

Dennis Historical Society Newsletter

Volume 30 Number 4

Send letters and stories to Lura Crowell, Editor, Box 607, S. Dennis 02660 or sesuetfarm@verizon.net

April 2007

Coming Events

April 23 10 A.M.
Manse Docent Training
Anyone who would like to consider working at the Manse is welcome.

Call **Nancy Howes**
(508) 385-3528
Or
Mary Kuhrtz
(508) 385-4978

April 28th
Girl Scouts at the
Manse 9-2:30

May 1,3,4,7 & 8
School Program at the
Manse

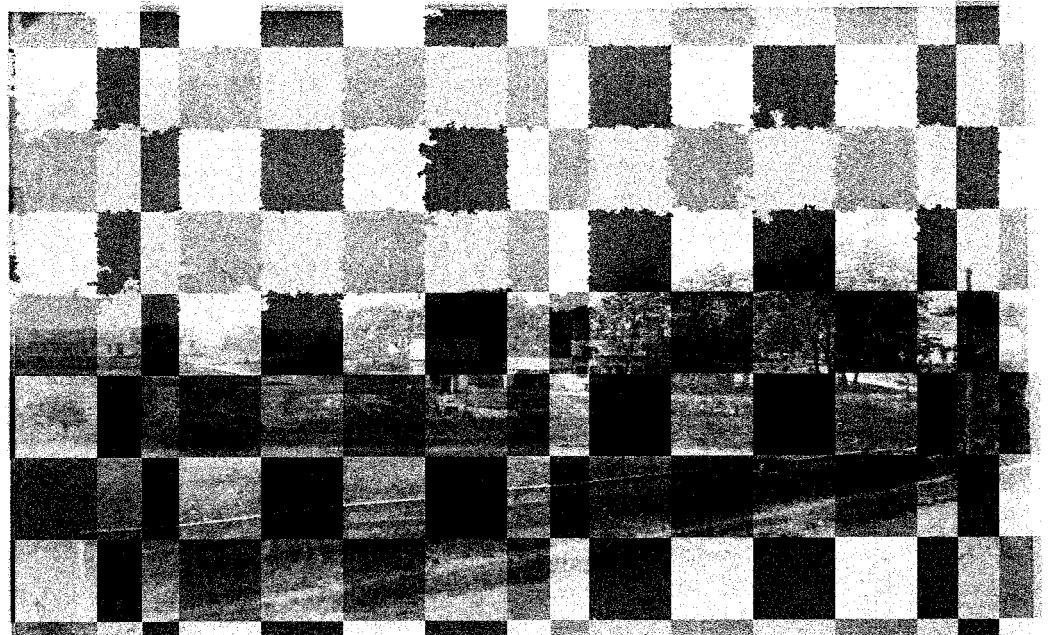
May 5th 2 P.M.
Spring Trail Walk
Walk the 50-acre nature trail of the Historical Society of Old Yarmouth. Meet at the Gate House behind the Yarmouth Port Post Office.

May 18, 19, 20
Maritime Treasures of
Dennis and Yarmouth
W. Dennis Yacht Club
Friday reception by reservation. Exhibit open Saturday and Sunday. Adults \$5, children 12 and under free.

One Thing Just Leads to Another

I always enjoy reading letters and e-mail questions people send to the DHS, and as I was filing some old correspondence, (May 26, 2004) I came across a note from Burt to Barbara Johnson of Yarmouth Port who had kindly sent some photos to the Society. As part of his reply, Burt wrote *According to my mother's notes, (Pauline Wixon Derick) she claims that the Overall Factory probably sat to the rear of the property which is now #47 Telegraph Road. (Dennis Port) To quote her notes: "Probably the property where Doane Kelley's store and overall factory was located. Factory started by his son Edgar in Jan 1880. Had 15 machines run by steam power, operated by female help, and from 5 to 7 persons engaged in finishing the overalls. Also carried work outside to others. Average turn out 130 dozen pairs." She doesn't say whether this turnout is per week or what. The property originally had on it what was called "Joseph Kelley's barn," built by Doane Kelley about 1850, and which was turned into a residence in the 1930's.*

You might remember that last month I was caught up with our post card collection and all the business that summer folks brought into Dennis. There was one post card in the South Dennis section that seemed a bit different. A *Velox* Card captioned "Factory, Cove Road going left (off Main St. in S. Dennis) and the Baxter home in the right corner" If you look closely, you can see the chimney of the factory off in the distance in the skyline to the left.



