

### STURBRIDGE AND DENNIS - 1840

We saw a very interesting film at our November meeting, depicting the work-a-day life as recreated at Old Sturbridge Village, representing early rural America about 1840. We also had a glimpse of the beginnings of industrialization as water power began to be employed to do tasks previously laboriously performed with "person" power. Following the film, we talked about the similarities and differences between Dennis and Sturbridge during this period, when agriculture on the Cape was much less important and occupations having to do with the sea employed a large percent of the male population. Nevertheless, certain aspects of daily life were very similar, and a good discussion was had, with many contributing. Our thanks to Jim Coogan, who showed the film for us, and also arranged to have it shown at the High School to several American History classes.

### CHRISTMAS OPEN HOUSE

The exceptionally mild weather which we have enjoyed may have lulled us into thinking that Christmas is a long way off. But the calendar says otherwise, and our Christmas Open House is only a short time away. Susan Kelley is organizing a group of volunteers to decorate the Manse appropriately. Georgia Pate will provide seasonal music, as will the Girl Scout carollers. I understand that there will be an ample supply of Dennis Historical Society's well-known version of "Negus", a tasty hot punch, as well as other delightful refreshments. We hope you will all come and exchange Holiday greetings with friends and neighbors, at the Josiah Dennis Manse on Sunday, December 12, from 3-5 P.M.

### CHRISTMAS COMES TO CAPE COD

Although we annually celebrate Christmas at one of our historic centers, there is a very good chance that Christmas was not celebrated in either house by its original family, or for several generations thereafter. If you remember from Governor William Bradford's journal, the pilgrims of Plymouth Colony deliberately banned all celebration of Christmas as they considered it a heathen holiday and not a Holy Day. Early writings on Cape Cod refer to the season as "Fool tide", a caricature of "Yule tide" as then celebrated in the Anglican church. A statute passed by the Great and General Court of Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1659 stated, in essence, that the celebration of Christmas had been deemed a sacrilege by the Congregational ministers, and therefore the exchanging of gifts and greetings, dressing in fine clothing, feasting and "similar Satanical practices" in observance of the day would be subject to a fine to the offender of 5 shillings. In fact, festivities surrounding Christmas in New England were very limited until the mid-1800's. Nevertheless, there is an historical record of a celebration of Christmas which was held on Pochet Beach in Orleans in 1626. Perhaps you remember that a vessel named Sparrowhawk was shipwrecked on its voyage from England to Virginia in that year. The Indians were persuaded to go to Plymouth to seek help for the stranded passengers. As Christmas Day arrived, the Englishmen, who were not Congregationalists, but Anglicans, celebrated Christmas with a roast goose, washed down with a hogshead of wine. If the Pilgrims had known that, they probably wouldn't have come to their rescue! Nevertheless, they did, sheltering the passengers of the Sparrowhawk until a vessel arrived which could take them to their destination. Thus the first known celebration of Christmas on Cape Cod was held on an Orleans beach in 1626, despite the disapproval of the Cape's first settlers.

### THE SECOND SCARGO OBSERVATORY

"There was a tall building upon Scargo Hill,  
But having blown down, 'tis not standing there still."

With these words, the Dennis correspondent to the Yarmouth Register laments the loss of the first observatory which stood atop Scargo Hill. The great windstorm in February 1876 which leveled the tower also uprooted the Liberty Elm on Boston Common, but unlike the elm, which was forever lost, the tower at Scargo would rise again. Almost immediately, plans were made to raise funds to replace the observatory, which had become a landmark for the Dennis villagers. Food sales and entertainments were held to benefit the building fund and by July of that same year, the new tower was complete. Joshua Crowell has a fine picture of the structure. About 30 feet high, it is a six-sided wooden building, resembling a windmill, but with an observation deck instead of a cap with arms and sails. Our Dennis reporter exclaims that this tower is surely strong enough to withstand a tempest, but in a good-natured jab at the Yarmouth Register's editor's inflammatory oratory, he adds that if Editor Swift will keep his fire confined to Yarmouth, the tower is sure to last for years. His light-hearted prophecy had an ironic twist. The tower did survive for a number of years, and withstood several tempests, and its end was not by wind, but by fire. I will tell you more next time.

