



# Dennis Historical Society Newsletter

Volume 31 Number 2 Send letters & stories to Lura Crowell, Editor-in-Chief, Box 607, S. Dennis 02660 or to sesuetfarm@verizon.net February/March 2008

## Calendar

*Saturday, April 12,  
10:30 a.m.  
"Colonial  
Marriage  
Customs"*

*Mary Aselfine will  
provide an  
entertaining and  
informative  
presentation of our  
ancestors' customs in  
the time honored and  
often-delicate mating  
rituals of the past  
ages.*

*Refreshments will be  
served*

*Dennis Public Library,  
5 Hall Street, Dennis  
Port*

Please continue to bear with us as we muddle along, missing Lu's valuable inputs as she continues to recover. We'll continue to patiently await the news that her first article is ready for publication.

## **Gaelic Love on Cape Cod: David, the Irishman, and Jane, the Welsh Maid**

**Burt Derick**

Our story starts in the Plymouth Colony Court on 4 Oct 1655: "And att this Court, Jane Powell, seruant to Willam Swift, of Sandwidge, appeered, haueing been psented for fornication, whoe, being examined, saith that it was comitted with one David Ogillior, an Irish man, seruant to Edward Sturgis; shee saith shee was alured thervnto by him goeing for water one euening, hoping to haue married him, beeing she was in a sadd and miserable condition by hard seruice, wanting clothes and liuing discontentedly; and expressing great sorrow for her euell, shee was cleared for the psent, and ordered to goe home againe."

Is this a love story? You bet! It is a story of loneliness, of two people finding comfort in a commonality they shared, of two people overcoming the problems of distance and class oppression. It is the story of the ancestors of a huge family with roots in what is now the Town of Dennis.

Soon after the arrival of the Separatists, they recognized the need to supplement their meagre numbers with strong, willing workers. With the strife in Great Britain from wars and the ravages of plague, to say nothing of the religious persecution, the authorities found all the manpower they needed in the poor, orphaned and destitute. They made those poor souls "out of sight and out of mind" by shipping them to the colonies as bondservants to the colonists. By making the price of their passage to the New

World the price of indenture, these people were literally slaves to the colonists for a period of years. Nearly all were young, unmarried, unskilled, and at the bottom of the social class. The ships that brought these people have no passenger lists, so lowly was their station in life.

Two of these people were Jane Powell and David Ogillior. They were people not worthy of mention in most records, poor bondservants, in their teens, forced to endure great hardship. Without their "trouble" in the Plymouth Court, for which Jane appeared to tell her story, they could easily have passed unnoticed and unmentioned by history, confined to some unmarked graves far from their original homes.

Jane Powell was likely Welsh in origin, based on her surname. There were one or two families in Boston with that surname in 1639. William Swift Sr., the father of Jane's master, was in Watertown in 1634, and it is possible (but unlikely) that she is related to the Powell's of Boston. William Swift moved with his family to Sandwich about 1637. William Sr. having died in 1644, his son, William Swift Jr., who resided on the present Standish Road in North Sagamore, now the town of Bourne, owned the indenture. It is much more likely that Jane was an orphan girl of England, taken from the streets and shipped to the colonies – the indenture making up for the price of her passage. Jane would have had a busy time helping to care for the 10 children of William Swift Jr.

David "Ogillior", the Irishman, was the bondservant of Edward Sturgis of Yarmouth. David's name is often spelled O'Kelia or O'Killia, and is probably corrupted from the O'Ceallaigh clan of Co. Gallagh, Ireland. (The name is currently spelled "Kelley".) David was likely a refugee of the Cromwellian wars of the 1640s. Edward Sturgis was of Charlestown in 1634, but had removed to Yarmouth by 1643. His residence in Yarmouth was north of the old meetinghouse on what is now Center

Street, at the intersection of Homers Dock Road. Based on the fact that David took the oath of fidelity in Yarmouth in 1657, he was born before 1636, and probably later than 1630. It is likely that Jane was of similar age, perhaps slightly younger.

The locations of the residences of the masters of these two young people are important data for our story. Measuring along the Old Kings Highway, which follows the ancient Plymouth-Sandwich-Yarmouth road, gives a distance of 24 miles from the residence of Edward Sturgis to that of William Swift Jr.

Nothing is known for certain about the backgrounds of David O’Kelia and Jane Powell. Whether they arrived in Boston or Plymouth is unknown, but likely the latter. Based on indentures of the time, they were probably in their early to mid teens on their arrival in America.

Imagine if you will a ship leaving England crowded with refugees. Among them are young orphans, prisoners and the destitute from all parts of the British Commonwealth. What better way to rid yourself of the refuse of humanity than to ship it to far-away America, where planters eager for manpower will pay for the cost of the passage? There is no cargo to worry about – most would have had nothing but the clothes on their backs. And among these dregs of humanity is a young Welsh girl, possibly near the last of her family, too poor to have been kept at home, else the lone survivor of the plague that ravaged her village. Another of the refugees is an orphaned boy from Ireland, a product of the wars in that land. What had these two in common? They were poor, lonely, scared, moving into an uncertain future, and they were Gaelic. They were descendants of the ancient Britons, and had a commonality of language that, perhaps, others on that long passage did not have. The mores of the time, and the crowded accommodations on that vessel would have prevented any intimacies, but you can be sure they would have talked to one another, allayed each other’s fears, and explored the commonalities of their condition. Months of passage in crowded, filthy conditions would have helped to seal the relationship.

