

AN ASSEMBLY OF ANTIQUES

Editor's note: The headline does not refer to those present!

The interesting assortment of belongings on the table in front of John Schofield at our November meeting seemed challenging enough for any expert. But Mr. Schofield provided interesting comment and information on each and every one of the items brought by our members for him to speak about. The range was from turn of the century collectibles to European imports and some Oriental offerings such as those brought back by our local mariners from their world encircling voyages. Two items were of particular interest to me--one a primitive flax hackel, the wood worn smooth by the tiresome work of preparing flax for spinning into linen thread. The other was the log of the Shiverick Clipper Ship, Wild Hunter. Written in the neat hand of Captain Joshua Sears, it covers the voyages from 1857 to 1860 of this most beautiful of the clippers built in East Dennis. Thanks to Mr. Schofield for his comments, and to our members who shared their treasures with us.

A NINETEENTH CENTURY CHRISTMAS

The First-comers to our beloved peninsula did not celebrate Christmas. Religion was serious business and left no room for merriment. The only holy days in the church calendar were occasional days of fasting and penance and even more occasionally, Thanksgiving. But as other cultures were woven into the fabric of Colonial life, the celebration of Christmas became common in New England. From the Dutch came Santa Claus, from the Hessians soldiers who served as mercenaries in the Revolution came the Christmas Tree, from the Episcopalian Virginians the English traditions of Yule log, holly and ivy, and the Wassail Bowl. By 1854 Christmas traditions were so much a part of the New England life that a clipper ship owned by Joseph Nickerson and Co. was christened "Santa Claus", and had a figurehead representing the old gentleman complete with his legendary pipe. (Capt. Bailey Foster of Brewster was for sometime Master of this vessel, which was designed by Donald MacKay.) Come to the Jericho House on Sunday, December 2, from 3-6 P.M. and help us recreate a nineteenth century Christmas. We promise a Wassail bowl, holly and mistletoe, seasonal music provided by Georgia Bagge, interesting company, and the beautiful atmosphere of lovely little Jericho House, dressed for the holidays by the members of the West Dennis Garden Club.

WEATHERWISE AND OTHERWISE

An interesting chapter in Marion Crowell Ryder's book, Cape Cod Remembrances, tells of the weather wisdom of our ancestors. Today, dependent upon satellites and radar, we have lost the art of casting a weather eye at wind directions, cloud formation, and the rise and fall of the weather glass. We leave weather predictions to the six o'clock news. But then, even as now, predicting the weather was one thing and doing something about it was something else. Deprived of electric blankets, steam heat and air conditioners, our ancestors had to learn to use their wits to survive the extremes of heat and cold. In light of the energy predicaments we find ourselves in this winter, perhaps we should examine some of the weather-coping tricks of our predecessors on this narrow land.

Dr. Abner Hersey coped with weather changes as he did everything else, in a practical, organized manner. He was as colorful a character as the Cape has produced, one of her first and best trained full time physicians, whose practice extended from one end of the Cape to the other. He lived in Barnstable in the late 1700's and tales abound as to his eccentricities. His method of keeping warm on cold winter nights was thus. Folded neatly on his bed were twelve woolen blankets. In summer he covered himself with two of these blankets. Then, as fall and winter progressed, he would pull up one more, then one more until finally, in the cold of February, all twelve would be heaped upon him. As the warming trend began, one by one of the blankets were removed and folded neatly for the next cold season. By all predictions folks, this may very well be a twelve-blanket winter, so scour your attic for some stout woolen blankets and, like Dr. Abner, be prepared for the worst.

THE STREETS OF OUR TOWN

A while ago we mentioned Sassafras Road as one of the streets in our town bearing the name of an historically interesting tree. Did you know that Holly Street in South Dennis is another such street? There are many varieties of holly (*Ilex opaca*) native to Cape Cod. Unfortunately, much of it has been destroyed by the general deforestation which took place as the earlier generations harvested the much needed wood. Some has been lost to forest fires; a little remains growing in the few undisturbed woodlands of the Cape. We are fortunate that the first Commissioner of Agriculture in Massachusetts, Wilbur Wheeler, saw the holly as endangered and set about to preserve and propagate this beautiful tree on his farm in East Falmouth in 1925. These hollies, some otherwise extinct as native trees, are now preserved by the Audubon Society on a 45-acre tract known as the Ashumet Holly Reservation and Wildlife Preserve. Self-guided trails wend through paths which are lined not only by native holly, but by fine examples of European and Asian varieties as well. Threat yourself to a glimpse of Unspoiled Cape Cod--take a walk through Mr. Wheeler's plantation this holiday season. You will be reminded of the beauty of this neat, dark leaved bright berried tree, so often a symbol of the Christmas season, whenever you pass Holly Street, one of the Streets of Our Town.