Factories in Dennis? Somewhere in the back of my mind I'd heard of that. Where to turn but Nancy Thacher Reid's *Dennis, Cape Cod?* There in Chapter 6 which is entitled *IN WHICH STEPS ARE TAKEN TO EXPAND THE BASE OF THE ECONOMY BY INTRODUCING MANUFACTURING IN THE TOWN* I found what I was looking for.

The entertainment of vacationers continued to increase in importance to Dennis in the remaining years of the nineteenth century.....There was one big problem....What do we do in the winter time? While some of the traditional businesses flourished, industries such as ice farming and cranberry harvesting were also restricted to short seasons. The tendency for young men to leave home to seek employment in other places continued. ...the leaders of business...began to look for ventures which would provide much-needed, year-round employment. Light industry might provide the answer.... (p 463)

With the wind unreliable and water power unavailable, the only option left as a source of power to revive the economy through industry was steam. Immediately after the (Civil) war, our noted inventor, Luther Child Crowell, had opened a steam factory for the manufacture of his paper bag on the main street in West Dennis. His plant employed very few workers. Nevertheless, his success proved that the use of steam as energy was not wholly restricted to advances in transportation.

Other steam plants would soon be up and running. In 1867, Allen Crowell erected a two-story building on the east end of Main Street in West Dennis which housed a sawmill and grist mill, both powered by steam, but as with the paper bag industry, only a few employees were required.

The first attempt to establish an industry in Dennis which would mass-produce a product and employ a large number of workers was the establishment of the East Dennis Straw Works in 1871 by the firm of Sears, Ledwitch and Company.In the first year thirty-five workers were employed at the straw works (making straw hats) and it was planned to raise that number to one hundred. (pp 464-6)

The picture is of the "Old Red Top" which had housed the church of The Reformed Methodist Society of Brewster until it was sold in 1870 and moved to Pleasant Street on Quivet Neck to become the Straw Works.



Photo credit
Mrs. Lawrence A. Nyberg

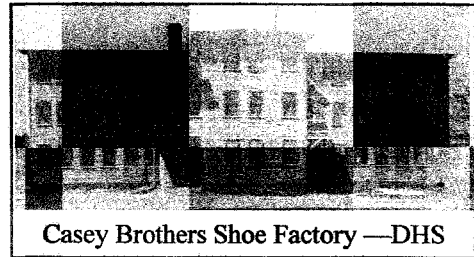
There were other attempts to provide employment in manufacturing for large numbers of workers all around the town. Overalls seemed to be an up-and-coming business in the 1880's.....(p 466) Here's where the letter from Burt fits with a bit more detail: ...in 1880 (Captain Doane Kelley, Jr.) set up a factory near his home for the production of shirts and overalls. His son, Edgar Poe Kelley, (1852-1942), was appointed manager.some of the workers were extremely productive! The Yarmouth Register of June 5, 1880 reported that Mrs. Elsie Chase had sewed 48 pairs of overalls that Monday and a total of 217 pairs for the week...

The Kelley Overall Factory had a short existence. In 1882, after only two years of activity, it was reported that Captain Kelley had installed large show windows in the front of the building and it was to be used as a fancy and dry goods store. (p 467)

West Dennis and South Dennis were also in the market for opportunities to improve the economic conditions. In 1884 Sears Crowell (1821-1904) erected a building and set up a factory on School Street for the manufacture of tacks, using steam for power. His tack factory was on the second floor of the building which stood in back of the home of T.T. Baxter and it

was managed by Alpha Baker(1860—). On the first floor, Mrs. Alpha Baker and Mrs. Roderick Drew Kelley packed the tacks for shipping. There was also a grist mill run by Seth Crowell on the first floor.(p 467) But once again, this new industry provided employment for only a few workers.

John A. Casey, a shoe manufacturer from Brockton, ...planted the idea of establishing a shoe factory on the Cape. With the backing of Captain Edward E. Crowell,on February 3, 1887, Casey Brothers Shoe Manufacturing Company was duly incorporated and the work began. A three-story building was erected...on the west side of School Street, just south of the West Dennis Schoolhouse.The shoe factory was intended to create 100 jobs, and it did. However, supervisory help and many of the workers had to be brought down from the shoe center of Brockton and boarded around the town. (pp 468-9) (Which resulted in a story about the first town lock-up which you'll want to read!) In 1891, Mr. John A. Casey decided to move on....After the Casey departure, the stockholders reorganized as the West Dennis Shoe Company....But nothing had changed and the problem of workers, raw materials and market made it a losing proposition.



