



Dennis Historical Society Newsletter

Volume 27 Number 8

August 2004

Calendar of Events

Board meetings are open to all interested members of the DHS. **Next meeting at West Dennis Graded School, 7 P.M. Wednesday, August 11**

Colonial Open House at the 1736 Josiah Dennis Manse Museum
77 Nobscusset Road
Dennis Village
Saturday, August 21
10 A.M. – 4 P.M.

Step back to colonial times as costumed interpreters demonstrate Early American skills, food, candle-dipping, dyeing, children's games and adult pastimes. Visit the 1745 one-room school house, and see the Colonial Militia Encampment performing drills.

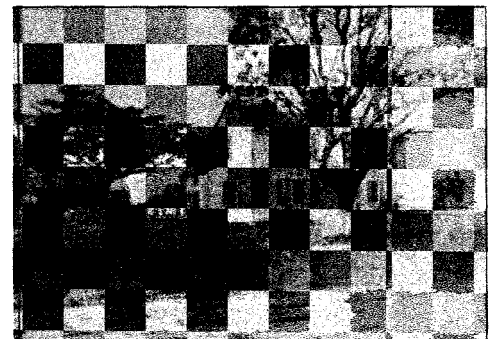
Jericho Skill Day
1801 Jericho Historical Center
Corner Old Main Street and Trotting Park
West Dennis
Sunday, August 22
11:30 A.M.—2 P.M.

Costumed guides demonstrate skills needed in 1800s life. Children's games. Refreshments.

There Was a Tavern in the Town

In July of 1985 Nancy Thacher Reid wrote in this Newsletter *IF ONLY THIS HOUSE COULD TALK....I would dearly love to listen to the memories it would share. The house I am speaking of stands on the easterly corner of the intersection of New Boston Road at Beach Street, in the traditional Howes neighborhood. New Boston Road was somewhat of a village center at one time. The Old West Schoolhouse, now on the grounds of the Josiah Dennis Manse, ... was built about across the street and a little to the east of this house. A grist mill was located where the present playground is, and across the highway was another mill—the south mill—with a Howes as a miller. The house with which I would enjoy having a conversation with was built in 1700 for Ebenezer Howes, and is one of the few "narrow houses" on the Cape (only one room deep) which has not been altered by the addition of a "lean-to" or salt box extension. Old-timers used the second story windows of this house as a yardstick to recount the depth of the Great Snow of 1717 when, after 21 days of snowfall, the Howes family ran out of food and had to leave their house through these windows. Ebenezer's son, Samuel, married Jerusha Sturgis, who was born in the middle of this memorable blizzard. Generations of Howes who grew up in this house must have heard the story of that remarkable winter over and over again. "Great Sam", as he was called to distinguish him from several other Samuel Howes of that generation, is said to have kept a tavern in this house in which he was born, and his children and grandchildren after him. The Tavern, or as sometimes called the ordinary, was the meeting place for the men of the village in those early colonial days. This old house is one of the few buildings left in town which overheard our ancestors discussing the business of shore whaling, the trials and expenses of the Indian Wars, the division of the mother town of Yarmouth, the calling of its first minister. If only this house could relate these tales, how much richer would be our history.*

This reminded me of a "tavern talk" where the speaker said that local taverns had bars which literally "barred off" supplies from customers and which were locked at night. ("Mind your P's & Q'!" referred to the tavern keeper's minding his pints and quarts.) A young adult could not order from the bar unless his chin reached the counter. He had to "measure up!" Messages and mail were often tacked to an upright post near the bar (hence to "post a notice") and the one who received mail paid the postage. Some taverns had a pipe rack which held clay pipes. The ends were broken off after each use so the next smoker had a fresh end. But it was the preparation of the food for all who stopped by which really caught our interest.



Old Picture of the Howes Tavern

A Taste of Colonial Cooking

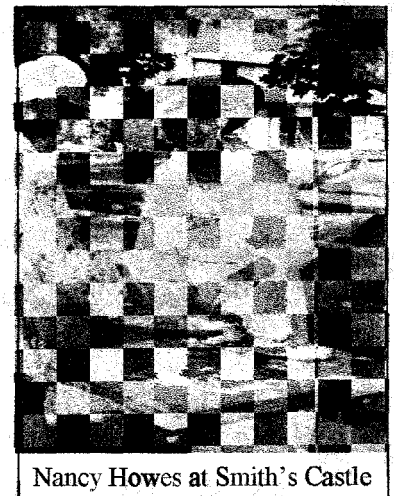
There was little change in cooking methods from medieval times to 1800. The green-wood lug poles which were responsible for so many scalds and burns gave way to iron cranes. The earliest beehive ovens were in the rear of the fireplace. (Later these ovens were built in the front of the fireplace.) They were heated with coals or by building a fire inside. The heat in the beehive oven was determined by putting a hand in or by the color of the bricks. Coals were removed with a peel which was also used to put the food to be cooked in the oven. The cook might have to step over smaller cook fires in the fireplace to get to the oven. Women wore wool or linsey-woolsey skirts as cotton or linen might flare up if a spark landed on them. The woolen skirts smoldered and sparks could be slapped out. Heavy iron kettles held up to 30 gallons and had no lid, while an iron pot was less than 12 gallons and had a lid.

