



# Dennis Historical Society Newsletter

Volume 25 Number 2

February 2002

## Calendar of Events

**Saturday, February 9  
Board Meets 10:00 AM**

**West Dennis School**  
Interested members welcome

**Saturday, February 9  
Old Fashioned Covered  
Dish Luncheon  
12:00 noon**

Find your favorite recipe, make it up and bring it to the West Dennis Graded School along with your plate and eating utensils. Rolls, coffee and tea provided. Bring one of your unique artifacts—something historical or hysterical—from home for an after-lunch show and tell.

**March 9, 10:00 AM  
Board Meets at the Manse**  
Interested members welcome

**Thursday,  
March 21 7:30 PM  
Women Who Went  
Whaling**

Kathleen San Clemente relates poignant stories from the diaries of wives who went to sea with whaling captains. Refreshments.

**Carleton Hall**  
1006 Old Bass River Road  
Dennis

## Time to Chase Away the Winter Blues

*Phyllis Horton*

In the late 1800s and early 1900s the standard recipe for banishing the winter doldrums was to get together over a covered dish luncheon or supper for some community sociability. It still works today. You are all invited to sort through your cook book and make up an old family favorite recipe. Bring it, your plate and eating utensils, and unless it's a closely guarded family secret, bring a copy of the recipe. Rolls, coffee and tea will be provided.

In my youth (a long time ago!) some of my best memories were made sitting at the long trestle tables at the West Harwich Baptist Church or the Village Improvement Club in Dennis Port. You knew you could always count on certain people bringing their specialty and you always hoped it would last until it got around the table to you.

The Chatterbox Club of Dennis village had covered dish suppers often at Carleton Hall. Margaret "Mig" Walker Maher had a favorite story about her son Brian and Selectman Earl Davidson. (I've told this story before, but it's good enough to retell.)

Mig had brought Brian's favorite dessert knowing that he would eat everything on his plate even though 'someone else besides his mother made it' just so he could have that dessert. Brian dutifully cleaned his plate keeping his full attention on the dessert table. He was not quite finished when he noticed Earl perusing the full spread of desserts but always coming back to Mig's dish. Not able to contain his anxiety, four year old Brian slid off his chair, ran to the dessert table, grabbed Mig's plate and returned to his place next to Mom with Earl in hot pursuit. Negotiations were worked out so that Brian agreed to share with Earl and all was well in the village.

There are many other "covered dish stories" among our members. If you have one please share it with us on Saturday, February 9. We'll gather at noon at the 1867 West Dennis Graded School. Bring a friend or neighbor to enjoy a good, old fashioned get together.

Everyone has something special in their home. It might be an item with a fascinating story of how you acquired it, or something you inherited that you have never been able to tell exactly what it is, or something that means the world to you--just because. Bring it and your story for some after lunch 'show and tell'. We'll all be interested in your story and perhaps one of our historical experts can tell you what your unknown artifact is. If not, we'll take a picture and send it off to Yankee Magazine for their expert to identify.



## Stone Walls

*Phyllis Horton*

Many places in Dennis today are defined by the stone walls that surround them. They range from the common rubble walls of our early settlers to the modern day rock wall that is engineered to the nth degree, each stone precisely bonded to its neighbor and fitted with precision.

The early walls were created by our ancestors when they cleared the fields for planting. They were from England where rock walls were everywhere, so moving rocks from the fields to build walls was a natural thing. The walls were laid with some care, but the primary interest was to get rocks out of the way so the fields could be tilled and the crops planted or opened up for pasture. Over the years stone walls eventually bounded the settlers lot lines. In the early 1900s Robert Frost said, "Good fences make good neighbors". That same thought, no doubt, worked in the early 1600s.

Today's formula for stone walls says that one ton of stone makes about 3 running feet of stone wall, 3 feet high and 2 feet thick. A ton of stone fills a full-size pick up truck load about 6 inches deep. That's a lot of stone for a three foot wall but today's building practices makes it much easier than in the early days. Sweat and sore muscles were the common ingredient in every old wall. I'm sure the pioneers would be amazed (and definitely jealous) to see the tools used today.

Stone walls define the Josiah Dennis Manse Museum. In 1906 new owner, Mrs. Dwight Chaffee, gentrified the property by having four impressive stone pillars built at the ends of the driveway, adding a lovely porch to the front of the house and a "summer kitchen" to the rear of the house. When she finished her renovations the Manse was truly a country manor.

The Manse was purchased at the 1967 Annual Town Meeting for \$30,000 for use as an historical museum. Extensive restoration returned the house to some of it's original look, but the grounds were not changed.

A few years ago the Manse Committee decided they had made as many "improvements" to the inside as was needed, and turned their attention to the grounds. One of the changes to be made was to eliminate the stone pillars and return the wall to what was likely there in Josiah Dennis' time.

