



AN ADVENTURE IN SAN FRANCISCO

How is the book coming, everyone wants to know. I've been saying just "Pretty good" in response to that question, but as of late I have been able to reply, "I'm up to the twentieth century", and I'm glad to be able to say so. Every once in a while I think to myself that those who read the finished book are going to think that every one who ever lived in this town was named Howes, Crowell, Sears, Hall, Baker, or Nickerson, for so many stories in each generation involve these families. Well, that's not exactly true, although according to the census of 1809 there were 30 families named Baker, 28 named Crowell, 24 named Hall, 24 named Nickerson, 27 named Sears, and 61 named Howes. The Kelleys were clearly in the minority with only five families of that name. But these were not the only families in town, even if they were clearly the majority. There was a smattering of Baxters, Chapmans, Burgesses, and other old Cape families. And in that same 1809 census there was one strange name. It was Manuel Spindell. He was probably, in fact, Manuel Aspendilo, of Dennis, whose marriage to Bethia Robbins is recorded in the Harwich vital records, as well as intentions filed November of 1789. I have not found out as yet just who he was or from whence he came. He seems to have been associated with the Paddock family and may have been a sailor who joined the whaling Paddocks when they visited a foreign port, perhaps Spanish or Portuguese. One thing we do know, Manuel Aspendilo was not your ordinary Anglo-Saxon Cape Coddler. Nevertheless, Manuel seemed to fit comfortably into the life of the village and the Spindells remained in Dennis for several generations. Manuel and Bethia had several children who attended local schools and married into those majority families. At least one son married and carried on the family name. Born to this son about 1832 was a grandson named Isaiah. When he became a lad of early teens, Isaiah Aspendelo, whose name had now become anglicized to Spindell, did as his friends did—he went to sea. What else would you expect of a Dennis boy in the Golden Age of Sail? At first he went on short journeys with the local fishermen and traders. But after gold was discovered in California he was one of the many local boys and men who manned the vessels which rounded Cape Horn and brought supplies to the miners around San Francisco Bay. His adventures were no doubt about the same as those of his friends who ventured to the west coast. The difference is that when Isaiah became an old man, he told his stories and had them written down. Thus he has given us a rare glimpse of Gold Rush days as seen through the eyes of a local lad. Isaiah describes himself as a "raw boy" when he left his home in Dennis to take a berth on the Antiss, a 595 ton bark-rigged vessel headed for California. The voyage around the Horn was filled with the usual hazards and difficulties but these were nothing compared to the adventures which awaited when the Anstiss arrived in the area which is now the charming city of San Francisco. Once the cargo was discharged, the crew was granted shore leave. Spindell remembered:

"When I arrived at the Golden Gate I was just as green and full of enthusiasm as the day I left my home."

But innocence was soon to be lost and the green boy who had left Dennis months ago was to become educated beyond his expectations or as Spindell told an interviewer near the end of his long life, his

"....Puritan ideas and nicely brought up sensibilities received several stunning shocks."

Saloons, dance halls, and gambling halls were a new and exciting thing to the young crew of the Anstiss. Isaiah's first adventure took place in an establishment which combined all three. He was surprised to see how deftly the pretty girl managed the roulette wheel, and watched in amazement as winners racked up their piles of quarters. His amazement turned to glee when having placed a quarter on a number, the lovely lady racked the quarters over to him. Isaiah couldn't wait to share his good fortune with his bunk mate. Soon the two returned to try their luck against the wheel once more. It took but thirty minutes for both boys to lose all of the money they had between them. Lesson number one, Isaiah—quit while you're ahead! Spindell did resolve never to gamble again, but the lure of the gold in them thar hills tempted him and he refused the offer to be promoted to mate and sail to the Orient in favor of becoming a prospector. Unlike many, he did manage to mine a sizeable amount of gold ore, which he turned into cash and sent into the town to be brought home to Dennis in charge of his brother. Some of the cash went astray, however, so Spindell travelled by boat from the gold fields to the town to see if he could discover what had happened. Upon arriving he fell in with a man who told him he was headed for the same hotel and knew the coach they should take. The stranger turned out to be a cohort of the coachman intent on robbing Spindell and doing away with him. He barely escaped with his money, however, when a cry of "Police" distracted the would-be thieves and Isaiah ran for his life. He took refuge in a boarding house, where he hired lodging, which turned out to be a crowded dormitory inhabited by a number of men in various stages of "sleeping it off". Needless to say, Isaiah slept but little, and was in a great hurry to be off to a more respectable house. He never did find out what happened to his cash. Spindell returned to the sea for a while, returning periodically to San Francisco where his fortune increased but little, but most of his adventures ended happily. Once while enjoying an evening on the town following pay day, he and his fellow crew were making merry in a saloon and talking about what they would do with their money when they returned home. Isaiah remembered an errand he must do before the evening wore on, and left his friends promising to return shortly. When he got back his friends had disappeared. Assuming that they were making the rounds of watering places, Isaiah returned to his room and retired. But the next morning his friends were still not to be found. Upon making inquiries he discovered that when they had reached a level of insobriety, they had been shanghaied and carried aboard a departing vessel to serve as crew, a common practice in (continued on other side....)