Breakfast was often "slat" meat with bean porridge or hasty pudding (corn meal mush). Meat was roasted on a spit which was turned by hand until it was "done to a turn". Cider and beer were served with each meal. There was heavy drinking in colonial days, as much as three times today's level. Toddy, grog, flip, punch, etc. were consumed for warmth and conviviality. For sweetening, colonial cooks used maple sugar, honey and molasses. Sugar "loaves" came in cones wrapped in blue paper from which "refined" sugar could be scraped or cut off. (The blue paper was saved and used to make dye. If a woman had a blue dress, it was a sign that she came from an affluent family.) Sugar, tea and other valuables such as spoons were kept under lock and key.

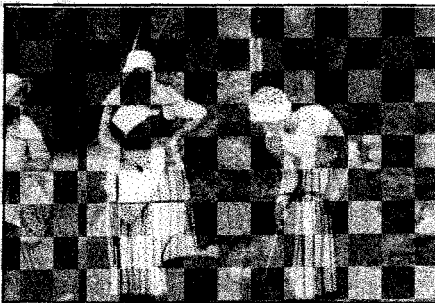
We knew all this, but how would it be to cook a meal for a crowd over a fire? And what else would you serve this time of year?

On July 10 Mary Kuhrtz, Nancy Howes and Lura Crowell from the Josiah Dennis Manse Museum Committee attended an 18th Century Day Camp for women at Smith's Castle in North Kingstown, Rhode Island to find out. To begin we had to dress the part. Layers of clothing topped with an apron, white cap and straw hat was the uniform of the day. Two women with the help of an experienced male tutor started the cook fires, with flint and steel, outdoors in two fire pits outfitted with iron stakes and cross bars, pot hooks and iron pots and kettles. Some of the women gathered material for the "sallett" in the gardens, washing the lettuces and spinning them dry in a cloth square whirled overhead. Lots of herbs, summer squash, garlic chives and cucumbers were available. There was vinegar and oil and more herbs for the dressing.

At another outdoor table women were grating bread for the chicken "fricasey". We took another trip to the herb garden for flavoring for the "bagge pudding" which had lots of eggs, flour, milk and bread crumbs beaten to a consistency thicker than pancake batter but thinner than bread dough. This whole mess was put in the middle of a well-buttered cloth square and tied with a string. When the kettle of water came to a rolling boil, the puddings were plopped in to cook for an hour. (Good thing someone remembered to put more wood on those fires!) Meanwhile, more eggs were beaten while one of the cooks cut up the chicken pieces. Chicken pieces dipped in eggs and crumbs were browned in the freshly-churned butter with gravy, mushrooms and wine. "Don't forget to put more wood on the fire!" The wind changed, smoke got in our eyes, and "more wood, please". "Stir or it will burn." "Too hot, lift those kettles to a shorter pot hook." (Those pots are heavy!) In the afternoon the cooking crew made raisin pies in Dutch ovens, stacked with coals beneath the pot and on top of the covers. First we cooked the filling—raisins, wine, sugar and spices—then made the lard crust on which we piled the filling and folded the crust up to surround it. Much to our surprise, everything tasted wonderful. We might even return in the fall to learn how they brew their beer!



Nancy Howes at Smith's Castle



A Letter from David Crowell

Nancy Howes left this copy of a letter from David Crowell of Long Island, NY which was given to her by Maureen Joyce. How Maureen got it is not yet known, but it is printed here with interest.

July 7

Dear Mr. & Mrs. Strudwick-

Alas, I can't be at the picnic. I am 88 and infirm. But I should be there and would be there since all my antecedent Crowells were East Dennis residents from way back. The East Dennis cemeteries contain their remains. My great, great grandfather—and especially his son—were leaders in the area. The latter named Prince Sears Crowell (what a moniker!) was known as Capt. Crowell. Legend has it that he was the richest and I hope the most respected man in town. He had a shipyard and built clipper ships, captaining some as well. It is pretty well established that one was the famous *Belle of the West*. And again according to legend, he filled her with goods, sailed to Hong Kong, sold the cargo, restocked the ship for the return voyage with oriental treasure, sailed home, sold the cargo, sold the ship and realized a net profit of 400,000 dollars and never worked again!