Casey Brothers Shoe Factory —DHS

The second company dissolved in 1894. (p468-471)



Red Star Overall Factory
Edmond R. Nickerson collection

Sometime in the early 1890's Mrs. Eleanor (Baxter) Young (1857-1947)...built a factory on Cove Road, almost opposite her family home. (At last, the picture on page 1.) Her factory, called the Red Star Overall Company, produced flannel and khaki shirts and overalls. Edmund Augustus O'Brien (1861-1953)... worked for her and used the experience he had gained in the larger plants, where he had previously worked, to organize the new factory.

In 1897 a second factory was built by Edmund O'Brien. It was located on the Main Street of South Dennis, on the west side of the road between Heir's Landing and Willowford Way. In 1898 both factories were busy.....(perhaps because) the Spanish-American War was brewing and army demands had increased. (pp472-3)

The Red Star Factory stopped production in the summer of 1900. Mrs. Young sold the boiler and dynamo to Dr. B. S. Stephenson, and he used it to steam-heat his house and to produce electricity—probably the first house in South Dennis to have these conveniences.

Mr. O'Brien's factory burned to the ground in 1904....But Ed "Pop" O'Brien was not a man to be without a job for long. He had an interest in the Cape Cod Poultry Business, also located in South Dennis near his factory, which seems to have prospered.

The score of years when steam-powered and woman-powered factories were at work in Dennis were interesting, but not notably financially successful. As one by one the factories ceased operation, the business interests were left to wonder what the economic future of Dennis would be. (p 474)

SPECIAL THANKS to Edmond R. Nickerson for a gift in appreciation of the transcription of the Seth Taylor Wheldon Papers by Burton Derick—to the Cape Cod Five Cents Savings Bank for their donation in support of the Maritime Exhibit—and to Priscilla Perry Sprunt for her check to help with some of the renovations needed at the Manse. We are truly grateful!

Apr. 2007

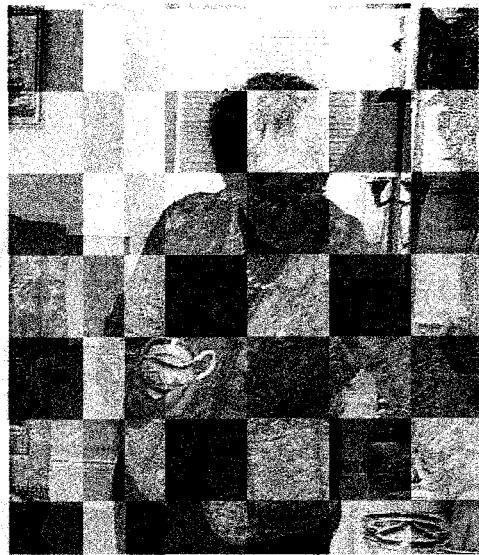
Dennis Historical Society
P.O. Box 607
South Dennis, MA 02990-0607

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

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

The Way We Were

On March 10 we met at the new Dennis Memorial Library meeting room to hear Mary Kuhrtz talk about "Canton Porcelain—The Dishes That Came on the Clipper Ships. If you missed this program, you missed a lovely display of blue and white china as well as Mary's special version of "Fractured History." Since it's been almost 400 years since the Pilgrims landed in Plymouth, she assured us that Elizabeth Winslow did *not* bring any china aboard the Mayflower. Her dishes would have been pewter or wood. When they sighted land, the women asked, "Is that Virginia?" "Not exactly," answered their menfolk. One of the ladies later said to another, "I knew they'd get lost!" Mary hastened to assure us that she just "made that up!" And then there was the story about how Queen Elizabeth saw some of those blue and white dishes the Dutch queen was using and sent the Earl of Essex to get her some of that China. Not to mention "Mrs. Saltonstall" sending off a special order with a local sea captain, who having been gone two years returned with her dishes only to hear, "I think I like the yellow better!" Don't worry, Mary only made that up!



Mary Kuhrtz
"Canton Porcelain"
Photo by Richard Howes