



Dennis Historical Society Newsletter

Volume 24 Number 10

December 2001

Calendar of Events

Sunday, December 9th DHS Christmas Open House

Celebrate Christmas at the Manse, a 1736 colonial saltbox house beautifully decorated for the season. Costumed docents will offer traditional refreshments.

1-4:30 PM

Josiah Dennis Manse
Museum

Wednesday, December 12 Board Meeting

Interested members welcome to attend.

7:00 PM

Josiah Dennis Manse

Sunday, January 13 Wrought by Hand

An illustrated talk about Cape and Islands samplers created by young girls in the 17 and 1800's. These pieces were worked under the supervision of older women at a Dame's School to show proficiency with a needle. Come hear Lynn Horton, Curator of History at Sandwich Glass Museum, talk about some very talented young women from our early days. A number of samplers from the DHS collection are illustrated in the show. Refreshments will be served.

2:00 PM

1867 Graded School
West Dennis

A DENNISPORT CHRISTMAS

Burt Derick

With Christmas approaching, thoughts naturally drift to those old traditions of times past. Christmas time was special when I was a child in Dennisport.

The hunt for the Christmas tree was a singular excursion for a young boy.

Dad would take us to the Plashes to look for that wonderful creation of God, the swamp cedar. Ugly of appearance due to the sparsity of branches, soft to the touch, and fragrant beyond belief, one had to cut a 12-foot specimen to end up with a bonafide 6-foot tree. After helping to select the one tree for us, and dragging it to the truck, we would then at home conduct an hour's worth of surgery -- cutting branches, drilling holes in the trunk with an auger, and placing new branches in places where nature never intended. The result was a tree of remarkable fullness and symmetry, something never before seen in the old Peat Bog. It was always a beauty, part nature-made and part man-made.

Our earliest trees had no lights. They were liberally decorated with glass balls, chains made with construction paper and white glue, and strings of cranberries and popcorn. How many hours we sat patiently with an enormous blunt needle stringing those kernels and berries -- although we had to have twice the volume of raw materials to make up for what found its way to our bellies. The final touch on the tree was aluminum icicles -- carefully saved from Christmases past, some of which were so worn and matted that they were far too short to be called icicles. But, Oh my! was that tree beautiful!

In the week or so before Christmas, my Dad, Dutch Derick, and uncle, Bob West, would climb to the roof of the little RLDS Church on Sea Street to install loudspeakers and a sound system. Every evening the Saints would gather, under the direction of my mother, Pauline, to play and sing Christmas carols, broadcasting the message to the entire "down-along" village. Old and young would arrive after supper, all prepared to tune up their finest voices. In those



From Warren Wigginton's glass plate collection

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A DENNISPORT CHRISTMAS

days I was a soprano, and could actually carry a tune! (At age 12 all changed, and the only tune I can now carry is in a bucket.) My favorite song was "O Holy Night" sung by aunt Babe West. I would run outside the church and stand to listen -- the music coming downward from the rooftop made it sound like Heaven's angels were singing.

On Christmas Day, the strongest memories are of the family dinner. We always congregated at Ma Wixon's, the whole clan. Dinner was finalized in the busy kitchen while Pa Wixon amused the grandkids (and himself) with the practical jokes brought by Santa (rubber chewing gum, fake dog poo, spring-loaded snakes in the can of peanut brittle, etc.) The main feature of dinner was Ma's chicken pies, smothered in gravy, new potatoes, Mother's home-canned green beans, squashes and turnips from the garden, and home-processed condiments and pickles. Mother's chocolate-chip-cherry cake was served with the meal and after.

The big treat after dinner was the chance to raid Pa's chocolate candy, with which he was always generous to all the kids. My love of chocolate has persisted since those days, and it is unquestionably one of the major food groups.

If there was snow, a final treat was sledding. The kids would get bundled to the point of near-immobility. If we couldn't get the adults to move, the kids would go to the tiny slope on Depot Street near Capt. Judah Nickerson's house. If, however, the adults were willing, we would all pile in the panel-van and go to Bass River Golf Course, where we joined dozens of other kids from all over the area. Through a child's eyes the hills there seemed purely mountainous! And after sledding, we might be treated to Ma's pink tea or hot chocolate.

We might also go ice-skating at the Plashes. As a kid with the weakest ankles in the village, I would spend more time on the ice than above it. Someone would find an old tire and set it alight, providing some warmth among the chill. We would wait for Mr. Henry "Ding" (he was Henry Chase, a village character) to appear at the pond. Mr. Henry was the most fantastic skater, doing leaps and whirls and spins, like a slightly-pudgy Todd Eldridge, the extent of his acrobatics made in proportion to how much alcoholic beverage he had imbibed before his arrival.

