

DECOYS UNLIMITED

D.H.S. members and guests were treated to an excellent program presented by Judy Harmon of Decoys Unlimited of Barnstable. We saw slides and examples of an art form which has evolved from a practical craft, and learned about its history and development and its present day status as collectible art. Two bits of trivia which you might add to the knowledge which you gained from the program of January 14. First, the word "decoy" evolves from the Dutch word "Endekooy", meaning a duck cage or trap, evolving in an earlier age when gun powder was expensive and hard to obtain, so ducks and other game birds were trapped, rather than lured into gunshot range. The second bit of trivia reflects the earliest stages of the art of the decoy, learned, incidentally - (as so many valuable things were learned) from the native Americans. Originally, what we now call decoys were not carved replicas, carefully wrought from wood. They were representations made from straw and feathers, perhaps the wings and heads of the sought after bird, attached to a wooden block or "stool" and placed in a spot where it was hoped it would lure the desired bird. From this early practice comes our present day expression "stool pigeon" meaning that false bird who betrays the rest of the birds of a feather which make up his flock. Our thanks to Judy Harmon for her artistic and informative program.

HAPPY VALENTINE'S DAY

Our Mid-Winter Festivity will be held on Valentine's Day, thus providing us with an occasion to commemorate a very ancient holiday. There are two St. Valentines, both of whom seem to serve as the patron saint of young spinsters. For centuries, St. Valentine's Day has been a day for lovers. For those without a lover, it represents a chance for finding one. Do you remember, back in grammar school, drawing names for the exchange of valentines? You were in fact commemorating an ancient custom, practiced before our country was founded. Young people within a parish would draw names for a Valentine's partner. If you were lucky enough to draw the name of a person you favored, you would wear it pinned to your sleeve during the festivities. From this originated the expression, "Wearing one's heart on one's sleeve," still used today. At our luncheon at the Half House on Sat., Feb. 14 at 1 P.M., we will decorate with valentines, and enjoy a fine meal, entertainment, door prizes and good fellowship. We hope you plan to attend. For Reservations, call Josh Crowell at 385-3689.

A MEDIA EVENT

D.H.S. will combine forces with the Community Schools program to present both a program for the general public and an assembly for the students at Wixon Middle School. Two audio visual presentations will be shown on Feb. 27. The school children will meet Barbara Waters, County Extension Agent, and will view her recent production, "The Edge of the Land - Precious Waters, Fragile Land". The film was created using part of a \$15,000 grant from Coastal Zone Management and was judged one of the two best local projects resulting from the Year of the Coast program. At 2:30 P.M., "The Edge of the Land" will be shown again, and will be followed by a showing by Mr. Bainbridge Crist, "Yarmouth's Historical Heritage", courtesy of the Old Yarmouth Historical Society. This is open to the public, you are all invited to attend, and bring a friend to see these two outstanding films.

POSTER WORKSHOP PLANNED

Dennis boasts two of the loveliest house museums on the Cape, our two Historic Centers, Jericho House and Josiah Dennis Manse. We are justly proud of these centers and anxious to attract as many people as we can to view them. The Jericho House Committee is launching a campaign to spread publicity into new areas, in an effort to increase the number of annual visitors. One aspect of this campaign is the project of creating eye-catching posters to be placed in strategic places around town. These posters will combine fabrics and attractive lettering in a unique design originated by Mrs. S. Quincy Newcomb, who will head a workshop for making them at Jericho House on Tuesday, Feb. 17 from 10-12 A.M. Anyone who is willing to help with this work is invited to be with us at this time, or to call Mrs. Newcomb. If you are a good letterer you are especially needed, even if the workshop times are not convenient. Please let us know of your interest.

ICE FARMING

We have spoken about our ancestors shift from farming the meager soil of the Cape to farming the fertile seas. But the farming instincts of the English yeoman did not stop at the high water mark. Our ancestors also farmed for a product which has been all too common a part of our winter this year, ice. Ice farming became an important industry in the middle of the nineteenth century, when a Cape Cod mariner took the risk of shipping ice south to Baltimore and Virginia, thus introducing fresh fish rather than that preserved by salt. The State of Maine produced most of the ice for commercial shipping. Locally, however, ice farming served local needs and was an industry of some importance until the end of World War II, when electric refrigeration replaced the ice chests of our youth. Ice was harvested on several Dennis ponds, and stored for use in warmer weather in ice houses built along the shores. There were three such Ice Houses on Scargo Lake and at least one on Fresh Pond. The ice house on Cedar Pond served the D.H. Sears Ice Cream business and I think I remember an old ice house on Baker's Pond. They were built with outer and inner walls of wood, the space between the walls being filled with sawdust. When the ice was thick enough, usually February, a path was cut to the center of the pond and using special tools, the ice was cut into blocks and floated to the ice house for storage. The introduction of the Frigidaire sounded the death knell for the local ice business, but the present cost of electricity might bring back some interest in the collection of natural ice.

