



DENNIS FESTIVAL DAYS

In 1959, before some of us were born--well, before some of you were born--Bob Briggs of The Wee Packet in Dennis Port and Bob Stone of The Lighthouse Inn in West Dennis came up with the idea of a special week of fun and games in late summer, to keep people in town until Labor Day. Dennis Festival Days is the result of their idea. The week has become so popular that now it not only keeps folks here, but it brings folks here to join in the family fun and events. Don't let the visitors have all the fun! Check our calendar for events at the Manse and Jericho, but try other activities as well.

HURRY HOME, RICHARDSON, IT'S WEDNESDAY!

As a general rule, I don't pay much attention to TV commercials, but I confess my ears do pick up when I hear "Anthony, where are you?" and I love to watch that handsome little boy running through the streets of the North End of Boston to join his family in a fine spaghetti dinner. In fact, on some occasions when I have seen that ad, I have thought, "Well, perhaps it's time we had a nice Italian dinner ourselves." This, mind you, from an old Cape Cod girl who was brought up on codfish cakes, potato bargain and baked beans, as was everyone else I knew. When I was a girl, the Cape towns were still decidedly WASPish, though perhaps not as decidedly as in 1890, when Charles Swift stated that 90% of the population of the county of Barnstable were descended from the predominantly Anglo-Saxon Firstcomers. Today, Newcomers from a variety of ethnic backgrounds outnumber Firstcomers by a large majority. So it is difficult to remember the days when someone from a foreign country, who didn't have baked beans for Saturday night supper, was an oddity in town.

The few "strangers" who resided here in the nineteenth century were most likely brought to town by a sea captain who "sailed foreign." Captain David S. Chapman brought a young Spanish boy home with him, whom he later adopted and named Ramon Chapman. In the churchyard at South Dennis lie buried John Rose of Fayal, The Azores, and a Chinese woman, both brought to Dennis by Captain Alpheus Baker, Jr. Several Irish families trace their Cape roots to immigrants who came here with Dennis captains who sailed across the Atlantic with cargoes for the relief of victims of the famine there.

And at one time, there dwelt in the household of Captain Thomas Nickerson of South Dennis a young man from Trapano, Italy, whose name was Nicholas Lipari. Capt. Thomas had taken a liking to the boy when Nicholas had signed on as crew for him. Before long he had named Nicholas as his second mate. In the fall of 1857, when Nicholas was about 20 years of age, he lived with the captain's family in South Dennis and attended school at Pine Grove Seminary in Harwich. There he studied navigation and other subjects with Sydney Brooks. Mr. Brooks was impressed with Nicholas's ability to learn and commented about his "foreign" student in two different entries in his journal. " He was very dark, even for an Italian, of moderate height and firmly built. Would talk religion as well as any subject."

Nicholas became a frequent visitor at the Brooks's home: "Many an evening Nicholas sat by our fire entertaining us with his interesting conversation." It seems that his ancestors owned the Lipari Islands north of Sicily and from that spot they had engaged in smuggling activities, a practice which Brooks suspected his pupil might be considering. For Nicholas's ambition was to become a master mariner, an aspiration which he did in fact achieve. He made several voyages as master of a small vessel. Following one voyage which took him to Italy about 1860, he brought home a present for Captain Nickerson and for his friends the Brookses. It was a package of macaroni which had been made in his native village of Trapano. According to Sydney Brooks's journal, Nicholas explained how the pasta was made and how it should be cooked. He promised to prepare it for them at a subsequent visit. But that visit never came. On a voyage to South America, Captain Nicholas Lipari was murdered in his bunk by his own second mate.

And what, do you suppose, became of that package of macaroni? Did Mrs. Brooks, whose usual meals consisted of fish chowders and Punkhorn stew, attempt its preparation? Or did it remain on the shelves of her buttery, to be discarded when her heirs took over her home? That gives me something to ponder, as I fix my "significant other" a nice Italian dinner when the next Wednesday rolls around.

CALENDAR

Aug 13 7:30 Board meets at the Manse
Aug 21 - 27 DENNIS FESTIVAL DAYS
Aug 23 1-4 P.M. Colonial Open House at the Manse
Aug 24 11:30-2:30 Demonstration of Colonial Homemaking Skills at Jericho
Aug 26 2-4 P.M. Village Garden Club Flower Show at the Manse
September 21 2 P.M. Annual Meeting of Dennis Historical Society at
place to be announced. Program Jim Coogan "Cape Cod Architecture"

THOUGHTS WHILE MOWING THE GRASS

This has been a typical Cape Cod summer as far as lawn care is concerned, finding us alternately complaining because the grass grows too fast then worrying because it has all gone brown. My Dad used to say that Cape Codders don't have lawns, they have yards. By definition, a lawn is land covered with grass, kept closely cut, while a yard is a piece of ground near or around a house. Our yard was covered with grass, all right. But unlike Dad's garden, which he watered, fertilized and weeded religiously, the grass in the yard had to fend for itself, except for a mowing when needed. For the yard was our playground. Over in front of the raspberry patch were the horseshoe pits--a summer gathering place for the men of the family and of the neighborhood. The competition was friendly but serious, and Dad was undisputed champion for years. Over on the side yard was a volley ball net. Here children and later grandchildren engaged in equally friendly but much less serious competition--noisier, too, I might add, even compared with the ringing of horse shoes against the metal stake. Across the front of the house the croquet wickets were lined up for good fun for those not inclined to speedier sports. When Dad announced the weekly mowing would be done that evening, one of us would be appointed to pull up the wickets, and woe be to the kid who missed one, as Dad had inherited a "Sailor's vocabulary", which he sometimes used when vexed.

Whether you have a lawn or a yard, you might be interested in the history of lawns, as compiled in the Old Farmer's Almanac for 1992. It seems that a study has been done by Dr. John Falk of the Smithsonian Institute, no less, raising the suggestion that creating lawns around our homes is genetic. The study proposes the theory that humankind evolved in the African savanna, and that having grass around us creates a feeling of safety. Other studies have revealed that lawns were cultivated for the emperors of China, and were planted around temples and public buildings in ancient Egypt and in South America. Our heritage of lawns probably goes back to England after the enclosure, and the elaborate parks of the aristocracy. Originally they were kept neatly cropped by the sheep and cattle. Then some aristocrat decided that these lowly animals were too common, and the custom changed to the keeping of more exotic herds, particularly of the deer family. But deer are not as efficient at lawn maintenance as are sheep. So the scythe was developed and peasants employed to keep the grass an even length.

Enter Mr. Edwin Budding. He was a foreman in a textile mill in Gloucestershire, England and in 1830, his active imagination led him to invent the lawn mower, based upon the machinery in his mill which clipped the nap on woolen material. This was the hand pushed mower which my Dad used for most of his life. In advertising his invention, Mr. Budding stated: "Country gentlemen will find in using my machine an amusing, useful and healthful exercise." As I recall, Dad was not amused. Neither was a contemporary of Dad's named Edwin George who found pushing the Budding mower strenuous. In 1919, he removed the gasoline engine from his wife's washing machine and attached it to his mower. (No comment from his wife is recorded, but I'll bet SHE was not amused either!) Thus, as OFA reports, "... he discovered that he could cut grass more loudly than ever before." Today we have lawns mowers in all shapes, sizes, colors and degrees of loudness to keep our lawns, or yards, in trim, if only it rains.

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