



CHRISTMASSES PAST

Thoughts of Christmas loom ahead with all its attendant hustle and bustle. These same thoughts send us off in several different directions. One is back to our earliest years. The first Pilgrim Christmas was spent, as was many a later one, in work. They came here with an animosity towards the "wanton Bacchanallian Christmases" spent throughout England in "revelling, dicing, carding, masking, mumming, consumed in compotations, in interludes, in excess of wine, in mad mirth" as detailed by Cotton Mather. Our Pilgrim fathers wanted to remove themselves from the excesses of a festival which had ceased to be a Christian holiday, and had become a time of noisy sports, revels, and personal degradation. Accordingly, the New England colonies had about 200 years of quiet Christmas times devoted to work and prayer. Our present day Christmas, which became fashionable in the 1800's, seem to have been influenced as much by German settlers to America with their stories of St. Nicholas as from any other source.

My earliest memories of this holiday are of my grandfather, Alton Robbins. He was the first one in Dennis Port to have a lighted outdoor tree. He painted regular electric light bulbs various colors, wired them together, and hired Cape and Vineyard Electric Co. and, later, Dennis Port electrician Charlie Finley, to put them up to the top of a large spruce tree in his front yard. About this same time his friend Ellis D. Atwood in Carver was doing the same thing, but on a larger scale. That eventually became Edaville. If Gramp hadn't stopped with that one tree Dennis Port might have become a mecca for holiday sightseers.

On Christmas Eve Grampie harnessed Old Dick to the sleigh or carriage, depending on the weather, dressed up with a black hat pulled over his eyes and a long black cape, and came dashing noisily, with sleigh bells jingling, to our back door. His cape had inside pockets full of candy and trinkets which he passed out while he demanded in a gruff voice to be told 'why we were still up this late on Christmas Eve...(probably 6 P.M.)... and didn't we know Santa wouldn't arrive if we didn't go to bed?' Believe me, we didn't waste a minute getting under the covers after that! I'm not sure how old I was before I realized it was my own grandfather under all that disguise. Years later I knew he did it for his own enjoyment, also to help buy mother a little extra time for all those thousand things that need to be done before Christmas morning. I also learned later that he went around to some other houses where Christmas would have been a little slim because of the Depression and left something extra for those kids. Thanks, Gramp, from all your "kids"!---and Happy Holidays to you all.

BITS AND PIECES

The chimney at the Manse is coming along nicely. The work is continuing and we are very pleased with the care they are giving to our old house....The person at Dennis-Yarmouth High School who put the post cards onto slides for us is Mr. Arthur Laughton, D-Y Audio-Visual Director. Many thanks, Mr. Laughton!....Don't forget the Christmas Open House at Jericho, Dec. 11 from 2-4 P.M. Bring a friend to enjoy the beautiful decorations, seasonal music, and great refreshments....Last year this issue was typed in script from necessity. This year it was a request....Ye Olde Ed wishes you all a nice holiday with family and friends, and best wishes for a happy, healthy New Year.

A FENCE FOR JERICO

There is an exciting new energy afoot at Jericho Historical Center. The Jericho Committee is working to upgrade the landscaping so it will set off their lovely full Cape house to its best advantage. Landscape designer Shannon Bohene has surveyed the entire lot and drawn up plans that will be implemented over a period of time. One of the first projects is to erect a fence. When anyone mentions an old Cape house the first image that comes to mind is a Cape cottage surrounded by a tidy white fence with Rambler roses somewhere in the yard--an All-American classic!

The Committee has met with the South Dennis Historical Commission and has their enthusiastic approval for the fence. It has been decided to use the same type of post and rail fence that is in front of the Dennis Town Hall. The acorn top posts are made from cement and are impervious to the rot and termites that plague most Cape Cod fences. This fence will surround Jericho. On the south side of the lot they plan to have a memorial garden that will be set off by a white picket fence. Kitty McNamara has been going throughout the village with tracing paper and pencil in hand to get ideas of what picket will look best at Jericho. That's the easy part. The difficult part is finding the funds. In by-gone years Grandfather would go out in the barn and turn out a few pickets or posts every day until he had enough for the whole fence. Unfortunately, that way of life is one of our pleasant memories now and we need to find other ways to build a fence. We are asking our members and friends to buy a piece of fence (or more) at \$10.00 each. There will be an appreciation party for the donors in warmer weather at Jericho.

