



CHRISTMAS IN HONG KONG

It's no fun to be away from home for the holidays. In the days of the clipper ships, however, this was not uncommon. Indeed, many mariners from Cape Cod spent the holidays away from home for more than one year in a row. Such was the case for Captain Joshua Sears. He was born and raised in East Dennis and received his education in the village school before taking up a life at sea. Capt. Joshua is one of our better known mariners, not only because of his varied career, but also because he kept a private journal which has been preserved by his family. In it he discloses many details of life at sea, including how Americans abroad met together to try to bring each other a little cheer on lonely holidays. In addition to the journal and the logs which he so carefully kept, Capt. Joshua was a prolific letter writer, and many of his letters home have also been preserved. Capt. Joshua Sears had been master of the ship Burmah and the Orissa. In 1355 he had been appointed captain of the Shiverick's newest ship, Wild Hunter. On her maiden voyage, you may remember, his wife Minerva and daughter, Louisa, better known as Lulu, accompanied him. But in 1357 Joshua Sears set out without his family on a voyage which was to keep him away from home for three and a half lonely years. There was no man in the world who loved home and family more than Capt. Joshua. But, in spite of homesickness which caused him days of melancholy and nights of sleeplessness, he was considered by other mariners to be the master of one of the best-kept ships afloat. This voyage with its many frustrations was not only a personal trial to the Captain, but took place at a time when cargoes were becoming scarce and economic conditions were poor. While running a tight ship, Joshua was also known as a driver, taking advantage of the slightest breeze or the fullest gale to get his ship and cargo in to port ahead of any others who had set sail with him. The journey which he undertook in 1357 took him first to California, then across the Pacific to ports in China. He then proceeded to England, Germany and back around the Cape of Good Hope to the China Sea once more, picking up and delivering any cargo which he felt worthwhile and delivering it to the market which he calculated to be most profitable. He weathered typhoons and doldrums, and yearned continuously for word from home. Especially on holidays and his birthday did he miss his family and often wrote expressing his depression. In the summer of 1359 he arrived in Hong Kong, the Wild Hunter much battered by a serious storm, and in need of extensive repair. Due to the economic situation, which found him barely making expenses, he determined that he would make the repairs himself. Thus he found himself in Hong Kong for several months, and here at last he caught up with news from home. Captain Eben Linnell of Orleans came into port while the Wild Hunter was laid up. He had spent the previous Christmas at home, and his news of the Cape was the latest that Joshua had received in a year. This Thanksgiving away from home was not as bleak for the lonesome East Dennis man. Capt. Linnell was in charge of the Ship Flying Mist, and to celebrate the day when fellow New Englanders were feasting and attending church at home, he gave a gala Ball aboard his fine ship. Capt. Sears attended and wrote a description of the festivities to his family. "I should liked to have had you and Lulu there," he said, "For crinoline was very much in demand, as there is only about fifteen ladies in port." Work on the Wild Hunter continued to occupy the captain and his crew for some weeks more, and Christmas, 1359 found them still at anchor in Hong Kong. For this holiday, there was no shortage of good company and good times. Captain Benjamin Parker Howes of Dennis was in port with his fine vessel the Southern Cross, his wife accompanying him. Calvin Clark Howes, second officer of the ship Eliza and Ella, and a fellow native of Dennis, was also in port and paid a call on the Wild Hunter, bringing news that Joshua had longed to hear. For Calvin had seen the Sears family before he left from home and could report that all had been well with them at that time. Since it had been a year since mail had caught up with the ship, good news even from so many months was welcome. Interestingly, another Cape Cod native spent that Christmas in the far off port. He was Captain Bailey Foster of Brewster, aboard his vessel, the ship Santa Claus. Although Saint Nicholas was not as universal a holiday figure in 1359 as he is today still one could imagine that little Lulu would have enjoyed swinging at anchor next to this vessel with its fanciful figure head. All in all, the Cape Codders had a merrier Christmas than any one of them had expected. Today, if you travelled to Hong Kong, unless you were part of a local tour, you would scarcely expect to find a fellow tourist from Massachusetts, let alone your own home town. Dennis people in the 1850's met each other in all of the major ports of the world, and were glad to exchange news of home. As it turned out, this long cruise made by Joshua sears in the Wild Hunter was his last. He arrived home before Christmas of 1360 and never spent lonely holidays again. In fact I would be very surprised if, in his later days, he told many times over the story of the holidays which he spent in Hong Kong with neighbors from home. It's a very odd sailor who does not love to tell of his adventures at sea.