CALENDAR

Dec. 9 7:30 P.M. DHS Board meets at the Manse.
Dec. 13 3-5 P.m. Christmas Open House at the Josiah Dennis Manse. Stephen Russell will entertain with seasonal songs. Refreshments will be served.

HAPPY HOLIDAYS TO ALL!!

...from other page

many of the wilder ports which the sailing vessels visited. Spindell continued on his voyage with the ship upon which he had arrived, and eventually returned to Dennis about four years later. His efforts to make contact with his friends were fruitless and after a time he concluded that he was the only one of the original crew of ten that ever returned to their homes. Having had enough of wild life on the west coast, Isaiah Spindell settled down to a quieter life on the Cape. He married and moved to Woods Hole, where he set up a fish packing and shipping business which later he expanded to Boston where Isaiah Spindell and Company was a thriving concern for some time. He retired from making his daily commute to Boston via the train in 1914, and lived out his life in good health and ready wit, always willing to relate the many stories from his younger and wilder days in the west.

"UMBRILLOS FOR SALE"

Only thirty days hath November and for that we can be grateful. Did anyone keep track of just how many of those thirty were rainy? My guess is twenty eight! I can't remember having to carry an umbrella for so long a period of time. In the course of researching for "The Book", I have had the fun of reading the microfilm of many old newspapers and in amongst the items of news which pertain to this town I have also occasionally made note of ads and articles of general interest. I now have a mass of trivia which I find interesting and maybe you will too. One such ad dates from 1767, and is from a newspaper called the Boston Post Boy.

"All sorts of Umbrillos made in the neatest manner,
and sold at the Golden Cock, Marlboro Street, boston"

Umbrellas are not new--not even as new as 1767. The word umbrella comes from the Latin word *umber* meaning shade. Ancient Egyptians used umbrellas. Early Egyptian art depicts slaves holding umbrellas over the heads of royals. In some countries even today an umbrella is a sign of rank. The use of an umbrella as a "rain shade" began in England in the 1700's, so the Golden Cock was keeping up with the fashions back home. Unfortunately, our ad does not describe the umbrillos, nor say how much they cost. I have yet to find an umbrella mentioned in the inventory of an estate. However, my children will find several in my estate, some of them very well used.

THE OLD YEAR PASSETH

We began this year's series of newsletters with some comments about almanacs, past and present, inspired by the 200th anniversary of the most popular such publication of today, New England's Old Farmer's Almanac. Please note that the predictions weatherwise for our region for December include more of the same type we experienced in November, except towards the end of the month, when, it is reported, Santa will arrive in Bermuda shorts!

The almanac in which Mr. Nathan Stone kept his diary in 1792 predicted cold, cold, and more cold, no Santa forecast given. Mr. Stone recorded that it was cold most of the month and that snow fell on four different days. Otherwise the month was uneventful. He made his customary calls on the members of the parish, settled his account with the church and paid his bill at Eldred Baker's store. "End the old year square with everyone", as the OFA for 1992 advises. And as usual there is no mention of Christmas, either as a festival or as a religious celebration. Even as late as this, the orthodox New Englanders regarded Christmas as a pagan holiday, and declared that there was no proof whatsoever to the claim of the 25th of December as the birthday of Christ. Still we draw the inference that Stone was a sociable man by nature. While he might not approve of the present day Christmas season in total, and certainly would deplore the commercialization which now surrounds the day, methinks he would approve of our annual get-together around a bowl of steaming Negus punch, to exchange greetings and good will. The OFA suggests it might be a very cold day on December 13th, but the warmth within the old Manse will not only be from the warm punch. It will be a warmth generated by friends glad to be with each other to enjoy the beauty of our ancient house, decorate for the season, and the beauty of excellent seasonal music. Even if it turns out that the weather is "so cold it makes your eyeballs squeak" as Old Farmer's suggests, you can be assured of a warm welcome at the annual Christmas Open House, held this year at the Josiah Dennis Manse on Sunday afternoon, December 13th from 3-5 P.M.

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