



CHRISTMAS AT THE MANSE

(PLEASE NOTE! A typographical error combined the last two lines of the November calendar. See this month's calendar for the correct date.)

This town is so fortunate to have two beautiful historic houses which are maintained for the public. We are proud and happy each year to join with the committee of one of these houses to sponsor a Christmas Open House. This year's Open House is at the Josiah Dennis Manse on Sunday, December 7 from 2-4 P.M. You will be greeted with unusual Christmas music, and refreshments will be served, including our famous hot punch. Susan Kelley, assisted by house chairman Maree Galvin and other volunteers, will decorate the house. It always looks so pretty by candlelight. I hope you and your families will plan to be there.

WHAT DO YOU DO IN THE WINTERTIME?

I laugh when people ask that question, don't you? There is so much to do on the Cape in the wintertime, that we are all spoiled for choice. A much more interesting question is "What did people on Cape Cod do for entertainment a few generations ago?" Ben Thacher, of Old Sound Museum in East Dennis, can tell us - and show us - as he shares with us the many antique audio and visual machines in his collection. If you are nostalgia oriented, you will love just being in his museum. Fun for everyone, children as well as adults. Plan to come on Sunday, January 11 at 2 P.M. at Old Sound Museum, East Dennis.

THE BOSTON TEA PARTY - THE CAPE CONNECTION

Many of you don't really know me at all except through our monthly letter, which, by the way, begins its tenth year with the next edition. A few of you do know that my husband and I have raised (or are we still raising?) five healthy, active, imaginative children. Those of you who have been through that experience know as well as we do that with a house full of children, it is very difficult to keep one's sanity throughout the month of December. Anticipation of Christmas brings a level of excitement never reached at other seasons. So, for survival reasons, we evolved with our family some rules and coping strategies to vent off a little of the accumulating steam. First of all, we never talk about Christmas until after Thanksgiving - usually that meant right after Thanksgiving, as the table was being cleared. In the matter of decorating the house, starting with our very humble creche on December 1st, one decoration a day was added, usually by mother, everyone else having the fun of finding the new one. Also, we devised some small celebrations to divert the total absorption with The Holiday. One of these my children remember well, and often joke about. It was December 16, Boston Tea Party Day. It being also Beethoven's birthday, we listened to a symphony during dinner and had a birthday cake for dessert. Then, wrapped up to the eyeballs, we walked to the High Bank Bridge and threw some symbolic tea into the river. What fun - such silliness - but it usually meant that for at least one day, the children were thinking about something other than the coming visit from St. Nick.

The Christmas holiday was hardly noticed in 1773, when the original Tea Party took place. All thoughts were centered on the acts of the British Parliament, taxing and limiting commerce of the unrepresented American Colonists. The tea, shipped under special privilege by the East India Company, and taxed to the consumer, was a symbol for those who felt the oppression should not be tolerated. Well, you know the story as well as I do. But do you know that there were some of "our boys" there on that cold December evening? I know of at least two, Joseph Bassett of Yarmouth and Edmund Sears who lived on Quivet Neck, both captains of small coasting vessels. They happened to be unloading cargo in Boston Harbor when the patriots arrived and they joined in the expedition. Fired up with anger against the British, Edmund, family tradition says, came home and threw all of Mrs. Sears' tea out the window. ("Your father's gone daft," she is said to have whispered to the children.) Edmund vowed that he and his family would drink no British tea, nor wear any British-made clothes ever again. Easy for him to say, but it meant a lot of spinning and weaving for his wife Hannah and their four daughters. The boys did their part, however, all four of them serving in the revolutionary forces during the war which was brought to reality in large part because of the consequences of a Tea Party.

Trivia question: There is now a Boston Tea Party ship and museum in Boston. What other community has a Tea Party memorial?