Yes, I would like to help build the fence at Jericho. I have enclosed a check for \$ _____
for _____ pieces given in the name(s) of _____.
Your name _____ Address _____

Please mail to Dennis Historical Society, P.O. Box 607, South Dennis, MA 02660

Please make checks payable to: DHS--Jericho Fence

CALENDAR

Dec. 11 2-4 P.M. Christmas Open House at Jericho. Period music. Refreshments.
Dec. 13 5:00 P.M. DHS Board meets with Gertrude at Wild Hunter.

A LETTER FROM WILLIAM ERNEST

Recently I received a note from Hope Crowell Hallett, my 5th grade teacher at Dennis Consolidated School. She enclosed a letter her brother William Ernest Crowell had written to her daughter, Norma Charity Burton, thinking I might like to use some excerpts in the newsletter. As I read the letter I could almost hear Ernest saying the words in that wonderful Cape Cod accent. There is a slide of him in the DHS "Shiverick Ships" show with his voice on the audio tape and some of the information in his letter is also on that tape. Many of you knew Ernest and would enjoy reading his letter, as follows:

Feb. 6, 1984

Dear Charity,

Your letter of Jan. 24th was received. Years ago the Shiverick Shipyard in East Dennis built a lot of small schooners for fishing. Most of them were owned by local families who went line-fishing for about 6 months each year. They fished off Plymouth, Provincetown, and on Georges Bank, south-east of Cape Cod for the most part. In the spring they would go further south and follow the mackerel schools north. My great-grandfather, Aaron Crowell, built a schooner at the Corporation but I don't know its name now. Most of them were about 60 feet in length.

My grandfather, Wm. Crowell, was part owner and captain of a Shiverick built two-masted schooner named the "VESTAL". These boats usually carried a crew of nine, often family members and part owners.

My grandfathers brother, Noah Crowell, was part owner and captain of a Shiverick built two-masted schooner named the "BRIDE", a similar boat. His brother, Urbana, sailed on the same boat.

Grandpa Wm. Crowell, was 27 years old in 1841 when an unfortunate thing happened. The Cape fleet was fishing on Georges Bank when a terrific storm arose. It was the first part of October and it is said there were 150 Cape boats present. Many were lost. Grandpa Crowell headed for Provincetown, as did his brother Noah. Noah was ahead of William. His boat did not clear Race Point, piled up on the Point and all hands were drowned. William got his boat into Provincetown Harbor and anchored there. It is said that 19 people from North Dennis were lost in all. The following year Edwin Crowell, another brother, was captain of the "BRIDE".

I have a model of the "VESTAL" that Grandpa Crowell made when he was an old man. The hull is complete, but he did not complete all the spars. I do not have the logs of these boats, I have excerpts from the log of the schooner "VILLAGE" for 1841, a similar boat engaged in the same type of fishing.

My mothers father, Marshall I Higgins, also engaged in fishing and was the captian of some fishing schooners. I don't know their names. He lived in Wellfleet, Mass., and told me he had made some tremendous catches of mackerel. He came along at a later date and seines were used in fishing by that time, instead of hand-lines. Later he sailed in various large schooners, some of which were three-mated. He sailed up and down the coast carrying coal and any cargo available.

Still later he entered the fruit trade in competition with Lorenzo Dow Baker of Wellfleet, who founded the United Fruit Co. He sailed to the Bahamas, Haiti, etc., for cargos of pineapple, bananas, and other fruit that he brought back to this country. This was around 1890. Unfortunately he became almost stone deaf and had to quit as he couldn't hear well enough to handle the crew.

I have only two of his log books. One is for the "FRANCE B. HILLER" of Wellfleet. The other is the log of the "ELLEN A. SWIFT" of Provincetown.

You are welcome to look over anything I have here when you come again and I shall be pleased to have you do so.

Pal's oldest boy, Brad, is thinking of going to the Maritime Academy. Life at sea is hard and not particularly rewarding in this day and age. I do hope he will change his mind.

With best wishes.

Love from,
Uncle Ernest

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