CALENDAR

Dec. 6	10:00 AM	Cape & Islands Historical Assn. meets at the 4 C's Library for Disaster Planning given by New England Document Conservation Center
Dec. 8	2-4 PM	Harwich Historical Society Open House, Brooks Academy, Harwich Center
Dec. 9	2-5 PM	Christmas Open House at Josiah Dennis Manse. Music by Dennis Girl Scout Troop 1515 and Stephen Russell. Come and bring a friend.
Dec. 12	7:00 PM	Board meets at Phyllis'
Dec. 25		Merry Christmas, one and all!
Jan. 1, 1991		HAPPY NEW YEAR--and best wishes for a happy, healthy year!!

HOW DID YOU DO ON THANKSGIVING TRIVIA?

According to my encyclopedia, Canadian Thanksgiving is celebrated on the second Monday in October, presumably because winter comes early in that clime. And the lady who succeeded in making Thanksgiving a holiday in the U.S. of A. was Sarah Josepha Hale. She had tried for 20 years to have the holiday nationalized before A. Lincoln became convinced by her pleas in 1863. Ms. Hale was a thoroughly modern woman, and her activity in establishing this country's Thanksgiving is not her only claim to fame. She began her adult life as a school teacher, and was the author of that timeless rhyme, "Mary's Little Lamb", based on an actual incident in her teaching career. In later life she was a journalist, and editor of Godey's Lady's Book. As such she was a contemporary of Lydia Maria Childs, also a journalist and editor of the magazine National Anti-Slavery Standard. You may remember Mrs. Childs as author of "The American Frugal Housewife, and also "Over the River and Through the Woods", one of the few well-known ditties associated with Thanksgiving. I hope your feast was festive, and the Board and officers of D.H.S. join with your newspaper staff in wishing you happy holidays ahead.

AS YOU SOW, SO SHALL YE REAP

Did you know that our own Lynne Horton was recently elected president of the Cape and Islands Historical Association? This is a well-deserved honor for a young woman who has done much to help this new organization in its self-appointed task of aiding the many historical groups here on the islands of Martha's Vineyard, Nantucket, and Cape Cod to share programs, ideas, and expertise with one another. Our society has done its share in making this association work. In addition to hosting meetings, we have discussed and demonstrated our excellent elementary school education program for the group. This summer representatives from Eastham attended one of our field trips at the Manse. They went home brimming with ideas, and as a result, we received a call last month to let us know that they had presented a program for their school children which was received with gratifying enthusiasm by children and teachers alike. It is only fair that we should help Eastham get its program underway. Do you remember the fine program presented by their then-President Don Sparrow a short time ago? And our most interesting and popular "Memory Days", held in each village a few winters ago, were held as a result of suggestions learned from workshops conducted by the Andrists of Eastham, experts in collecting oral history. Our latest sisterly sharing with another society was the loan of our equipment and cranberry slides for showing at the Open House during the Cranberry Festival, sponsored by the Harwich Historical Society, and held at the newly renovated Brooks Academy. This was also a fair exchange, as Link Thacher of Harwich helped us immeasurably in writing and producing our cranberry slide show and narrated it. We have received another benefit from our willingness to share, and that is an invitation to attend the exhibit and celebration to be held on Saturday, December 8, at the Brooks Academy. If you have not seen this beautiful building since its reopening, you should make this a "must-do" on your December calendar. In addition to this welcome invitation, Beverly Thacher, who has had a major part in the refurbishing of the museum, has promised to help us next spring, to bring new life to our own cranberry exhibit at the Jericho Barn, which we all look forward to. So join Harwich as they invite the public to view and enjoy the exhibits at their fine old building, and perhaps many of their folks will join us on the following day for music and refreshments at the Open House at our Manse.

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