MID-WINTER FESTIVITY

Fore-warned is fore-armed. This popular luncheon will be held on February 14 at Christine's restaurant in West Dennis. For \$9 (tax and gratuity included) you will have your choice of Lasagna, Scrod, or Chicken. Mark the date now. A reservation form will be included next month.

CALENDAR

December 4	10 A.M.	Sandwich Glass Museum. Bi-Monthly meeting of the Cape and Islands Historical Association. If interested, call Phyllis or Nancy.
December 7	2-4	Christmas Open House. Josiah Dennis Manse.
December 9	7 P.M.	Town Meeting.
December 18	7:30 P.M.	Board meets with Phyllis.
December 25		Merry Christmas, one and all.
December 28, 1869		Chewing gum was patented at U.S. Patent Office (not a Reid family holiday!)
January 11	2 P.M.	Old Sound Museum, East Dennis. Ben Thacher and his marvelous talking machines.
February 14	12 noon	Mid-Winter Luncheon. Christine's, West Dennis.

CAPTAIN BERNARD O'NEIL PART II

In the period of 1840-1860 several new names appear in the town of Dennis. Some of these were Irish immigrants, victims of the potato famine, who came on vessels captained by local men and settled here, working as domestic help, farming, or working on the project of building the large wharves which were growing out from both our north and south shores. Some of these men became mariners and some Master mariners. I cannot tell you how or why Bernard O'Neil came to Dennis. Whatever brought him here, he liked what he found and made it his home for life. He fell in love with Roxanna, the daughter of Capt. Elisha Crowell, and the two were married when both of them were 22 years old. But Bernard's joy soon turned to sorrow, for in June of 1845 he laid both the body of his young wife and their infant son to rest in the West Dennis cemetery. After a few years of loneliness, he married again, Lydia (Chase) Baker, herself a young widow. But once again, well-laid plans would go awry. After presenting Bernard with a son, named Bernard Davis O'Neil, Lydia lost her life giving birth to a second infant, who also died. Left with a son only 2 years old, Bernard must find himself a wife to be the child's mother. This time, he was more fortunate, for his new wife, Laura Ann Smith, bore him a fine family and survived him into golden years of old age. They lived in a home which I remember well, as being very large and hospitable. It stood off Fisk Street, between Pond and Main in West Dennis, and has been gone for many years. The older boys in the family went to sea with their father, and sometimes in the summer the younger ones and Mrs. O'Neil would go also. The girls were talented musically. Laura Belle was organist of the village church for 25 years. The O'Neil home was often the scene of gatherings for the West Dennis young people. Captain O'Neil owned shares in many local vessels, as did the other captains, but for much of his career he sailed for the Boston firm of Thomas Dana and Company. Some of the vessels of which he was Master were the schooner Sea Mist, brig Mary E. Dana, and schooner Annie L. Conant, on which he carried cotton to England. His career is similar to that of many of the town's sea captains of that era. The great-granddaughters of Capt. Bernard O'Neil have given the town his ship's flag to preserve and display, in memory of their parents, Dexter and Ruth O'Neil. The girls grew up in the captain's homestead in the 1930's and 40's. They remember the huge 13 star flag being displayed on the side of that old home on the Fourth of July. Perhaps some of you do also. Town Meeting will be asked to appropriate \$3,067 to have the Andover Textile Conservation Center restore the flag and prepare it for display. It will go back on the wall of the Wixon School, as a family memorial, but also as a reminder of the many mariners who contributed to the economy and reputation of the young United States. Please go to Town Meeting and vote to preserve Captain O'Neil's flag.

MORE NEW MEMBERS TO REPORT.....

.....including Mr. and Mrs. Roger H. Parish, Robert H. Rohr, John A. Burton, Rick Maitland, Mr. and Mrs. John W. Laffey, Mr. and Mrs. Brendon Joyce, and Mr. and Mrs. Albert E. Kelley. Welcome all - let's keep those cards and letters - and dues - coming.

Dennis Historical Society
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