



Dennis Historical Society Newsletter

Volume 25 Number 8

August 2002

Calendar of Events

Sunday, August 4, 2002

275th Anniversary of first sermon
preached by Josiah Dennis

9:00 AM

Dennis Union Church

Wednesday, August 14, 2002

Board Meeting

All interested members are welcome!

7:00 PM

Josiah Dennis Manse

Saturday, August 17, 2002

Colonial Open House

Step back in time to the 1700's as
costumed docents demonstrate early
American skills. 1770 one-room school
house, Colonial Militia Encampment.

Some audience participation.

10:00 AM – 4:00 PM

Josiah Dennis Manse

Sunday, August 18, 2002

Jericho Old Fashioned

Crafts Day

Costumed guides demonstrate skills
needed for 1800's life. Children's
games, refreshments.

11:00 AM – 2:00 PM

**1801 Jericho Historical
Center**

Monday, August 19, 2002

Open House

1:00 PM – 4:00 PM

**1867 West Dennis Graded
School**

Monday, August 19, 2002

**300 Years of Dennis
Maritime History**

Phyllis Horton, Dennis historian, tells
how the fortunes and misfortunes at sea
impacted the lives of Dennis people.

Refreshments.

7:30 PM

**1867 West Dennis Graded
School**

“Charity Huts”

America's First Life Saving Huts Were Built Along Cape Cod's Atlantic Shore *by Ray Urquhart*

Since the first recorded shipwreck in 1626, it has been estimated by marine researchers that more than 3,000 vessels and their seamen have become victims of the Cape's submerged sandbars, treacherous rips and frequent gale force winds. Late in the 18th century, the Massachusetts Humane Society, concerned about the many shipwrecked seamen, built a Hut at Stout's Creek in Truro. Resting on sand, it had a chimney. Wind eventually blew sand from its foundation and the chimney's weight toppled the hut. The Society in 1802 demolished the hut and contracted to build a number of huts for the “preservation of shipwrecked seamen upon the most exposed places on Cape Cod.” Six huts were initially erected between Race Point and Monomoy Point. The first was built halfway between Race Point and the head of Stout's Creek, on Nauset Beach, halfway between the entrances to Nauset and Chatham harbors, and lest seamen should miss this hut by striking to leeward, another hut was erected on the same beach. A sixth hut was built at Cape Malebarre (Monomoy Point).

All six huts were of one size and shape. Each was placed on piles. The south-facing side had a sliding door and on the west side a sliding shutter. A pole 15 feet high stood above each hut on the east. Inside was a bench and either straw or hay. Two thousand copies of a report published in October 1802 describing the location of each hut were distributed to customs houses and insurance offices in Massachusetts. For Nauset Beach the description read “about a mile and a quarter from the hut west by north appear the top and arms of a windmill.” By 1845 the Society had 18 charity huts along the Massachusetts coast. The year before, Congress recognized a federal role and appropriated \$5000 to assist the Humane Society. In 1848 Congress authorized \$10,000 to build and equip life saving stations. Within six years there were 137 lifeboat stations along the Atlantic Coast staffed with volunteers. Not until 1871 were lifeboat crews paid for this hazardous work. In 1915 the Revenue Cutter Service, which was established in 1790 to patrol the coast and collect tariffs from



Sketch of Charity Hut
by Ray Urquhart

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“Charity Huts”—America’s First Life-Saving Huts

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commercial vessels, merged with the life saving service to form the U.S. Coast Guard.

Publications mentioning the charity huts have stated that they were equipped with matches and even canned goods. None of the huts, other than the failed hut built in the 1790’s, had a chimney, and since they were filled with hay or straw, it is unlikely a shipwrecked seaman would have attempted to light a fire inside. Moreover, the first friction matches were not in use until the 1830’s, long after the huts were built. Canning was invented in France in 1810 and production of cans did not begin in America until 1819. The first cannery opened in Boston in 1820. With these facts in mind, we can assume the early huts provided little more than shelter from the elements.

Dennis Men in the Lifesaving Service

From: *Dennis Cape Cod from Firstcomers to Newcomers 1639 – 1993*

By: Nancy Thacher Reid

Dennis Village

Obed Shiverick

James H. Charles, Captain

Served at:

Monomoy Point

Orleans

Dennis Port

Wilton Berry

Albert Chase

Richard S. Gage

Timothy F. Murray

Walter F. Wixon

Orleans

Orleans

South Dennis

Reuben W. Eldredge

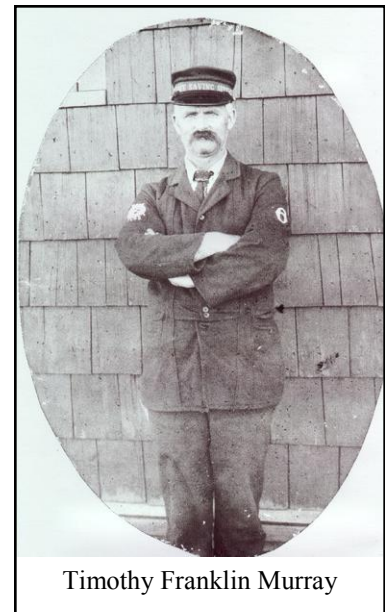
Monomoy Point

West Dennis

Benjamin Kelley

Alton J. Baker

High Head



Timothy Franklin Murray

Meet Your Board Members – Raymond M. Urquhart

Ray is in his third year as the Historical Society’s President. He is presently a member of the Dennis Local Planning Committee which is completing a draft of the town’s master plan, and the 1867 West Dennis Graded School House Oversight Committee. He chaired the West Dennis Graded School House Restoration Committee and was for five years a member and treasurer of the Dennis Conservation Trust.