Those were wonderful days. Days full of family, church and community. Days of simple but profound pleasures. Days, alas, to which we can never return except in the depths of our memory.

List of Officers and Directors of the 2001-2002 DHS Executive Board

Elected Officers

President: Raymond Urquhart

Vice President: Marjorie Mantell

Treasurer: Joan Martin

Asst. Treasurer: Lura Crowell

Recording Secretary: Bonnie Hempel

Corresponding Secretary: Virginia Devine

Elected Directors

Until 2004: Brendan Joyce and Susan Kelley

Until 2003: Nancy Howes and Burt Derick

Until 2002: Sarah Kruger and Terri Fox

Appointed Directors

Dennis Historical Commission: Nancy T. Reid

Jericho Historical Center: Marjorie Mantell

Josiah Dennis Manse: Phyllis Horton

Thanks to Our Donors

The request in last month's newsletter for donations to defray the cost of climate control for preserving the artifacts in our two historic museums was answered to date by the following:

Fred DiMaio of E. Dennis in memory of Cynthia Hotaling

John and Althine Marsh of E. Orleans

Joan Y. Nickerson of S. Dennis

William and Isabelle Flynn of S. Dennis

The Reverend and Mrs Edward A. Walker, Dennis, in memory of Joshua Crowell

Charles F. Crowell, E. Dennis, in memory of Cynthia A. Edwards

Phyllis Horton, Dennis Port, in memory of Joshua Crowell

Thomas and Lydia Sebastyn of Dennis, in memory of the Franco family

Peter and Holly Howe of Newton Center in memory of Barbara Burleigh Howe

Mr. and Mrs. Robert C. Hayes, E. Dennis, in memory of Edgar Bearse, III

Lorraine Wixon Clarke, Hot Springs, Arizona, in memory of former selectman Norwell Wixon

George Wilson, Pittsfield, in honor of and in memory of Catherine M. Wilson who felt very strongly about the Historical Society and looked forward to leading the bike tours each summer.

The Society thanks you all very much for your gifts. Come to the museums next summer and we'll show you what a difference it makes for our collections.

Membership

We are delighted to announce some new Life Members to the Dennis Historical Society. A specially designed certificate is being prepared for each one.

David I. Cook

Barbara Dute Hart

Burton N. Derick

Terrill Ann Fox

The DHS Board voted at the Annual Meeting to give an Honorary Life Membership to Marion W. Collins (see September newsletter). We believe Marion is our eldest member and will be 102 on January 21, 2002. Why not send Marion a card in honor of her birthday? She'd be pleased. Her address is:

1 Welthian Ct., E. Greenwich, RI 02818.

Welcome to new members Edward Lazarian of W. Dennis and Delores Lark, S. Dennis. We have ONE student member, James F. Walker of Dennis Port.

Changing your address? Remember to notify us at P.O. Box 607, South Dennis, MA 02660.

Acquisitions

Recently added to our library is a copy of the September 22, 1887 Cape Cod Newspaper giving us a glimpse of the social events of the day. Thanks to Carl and Patty Nickerson and to Joan for delivering it.

Also new to the library is George B. Nickerson's 1897 Wood Book, which has listings of Nickerson land divisions for woodlots complete with maps drawn by Annie Nickerson.

Burt has also brought us another book, the leather bound "Pump Auger Book," circa 1829, which is a record of South Dennis residents who purchased a large auger for making wooden pipes and who rented it out to the villagers to pay for it "by the foot bored." It contains good old names such as Obed Baker.

Thanks to Ruth Derick, too, for donating her grandparents' large colored picture of George Washington to the West Dennis Schoolhouse.

Dennis Historical Society

P.O. Box 607

South Dennis, MA 02660-0607

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THE WAY WE WERE

Christmas at the Manse

Are you ready to get in the mood for the holiday season? Come to the Josiah Dennis Manse on Sunday, December 9th from 1 to 4:30 P.M. and it's guaranteed that you'll feel ready to tackle all those holiday chores. The Manse Committee will have all the nooks and crannies in Josiah and Bathsheba's house decorated with greenery. It's a labor of love and every year the ladies are more inspired. Sample some of the goodies and a bit of our Colonel Negus Punch. Stroll through the house and perhaps you can pick up some ideas for your own holiday decorating at home.



Check out the flyers around town for other Visions of Christmas events going on during the afternoon. Ride the trolley, sing a Christmas song and celebrate this special season.