CALENDAR

- Feb. 1 You should still have half of your wood and half of your hay.
Feb. 14 St. Valentine's Day-Mid Winter Luncheon-Cape Half House-West Harwich Sociability begins at 1, Buffet Luncheon at 2. Entertainment and Door Prizes. Reservations necessary-send \$5.95 per person with stamped, self-addressed envelope to: Mr. Joshua Crowell, Box 963, Dennis, MA 02638.
Feb. 17 Poster Workshop-Jericho House-10 A.M.-12 P.M.
Feb. 27 D.H.S.-Community School showing of the two productions, "The Edge of the Land" and "Yarmouth's Historical Heritage" at 2:30 P.M.-Nathaniel Wixon School-Free.
Mar. 25 West Dennis Community Bldg.-7:30 P.M.-Claire Baisley-"An Overview of Architectural Periods on Cape Cod"

WEST HARWICH AND DENNISPORT

Some folks have expressed some surprise that our annual Mid-Winter Luncheon is being held across Division Street in West Harwich. Across the political boundary in both directions, the two villages of West Harwich and Dennisport have a great deal of history in common. Geographically, they share the neck of land between Swan Pond River and Herring River, formerly called Crocker's Neck. The long wharves which extended out from the present Sea Street were owned by merchants from both sides of Division, and the mariners who sailed from them hailed from both neighborhoods. The Baptist church, which serves both communities today, was founded in 1756 (the first Baptist church on the Cape) by residents of both Dennis and Harwich. Also for many years a column of local news in the Yarmouth Register was headed "West Harwich and Dennisport", as the news from both places was of such common interest. Today, the Chase Library is supported jointly by both towns, and used by folks from both villages. So it is not improper that we should move a few hundred feet out of town for our Historical Society luncheon, after all.

THE STREETS OF OUR TOWN

Among the streets of our town, especially in our newer developments, are many bearing the name of a person, be it given names such as Linda and Joan, sur-names such as Wixon and Crowell, or whole names such as Perry Taylor and Peter Oliver. Some are of ancient and historic origin, others are brand new, but nonetheless interesting. If anyone knows the source of any of these "proper Name Streets", I would love to have the information to file with my collection of street names. The "proper Name Street" that I would like to tell you about today is in West Dennis - Uncle Barney's Road. This street, which follows the Bass River southward from Ferry Street or nowadays from Route 28, was accepted as a town road in 1847 on the petition of Barnabas Baker. Barnabas and his kinsman John Baker had extensive salt works along this section of Bass River, as well as homes, woodland, meadowland and some waterfront businesses. They were both no doubt "Uncle" to a good many who lived in this neighborhood of Kellys, Crowells and Bakers. One suspects that John and Barnabas had had a private road along the river for a long time previous to 1847. By this time the importance of the salt-making industry had already begun to decline. One of the many reasons was the development of the ice industry and the shift to preserving food by cold rather than salt. Uncle Barney certainly rolled with the economic times and probably was shipping ice, as were other local mariners. At any rate, the road to his waterfront is now lined with comfortable houses rather than salt works and sail lofts, but it still is called Uncle Barney's Road, one of the Streets of Our Town.

HOUSE DATING IS ALIVE AND WELL

Under the direction of chairman Edmond Nickerson, the House Dating Committee continues to award date markers to houses which are documented to be 100 years old or older. If you have a home which you would like to date, please contact Mr. Nickerson for assistance or information (398-3174). May I just add a personal note to this notice? New date markers are skillfully lettered and bear a familiar logo, and are based on the original markers which were lovingly created and personally delivered by Mr. Harold Phillips, recently deceased at the age of 91. I knew Mr. Phillips and admired him, not only as a fine father, husband and person, but also for his devotion to such volunteer services as D.H.S. house dating, and Liberty Hall, where for so many years he not only raised and lowered the flag daily, but willingly performed whatever came to his hand with all his might, and without need of recognition. "Well done, good and faithful servant". May this serve for many such devoted friends and members.

Dennis Historical Society
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ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED