



THE LITTLE HOUSE THAT COULD

Once upon a time, a tiny house was built in our town, only one room wide and one room deep, with a shallow sleeping loft above. It would appear that it was constructed in the early 1700's, probably near Bass River. As the family of the young couple who lived in it grew, so did the house. First it was doubled, then a slanted roof--a "lean-to"--extended it by a large room to the back and eventually, in modern times it was widened with another room. For much, if not all, of its life, the house, still a modest cottage, stood on the east side of what we call Uncle Barney's Road in West Dennis. Facing confidently towards the south, it sheltered many generations of residents, and was witness to laughter and sadness, births and deaths, large events and small. No doubt many an evening saw the family and perhaps neighbors gathered around the fireplace, discussing the happenings in the neighborhood--the doings at the Crowell and Studley Shipyard down the road, the success of the cranberry crops on the nearby bogs, the development of salt works along the shore.

The little home was well taken care of through its many years of life. This year, however, the day came when the family who cared for it found it inadequate for their needs. The time had come in their lives when a new, more convenient, building was necessary. But the lot was not large enough for two homes. The little house must go. The owners did their best to contact someone who might be interested in the little house, hoping to move it to a new location. The Dennis Historical Commission was contacted and invited to visit the house. A neighbor had remarked to the owners that the house would never withstand an attempt to move it. But the Little Old House said, "I think I can!"

It was determined at a hearing held by the Commission that the little house was well over the 75 year cut off point, and was of enough architectural importance to the development of the town to warrant an effort to save it. Now the task of finding a person who would move the house began in earnest, a formidable task with but 90 days of grace. Prospects were contacted promptly. And then, not two days after the hearing, a gentleman, Ken Grady by name, called to say he would like to move the house, and a enormous job was begun.

Not the easiest part of the task for Mr. Grady, was obtaining the necessary permits from the state and the towns of Yarmouth and Dennis. There were also complicated arrangements and plans to be made with the three utilities, with state and local police. In the meantime, the crew of the Hayden Restoration Company began preparing the house for the move.

As the moving day approached, the skeptics voiced their opinions. "She'll never make it around the corner to Route 28." "It will never get under the traffic lights." "It can't get across the High Bank Bridge." "Oh, I think I can," said The Little Old House. And she did!

Past the branches over hanging Main Street, South Dennis, over the rough railroad tracks, to the last big corner at Old Chatham Road West, the caravan of utility trucks, police cars and The Little Old House slowly made its way. By this time, the skeptics were outnumbered by the rooters. "Come on, old house, you can do it." And now the last wires have been lifted, the last branches trimmed and there she sits, on Uncle Stanley's Way, still facing south, somewhat battered, but still proud. "I thought I could," she seems to say. The moral of the story? When many people work together, the physical reminders of our history can be saved. More about the Little Old House That Could next time.

CHRISTMAS OPEN HOUSE AT THE JOSIAH DENNIS MANSE

This year it's the Manse's turn to play host to DHS annual Christmas Open House. The old house will be bedecked, as it never was in Colonial days, with decorations created from natural materials by volunteers directed by Susan Kelley, who always manages rto make tho old house look so beautiful. The usual yummy refreshments will be offered, including our famous Colonel Negus punch and cider. This year the many gift items which DHS offers for sale will be available for you to purchase to add some history to a loved one's Christmas. Join us on Sunday, December 14 from 2-4 for a relaxing interlude in this frantic season.

CHRISTMAS THEN AND NOW

Yarmouth Register, December 23, 1876: "The question which interests a boy just now is not so much whether he is receiving an orthodox religious instruction, but whether his Sunday School is going to have a Christmas Tree with something besides book marks and pen wipers on it."
Cape Cod Times, November 20, 1997: "Power wheels--Kawasaki Ninja Ride-on."

CALENDAR

Dec 8 7 P.M. Wixon School Special Town Meeting
Dec 10 7:30 Board meets at President Kitty's
Dec 14 2-4 Christmas Open House at Josiah Dennis Manse
DHS gifts for Christmas giving will be on sale

Coming up: Feb. 14 at Christines-- Our Annual Mid-Winter Festivity
Details and reservation form next time

THIS COULD BE YOUR LAST NEWSLETTER

If there is a colored marker line under this sentence, your subscription to the DHS newsletter ends with this issue, because you have forgotten to pay your dues for 1997-1998. The cost of producing and mailing the newsletter absorbs a major portion of your annual dues, but you will also lose your voting privileges. If you support the purposes of DHS--documenting, preserving and teaching the history of this town, if you're proud of this society's efforts to publish and distribute our new town history, and if you enjoy the benefits of being a member--voting at annual meetings, receiving the newsletter and attending our programs and luncheons--PLEASE FORWARD YOUR DUES TODAY! Send your check to Membership Chair Isabelle Flynn, PO Box 607, South Dennis MA 02660. And if you think there is an error in our records, please call 385-2966. Thank you.

A VERY VERY SPECIAL TOWN MEETING.....

....will be called to order on December 8, 1997 at Wixon School at 7 P.M.. If you are interested, in this town's history, even in a minor degree, please be there and bring your neighbors. An article on the warrant is a request to raise and appropriate \$20,000 for preservation measures at Josiah Dennis Manse. This will be added to the \$20,000 already appropriated by Article 22 of the Special Town Meeting of December 10, 1996. The Massachusetts Historical Commission will match these two appropriations with a grant of \$40,000.

The Reverend Nr. Josiah Dennis, the first minister of the East Parish of Yarmouth, now the Town of Dennis, was, of course, the man for whom the town is named. He was a man of whom it is said, "...he carried the community in the palm of his hand..." for the forty years of his ministry, and whose influence on the moral, spiritual and educational development of the town was enormous.

How many towns in Massachusetts own the homestead of the man for whom the town is named? And how many have such a comprehensive collection of memorabilia and documents from their early history, much of which is displayed at the Manse? Or what other town conduct such highly acclaimed educational program for their own and other school children, which teach a respect and understanding for their heritage (conducted in part at the Manse)? Not many, if any at all.

But now, the homestead of this man, built for him by his parish about 1737, is endangered. Changes in the underpinning of the building in order to install modern heating and plumbing have proven to be disastrous to its stability. Powder post beetles have wrecked havoc with beams which hold up the roof. Floors are warped and the building needs reshingling. All of these repairs can be accomplished if the town meeting will vote to appropriate the additional \$20,000 to match the MHC grant. We need your vote, to be sure the result is in the affirmative. PLEASE be present and help us approve this article.

Dennis Historical Society
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