardens. "The owners have been notified, but there has been no response, and the problem continues." Dumas said. "Without a field driver, as provided by an old state law, we cannot legally impound the stray animals or fine the owners."

The selectmen voted the appointment of the assistant animal inspector Thomas Fleming as the field driver. The state law which establishes the field driver is so old it set suggested fines in pennies, Dumas said. On Fleming's recommendation, the selectmen adopted the following schedule of fines for farm animals caught running at large: Chickens, turkeys, ducks, geese, \$3; goats, pigs, sheep, \$5; ponies, horses, mules, donkeys, \$10; and cows, steers, bulls, \$15. Animals cannot be released until the fine is paid to the field driver and/or impounder, and each day constitutes a new offense, Fleming said.

A recent count of farm animals in Dennis reveals there are at least 60 horses, 16 ponies, several cows, goats and pigs, in addition to numerous chickens, turkeys and ducks. ....



### Member News:

First a welcome to new member Lisa Morales of Albany, NY.

Then a thank you to Priscilla Perry Sprunt (now living in Richmond Hill, GA) for her lovely note (partially quoted here) and special gift.

*Dear Society Members:*

*Enclosed is a check for the Society in honor of two of Mother's friends, Phyllis Horton and Burt Derick—I was always aware of the hard work they (and many others) did for DHS.*

*Recently I have been interested in Mother's legacy of writing so much in her long life. She was a "Cady" and I inherited the big book of Cady Genealogy from Mother along with 4 volumes of poems by her relative, Dr. Daniel L. Cady, poet laureate of VT at one time. Mother was Ernestine Wood Cady before she married Leon Darius Perry. (West Dennis) Her father was John Wesley Cady, one of the first photographers of Easthampton, MA. ...*

*Use the money as you wish—It is a gift to the Dennis Historical Soc'y with love and thanks to two of Mother's favorite members—*

*Priscilla*

Our sympathy goes to the family of long time member Gertrude Dorothea Ellis who retired to West Dennis in 1968 after an active career as the first woman engineer at Raytheon where she was involved in the evolution of rocket systems.

More sadness at the loss of former member Alton Robbins brother of members Phyllis Horton and Mary Whittemore of Dennis Port, Naomi Costa of Provincetown and Lois Steele of West Yarmouth. He served Dennis as tree warden, cemetery commissioner, fireman and more.

4/06

**Dennis Historical Society**  
**P.O. Box 607**  
**South Dennis, MA 02660-0607**

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

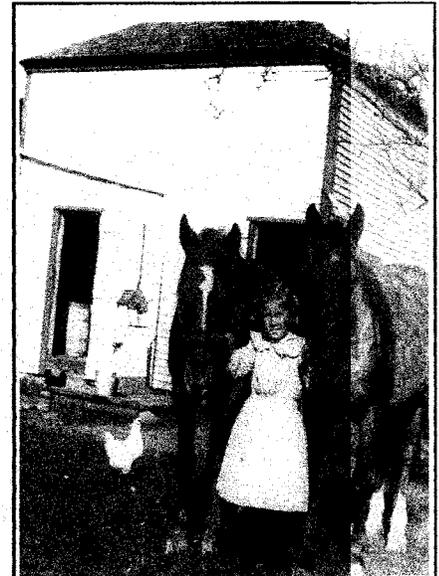
Non-profit  
Organization  
**US POSTAGE**  
**PAID**  
Permit No. 2  
South Dennis, MA  
02660

## The Way We Were

Nancy Thacher Reid's History tells us (p 604) *Over in East Dennis, so many men took to raising poultry that Sesuet Neck earned the nickname of "Hen Neck." ... In addition to local markets, both chickens and eggs were shipped to Boston markets. Poultry farming had become so extensive in town, the town fathers decided to levy a tax on fowl. The first count in 1925 found 3,640 fowl residing in town, many of them only temporary residents to be sure. ...*

*The farmers took their turn serving on the Farm Bureau, Seth and Nathan Crowell, Edwin Gray of West Dennis and Brant D. Ellis. Marcus L. Crowell, son of Seth, not only carried on the poultry business, but also served on the board of the Farm Bureau for over ten years. The Farm Bureau was a welcome advisor to those who wished to advance the agricultural health of the town for over four decades.*

*... Business reports of the Cape Cod Chamber of Commerce commended the Farm Bureau for advising poultry farmers on how best to control disease in their flocks and improve quality. The industry continued to flourish, reaching a peak of 4,255 fowl taxed in 1937, after which there was a steady decline until 1961 when only 100 hens could be found in the town.*



**"Hold your horses!"**  
Blanche Evelyn Crowell, daughter  
of farmer Seth at Sesuet Farm