Ray was for many years a member of the Academy for Lifelong Learning at the Cape Cod Community College, serving for two years as chairman of the governing Council, treasurer and a discussion leader for many Academy courses. He also taught credit courses at the College.

His public service career began in 1952 with his appointment while in graduate school as town manager of Islesboro, Maine, an island community in the Penobscot Bay. Ray later served as the first township manager of Cedar Grove, New Jersey, and village administrator in Bronxville, New York. He was president of the City Managers Association of New York State. In 1967, and after training in Hawaii, Ray was assigned as a Foreign Service officer to South Viet Nam where he directed the nation-building program in

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MEET YOUR BOARD MEMBERS – Raymond M. Urquhart

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the northern military region. He served in South Viet Nam for three years, returning to Washington in late 1970. While in the Foreign Service, Ray was appointed the first county executive of Greenville, South Carolina, under a Congressional program enabling federal personnel to work temporarily in local or state government. He remained in Greenville County three years and then was assigned to the Philippines working with the central government.

Ray was an aerographer in the U.S. Navy in World War II and was selected to participate in a Hurricane Micro seismic Research Project in Florida, establishing after several months training a hurricane tracking operation at Roosevelt Roads, Puerto Rico. He is a graduate of the University of Colorado with a degree in political science. Ray had completed class work for a doctorate in public administration at the University of the Philippines when he was reassigned to Washington.

A native of Quincy, Massachusetts, Ray counts Mayflower pilgrims William Brewster, Isaac Allerton and John Howland as kin. He has been married to Eileen MacDonald for more than 50 years. They had five boys and a daughter. The eldest died of cancer.

Member News, Donations and Acquisitions!

The members of this society, though relatively small in number, are truly big in the giving department. We are grateful to **Ann Treat Reynolds** for finding and donating a school desk and chair from Cohasset to the West Dennis Schoolhouse in memory of her mother, Caroline Petersen Reynolds.

Joel Crowell and Paul Sullivan saw to it that we now have a huge iron kettle on the grounds of the Manse. Phyllis Horton tells us that similar kettles were used by cranberry growers to boil bales of tobacco stems and leaves to make a nicotine spray for insect control on their bogs. **Jeff Deck** has given us a smaller iron kettle with stand for our dying projects during Festival Days at the Manse.

Terri Fox has donated an early spinning wheel to the society in honor of her mother, longtime DHS member **Martha “Sherry” Sparrow**. **Henry and Susan Kelley** contributed an indigo blue linsey-woolsey coverlet for the pencil post bed in the upstairs bedroom at the Manse. Susan is weaving the fabric for the bed hangings for the bed, and the Manse sewing committee will pick up the blue in the coverlet as they embroider the hangings.

We are also grateful to **William Hume Crowell** for giving us a school notebook kept by his mother Jane Hume when she came to Dennis to teach English and Home Economics at the high school. Later Jane Hume Crowell was one of the first women to be elected to serve on the School Committee. **Jane Chase (Mrs. Robert P. Chase)** of South Dennis has contributed a book of poetry, and **Burt Derick** has donated an Images of America Book of Chatham for the library.

Our own Josiah Dennis, **Joe Solarz**, retired this year from the school program where he has greeted hundreds of school children over the years at the front door of the Manse. In his wonderful costume he became the personification of the dear minister himself. We miss his faithful presence. In gratitude for his years of service, the DHS Board of Directors voted to make him an Honorary Lifetime Member of the Society.



Illustration from:
Forgotten Household Crafts
by John Seymour

Dennis Historical Society

P.O. Box 607

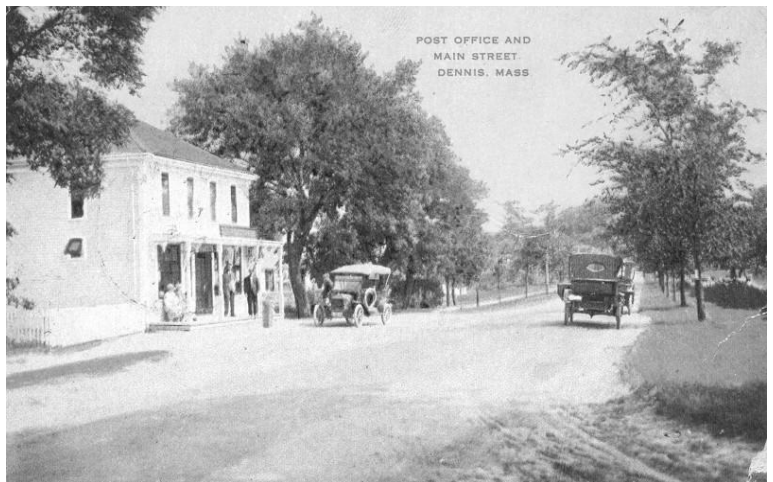
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The Way We Were

Henry Kelley can always find time to recall stories about the goings-on around town. Recently he was heard to tell about “**Walter Fessenden**” of Dennis Village. It seems that Walter was a man of modest means who had no wood lots of his own. As a result he asked for and received permission from various others to clean up the tops and branches of their trees after the major wood had been carried away. One day he pulled his horse and wagon in front of the Dennis Post Office where some local wags derided his practice of picking up these “leftovers.” One said, “Walter, where are you going with your wagon full of such crooked wood?” To which Walter replied, “Boys, crooked wood will still make straight ashes! Git along, Horse.” Now for those of you who don’t remember the practice of calling townspeople by their first and middle names, you might not know that Walter Fessenden had the last name of **Howes**. Walter Fessenden Howes was born February 23, 1852 and died July 4, 1922.



Dennis Post Office, circa 1918
From the DHS Postcard Collection