Other ships from the yard plied a different trade. A branch of the family that lived in Woods Hole owned a small rocky island off South America which was deep in guano deposited for millenniums by sea birds. One of these shipyard ships would sail to the island, load up with guano and sail to a foreign port, sell as much guano as possible, and sail to another port and repeat the process until the guano was all gone. They would then sell the ship and go home. My grandfather David Crowell, for whom I am named, at 19 years was 1st mate on one of these journeys and kept the log which I now possess.

Years ago I visited East Dennis with my young family and was guided by cousins in residence through Prince Sears Crowell's mansion—very impressive! But that's another story.

Please forgive my printing—my handwriting's worse! I hope all this will interest you. Many thanks for the picnic invitation.

Sincerely,
David Crowell

Nancy Thacher Reid writes in her history *Dennis, Cape Cod...* (p. 367) that "An entire book could, and should, be written about Prince S. Crowell." (1813-1881) "He was ...born on Quivet Neck, the son of master mariner David Crowell (1786-1871) and his wife Persis Sears (1789-1861). Of this couple's five children, Prince and his sister Betsey were the only ones to survive childhood. Betsey became the wife of Christopher Hall in 1835. Prince Crowell married Polly Dillingham Foster in 1835 and they were much more fortunate with their family than were Betsey and Christopher Hall. Of their eight children, only one did not reach maturity and their descendants continue to be a blessing to their natal town.

Like his brother-in-law, Prince Crowell went to sea in his teens and was a sailing master in his twenties. Following Christopher Hall's example, Crowell retired from the sea in 1846 and invested his earnings in vessels, including those built in the East Dennis yard."

In 1852, with Christopher Hall, Prince invested in the building of the clipper ship *Hippogriffe*. In 1855 the Boston and Cape Cod Marine Telegraph Company announced it would cover the entire Cape, While many worried that the electricity would be harmful to their health, Capt. Crowell became a strong backer and in 1856 was elected as a director of the company. (p. 379) He was principal owner of the *Kit Carson* launched in 1855 and later of the *Webfoot* and *Christopher Hall*, also built at Shiverick Shipyard. After the Civil War Captain Prince invested in railroads instead of ships. (p.389) In 1858 he supported the innovation of the graded school which would replace the many one-room schoolhouses in town. (p.391) In the 1840s he was among the most influential and active abolitionists in town (p.403) and one of the authors of a resolution to be sent to President Lincoln affirming that the town and her people would support him in his effort to keep the country united. (p.406) By 1865 he was also one of the main cranberry growers in the area. (p.450)

Thank you, David Crowell, for reminding us of one of our truly great citizens!

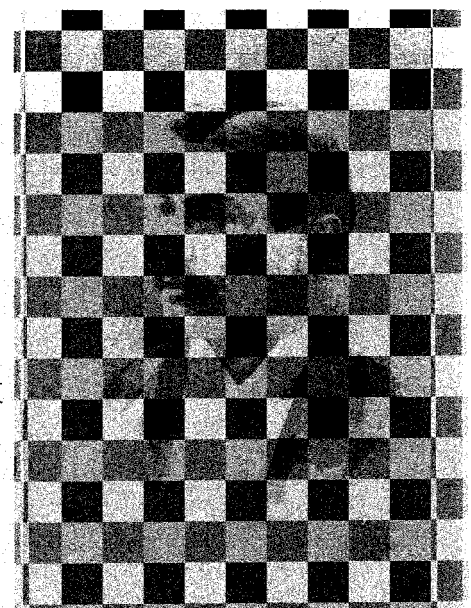
Dennis Historical Society
P.O. Box 607
South Dennis, MA 02660-0607

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

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

THE WAY WE WERE

Other Dennis mariners were not so fortunate as Christopher Hall and Prince S. Crowell. Among her pictures, Blanche Linwood Howes (Crowell) had written in 1891 this brief story. Hiram H. Hall was the son of Cyrus Hall and brother of Wilfred A. Hall. He lived where G. M. Howes now resides. He was the postal clerk on the *S. S. Elbe* and went down with the ship in the North Sea on the way home from Bremen, when struck by another boat and sank in 15 minutes.



Hiram H. Hall of Dennis