November 28 New Bedford Historical Bus Tour. For information call 394-5739.
 December 2 Christmas Open House, Jericho Historical Center 3-6 P.M. All welcome.
 December 16 The Boston Tea Party, 1773. Drink cocoa!
 January 1 Happy New Year (N.S.)
 January 23 "The Cape Cod Canal" Talk by Bill Norman, U.S. Corps of Engineers,
 Carleton Hall, Dennis, 7:30 P.M.
 February 16 Mid-Winter Festivities. Luncheon at The Columns, West Dennis, details
 next month.
 Note: There will not be an Executive Board meeting during December.

A PASSAGE FROM THE NORTH SEA TO THE SOUTH

It seems strange that the building of a canal through the Cape should have
 been a matter so long considered and so late accomplished. In 1627, when the trading
 post with the Dutch was established at Manomet, the need for the joining of the
 Manomet River and Scusset Creek was evident and appeared practical. And yet nearly
 300 years of speculation was to pass before the canal was opened for traffic. In
 the meantime among other sites proposed for the ship canal was our own Bass River
 which, though far from straight, is in fact almost a natural cut-through from north
 sea to the south. Think of the changes in the history of our town if this way had
 been chosen. But the presence of Dog Fish Bar on the west side of the mouth of the
 river seems to have discouraged its proponents. Bill Norman of the U.S. Corps of
 Engineers which maintains the Canal will give us the history of the Cape Cod Canal
 at the D.H.S. meeting on January 23 at 7:30 P.M. at Carleton Hall, Dennis. Please
 join us.

SCUTTLE WATCH

Sales of Scuttle Watch by Marion Crowell Ryder have been good in advance of its
 reprinting in December. If you have not ordered a copy, remember that only one
 thousand have been ordered, several hundred of which are going to local schools.
 Send your order to Scuttle Watch, Box 607, South Dennis, MA 02660. If ordered
 before December 15, the cost is \$4.50 plus mailing charge of 75¢ and you will also
 receive a copy of Master Mariners of Dennis. After December 15, the price is \$4.95.

THE WRECK OF THE GENERAL ARNOLD

All of us know the story of the cruel winter of 1777-78 when the Continental
 Army, encamped at Valley Forge, suffered extreme hardship due to the unexpected
 early and severe weather the week before Christmas 1777. Hundreds of soldiers died
 not at the hand of the British, but from a more formidable enemy, the weather. The
 preceding year, December 1776 must have been much like that famous year at Valley
 Forge, for here in New England a smaller tragedy befell a small group of Volunteers,
 who succumbed to the same enemy--cold. On December 24, 1776, the brig, General
 Arnold, left Boston headed for New York with 105 aboard. The brig encountered a
 severe Northeast storm as it attempted to cross Cape Cod Bay and was driven back to
 Plymouth where Capt. James Magee was able to anchor, hoping to weather out the storm.
 The men of Plymouth realized the danger the brig was in, but were forced to remain
 on shore by the wind. On Sunday, December 27, the wind abated sufficiently for a
 rescue attempt to be made--too late for many, for of the 105 aboard, only 33 remained
 alive. Eleven of the mariners were from Barnstable. One of them was Daniel Hall,
 grandson of Deacon Daniel Hall, long time lay leader of the East Precinct Church
 (North Dennis) and a nephew of Atherton Hall who was to become the first Town Clerk
 of Dennis when it separated from Yarmouth in 1793. The only survivor among the
 Barnstable contingent was Barnabas Downs, Jr., who, though frozen, was able to
 attract rescuers to his seemingly lifeless body by blinking his eyes. He was
 tenderly cared for by the inhabitants of Plymouth and when recovered enough to
 return home, there was no carriage to be found on the Cape that could serve as an
 ambulance. The only carriage at all was a one horse shay belonging to Dr. Abner Hersey
 of "twelve-blanket" fame. So John Thacher who carried mail to the Cape from Plymouth
 rigged a stretcher between two horses and painstakingly carried the crippled Barnabas
 back to his Cape Cod home. It is interesting to speculate in view of our subject for
 the January meeting, whether or not this tragedy (and many similar) would have been
 avoided if the Canal had been attempted earlier in our history.

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