The Department of Public Works knocked the pillars down with machinery and 'would be back when time allowed' to finish off the walls with large end stones. Time went by. Other works in town were more pressing and finally several of the committee agreed to take matters into their own hands and finish the job, with the town's blessings.

Dick Howes, Seth Crowell, Dave Talbott and Gene Tully armed themselves with tools not too different from what the early settlers used and, after a valiant effort, made the wall look as if it had never been changed. The present day wall looks perfect for the 1736 Manse. Many thanks to you, gentlemen.



Left to right: Richard Howes, David Talbott,  
Seth Crowell and Gene Tully

## **BITS AND PIECES....**

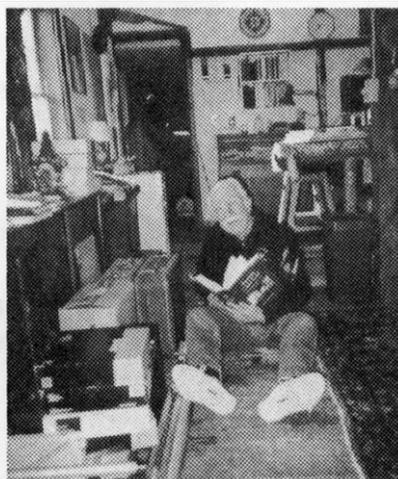
**The DHS Christmas Open House was a lovely event.** 300 people came by to sample the tasty refreshments and enjoy the holiday decorating done by the Manse Committee and friends. Next year it will be held at the Jericho Historical Center. Be sure to mark your calendar for December 8, 1-4 P.M. at the charming 1801 sea captains house in West Dennis.

**The 2002 yearly calendar is included with this newsletter.** If you did not receive yours you can find one at the Dennis Chamber of Commerce, your local library, or call 508-394-0017 and we'll mail one to you. If your membership has expired and this is your "Last Newsletter Notice," you may use the membership application on the calendar to send in your renewal.

2002 started off with some **World War II acquisitions.** We have received an air raid warden's helmet, billy club and whistle, ration books with stamps and tokens used by the late Nathaniel H. Wixon from Burt and Ruth Derick and Adelia West along with an article about the war. We are into the 21st century and must think about collecting for the 20th century before those items are lost. It is easy to think that things of your lifetime have no significant historic value, but they do. History is made every day. If you have some things you are unsure whether to save or throw away please think of donating them to the historical society. Let us decide if they will add to our collection. We'll be most grateful. Call 508-394-0017 or write to DHS, P.O. Box 607, South Dennis, MA 02660.

**Another thing we'd be delighted to have you donate is---your time!** There are many ways you can give of your time and talents to the DHS Board, the 1736 Josiah Dennis Manse, the 1801 Jericho Historical Center or the 1867 West Dennis Graded School. There will be a museum in the top floor of the school house and help is urgently needed. You'll meet some great people who, like you, had a little spare time and said, "Yes" to the society. Please call the number listed above and we'll point you in the right direction.

**Talking about Donations!...** We are thrilled with the continuing contributions to our climate control/preservation fund. This month we have to thank Marion Scofield for a *second* donation in memory of Wilson. We are very grateful, Marion. Thanks, too, to Alice Burton for a generous gift in memory of John. We also received a special contribution from Muriel Winchell, which was sent in memory of her grandfather, James Phelan, who was born in Dennis Port in 1851 and who was returned in 1931 to be buried in Swan Lake Cemetery "at his very definite request" beside his mother, Emeline Howland Phelan. Thanks once again to all.



**DHS PRESENTS:** Our man-about-town, Brendan Joyce, brings two Historical Society productions to the public on request, the ever-popular Shiverick Shipyard Show and the Dennis Show. Here you see him, surrounded by slides and equipment, Dennis History in hand, as he prepares to hit the road. There must be a more *comfortable* way to prepare, but the show must go on! Thanks, Brendan.

**Dennis Historical Society**  
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## THE WAY WE WERE

### SAVING YOUR FAMILY'S MEMORIES

*Conservation techniques you can practice at home.*

#### **Photographs**

Label your photographs. Use a pencil to write on the back of the photo all the pertinent information, i.e., people, place, date, etc. Do not depend on memories 20 or 30 years down the road to supply this type of information.

Do not expose your family photos to extremes in light, temperature or humidity, all of which will do damage over time. Handle the photos as little as possible. Even clean hands can leave residues of dirt and oil that will damage the image.

If you wish to store your photographs in albums, avoid those that have clear plastic sheets over the pages. These can effectively destroy your photos in a matter of only a few years. Use mounting corners in albums and interleave pages with acid-free tissue to prevent photos from touching each other or purchase acid-free albums for long-term storage.

Color photographs and negatives will fade under the best of conditions. Storing these items in a cool, dry, dark area will retard, but not halt this process. If you want photos for the truly long-term, use black and white.