



Dennis Historical Society Newsletter

dennishs@cape.com

www.dennishistsoc.org

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This Old House 401 Main Street, West Dennis

Last month I began the description of one of the grandest houses in Dennis that was built by a man of very humble beginnings. Obed Look Baker was born in 1817 in Little Compton, RI, a natural child of Mary Look Baker. It would be interesting to learn how Mary and Obed arrived here. Mary married Heman Baxter of South Dennis in 1822, and Obed was raised in South Dennis.

Obed spared no expense in building his dream house. The marble was imported from Italy for the

fireplaces, the lush carpeting, alive with riotous color, was selected and laid by Captain Baker, himself. An elaborate French crystal chandelier hung from the front parlor ceiling reflecting its light from a wide mirror across the room that covered the wall from the ceiling to the fireplace. Lovely Brussels lace curtains and beautiful mulberry silk damask draperies finished off the great parlor.

Obed loved this room where he could relax on overstuffed furniture covered to match the mulberry drapes and look fondly at paintings of the Sch. Luther Child and one of the Boston and Philadelphia steamships that had been a



favorite of his, and no doubt, reflect on the wonderful life he had acquired through diligence and hard work. This room is where he welcomed members of his business, political and social life and he spared no expense to make them feel welcome, from the humble neighbor down the street to the power brokers of his acquaintance.

Obed planted three willow trees on his lawn that he grew from a slip he supposedly took from above the tomb of Napoleon at St. Helena. These trees are seventy-foot giants today.

Captain Obed died in his home on August 2, 1895 truly mourned by all who knew him. His daughter, Bessie May Baker Keith then became owner and used it as a summer residence. She added the glassed in wings and made other additions in the early 1900s. She installed the elaborate iron fencing, a fishpond with goldfish and water lilies, and a pair of peacocks that roamed the grounds and screeched at people walking by if they stopped to admire the beautiful gardens and grounds. Bessie was the social Grand Dame of West Dennis in the summertime. She opened her lovely home in September 1921 to about 200 people for a reading by noted Chatham author, Joseph C. Lincoln, to benefit the West Dennis Library.

The property passed out of the family in 1961, eventually becoming a Mecca for jazz lovers who came to hear the jazz greats of the era, and a restaurant. The past few years have been a struggle for a series of owners.

This Old House is waiting for someone with money and a vision to bring it alive again in the 21st Century. The spirit of Captain Obed Look Baker would be grateful.

Phyllis Horton

The Stephen Homer House

The July newsletter contained an article by Kevin Keegan on his restoration of this classic dwelling on the north side of Rt. 6A. Here is a picture of the work in progress.



Photo by Richard S. Howes

Cook Books of History

Did you know that the earliest cookbook is believed to be a clay tablet from Babylon, dated circa 1005 B.C.? Reportedly, it gives directions for preparing elegant meals like those described in histories of the Ancient Greeks and Romans.

I doubt we have any cookbooks of that vintage on Cape Cod, but I'm sure just about everyone has a treasured cookbook, handed down in their family. An old family cookbook can reveal a great deal about the life of those who used it and made interesting and often intriguing notes in the margins, as well as tucked in notes and cut-out items from magazines and newspapers.

The cookbook handed down to me from my mother – the pages stained and yellowed – is sitting here on my desk as I write this. It is actually a school notebook with mostly handwritten recipes such as this one:

5 loaves or 8 dozen rolls
4 qts. flour
2 tabbsp. salt
1 1/2 tabbsp. sugar
Little less than 1/2 lb. lard
2 qt. milk
2 yeast cakes

As for how to put all these ingredients together, you ought to already know from your mother who taught you to cook. Right?

I admit, that although I have often made bread and rolls over the years, I never used this particular recipe. Others in the notebook, now literally falling apart, are among my favorites. They range from oatmeal cookies to Washington cream pie, from chocolate cake, to “Florida Blueberry Cake,” to cucumber pickles, mustard pickles and green tomato “picklilly” (sic) to name a few.

For Skills Day, the August 16, Open House at Jericho, I am planning an exhibit of old cookbooks, along with a few samples of what they can produce. After all, talking of “old” skills, cooking has been with us since our cave-dwelling ancestors discovered how to make fire.

My cookbooks tell stories, and I’m sure everyone else’s do too. If you would like to participate in this exhibit with a special cookbook, with a story, or a recipe from the past, call me at 508-398-8592, or email, meleastman@aol.com.

Peggy Eastman



The Barn at Jericho



Did you recognize this treasure? As members of our Dennis Historical Society this should have been easy. This barn is located at the Jericho Historical Center on W. Main St., corner of Trotting Park Rd. (By the way, who knows how this road was named?) Come to Jericho’s Skills Day on Sunday, August 16, 11:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m. Tour the Barn (find the relic from the steamship Portland disaster!) then go inside the home built for Captain Baker to see the cookbook display!



DHS Library

We are in the final stages of completing the agreement to move the DHS Library to the West Dennis Library. We would really appreciate any additional contributions that our members could make to ease the costs of the modifications to the library shelving and other related moving expenses. Please send contributions to the address in the newsletter header if you can support this project.

Pete Howes, DHS President
Burt Derick, DHS Librarian



Membership Notes

Membership Dues Renewal - Your membership renewal package is enclosed. We hope that you return this promptly to help our Assistant Treasurer/Membership Chairman Mary Kuhrtz.

New Members - We are *very* pleased to welcome Michael and Eileen Birch and Henry and Patricia Burke into the Dennis Historical Society.

New Members Reception - *New members – Have you RSVP’d your invitation to the August event yet??*



Notable Quotes

“People do not decide to become extraordinary. They decide to accomplish extraordinary things.”

*Sir Edmund Hillary
1919 - 2008*

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



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ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

Mark Your Calendars – Upcoming DHS Programs

Thursday, August 6, 10:00 a.m.

The Ancient West Dennis Cemetery Walk

A guided walk in the early 1700's West Dennis Cemetery with Terri Fox.

A \$3.00 Donation is suggested.

Meet at the West Dennis Cemetery

Fisk Street, West Dennis

Rain Date - Friday, August 7, 10:00 a.m.

Saturday, August 15, 10:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.

Colonial Open House at the Manse

Costumed interpreters demonstrate early skills. Open hearth cooking, Candle making, spinning, pie making, the Colonial Militia performing drills, children's games and more.

Refreshments will be served.

1736 Josiah Dennis Manse Museum
77 Nobscusset Road, Dennis Village

Sunday, August 16, 11:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.

Old Fashioned Skills Day at Jericho

Costumed guides demonstrate the varied skills needed for life in the 1800's.

Don't miss the Driftwood Zoo! See the authentic tools of the time in *The Barn at Jericho House*.

Children's games. Refreshments will be served.

1801 Jericho Historical Center
90 Old Main Street, West Dennis

Saturday, August 29, 7:30 p.m.

Twilight Cemetery Visions!

Tour historic Dennis Village Cemetery with ghostly reenactors. *Bring your imaginations.*

Reservations required. Maximum 30 souls
\$13 per person *prepaid* to benefit the
Josiah Dennis Manse Repair Fund

Call 508-385-9308

Rt. 6A & Old Bass River Rd. Dennis Village
Rain Date - Sunday August 30