That relationship was destroyed on their arrival in America. Their landfall was likely in Plymouth. As with the black slaves of slightly later times who had their families destroyed by being sold to different masters, these two young people would have had no opportunity to stay close, and their indentures were sold to different masters. No pleas of compassion would have been heard. Papers would have hastily been drawn up at the dockside, sealing the indenture, stating the term of service, and they would have been taken through the looming wilderness to their new homes.

It was a hard life. Jane’s plea in court tells of her miserable condition, and hard service, and David probably fared no better. The foods in this place were new and strange, savages and beasts lurked in the forests, and the labor was probably unlike any they had experienced at home. They were among complete strangers, people with whom they had nothing in common. Many were religious fanatics, ruling with an iron hand, punishing people for the most common of infractions. The population was so tiny that goods and services were not available, and anything needed for survival had to be made at home, from shelter to clothing. The loneliness of these two people must have been almost unbearable, and they must have had little hope for any future.

But love finds a way. In a time where roads were less than cartways, and when transportation was by ox-cart or shanks-mare, David found her. The 24 miles from Yarmouth to Sagamore were no barrier. Perhaps David was on an errand for his master, attending the only gristmill in the area to get the corn ground to flour. It was unlikely that it was a chance encounter. We can visualize David doing all in his power to discover the location of this young girl he met on the boat, with whom he had exchanged hours of conversation, exchanging intimate thoughts. It was also not a single encounter in the woods of Sagamore, but one of many. There was certainly a background relationship between these people that resulted in the encounter for which she was charged.

And what of this charge of “fornication”? Usually it meant that she was pregnant, rather than being “caught in the act.” The charge is very common in the early records. The most “respectable” people are often charged with “fornication” in the colony, due to the fact that the girl was pregnant before marriage, or that the first baby appeared less than 9 months after marriage. Why would this be so common? The answer is to be found in the definition of wealth. A family’s wealth was measured in the number of children they had – the number of hands that would be available to do the work, increase the plantation, and provide more services. If, for some reason, a couple could not have children, there was no sense getting married – they would be poor and destitute forever. Was it a conscious decision to see that they could be fruitful before the permanence of marriage? Perhaps. But back to our story.

Jane’s plea to the magistrates in answer to the charge is remarkable in its power. This poor, destitute creature admits her wrongdoing, at the same time telling of the conditions that led to her behavior. Despite her guilt, they cannot bring themselves to levy the typical punishment of a public whipping, and they meekly send her home. Not do they charge David with seducing this girl with its accompanying punishments. They leave the two to work out the problem to a reasonable conclusion. Perhaps just as remarkable is the fact that the clerk at the Court recorded Jane’s story in the great detail that appears; nowhere else in the records is there such an explanation of how she got into this circumstance.

David does the honorable thing – they marry. Would he have done any other? He gains his freedom, frees Jane from her indenture, and brings her to Yarmouth. David builds his homestead on the bluff above Bass River, overlooking a bay which still bears the family name. They are blessed with at least 7 children. And through hard work they prosper. David becomes a pillar of the Quaker movement, and the meetinghouse is built on his land not far from the homestead. When David makes his will in February 1697 (proved in July), the relationship between David and Jane is expressed with the simple words “my Loving wife Jane”, twice repeated. He leaves her with a comfortable estate at the time of £90 - land, house, furnishings and livestock, with 5 sons and 2 daughters to care for his wife in her widowhood.

Jane, who died in October 1711, probably rests beside her husband in the old Quaker Burying Ground on Mayfair Road in Dennis. They both died honored by the community in which they lived and by their neighbors. They were the progenitors of thousands of descendants, including this author.

And was this a love story? You bet it was!!!

### We Need Your Help!

We would *love* to find someone to help us with data entry using Past Perfect museum software (we provide the simple training). This is a long-term part-time *paid position* with very flexible hours. Familiarity with desktop computers and knowledge of Microsoft Word is necessary. If interested, please contact Jinny, our President, at 508-385-4441

### Census Capsules

This is the second installment of *Census Capsules*, bits of information drawn from the United States Census data thankfully transcribed by Burt & Ruth Derick and his family as well as from other sources.

In 1820 (the next available Census) Dennis had only three hundred and eighty three families comprised of only 2,032 residents (1,052 males, 980 females) in the town that spread from Nantucket Sound to Cape Cod Bay. We can assume that these families had a lot of ‘native neighbors’. They were mainly clustered on the coastlines, but some folks were noted as living near Follins Pond and in Dennisport. The main source of employment was listed as Commerce (71%), employing three hundred and sixty five people in a general industry that would have included all of the maritime activities and all that surrounded them. An additional one hundred and nine people are listed as being engaged in Agriculture (21%) forty-one in Manufacturing (8%), which would have included salt production, providing a total of five hundred and fifteen people listed as employed.

The twelve *largest* families in Dennis – and you’re sure to recognize all or most names - were:

Family Name	Number of Families	Number of People	Employment			Total
			Agriculture	Commerce	Manufacturing	
Howes	62	328	27	45	10	82
Baker	42	241	7	63	1	71
Crowell	41	197	8	46	5	59
Kelley	26	127	7	22	3	32
Nickerson	25	138	1	33	0	34
Hall	24	150	19	21	0	40
Sears	24	132	11	21	5	37
Chase	17	87	1	15	1	17
Wixon	13	64	4	12	0	16
Burgess	5	21	1	3	0	4
Paddock	5	19	0	1	1	2
Robbins	5	35	1	7	0	8
Totals	289	1539	87	289	26	402

Even these government records are of little help in filling in any details for this period, for the 1820 census lists only family heads, the number of people in the household sorted into a few age ranges by male and female, and categorizes their employment as given above. That census does give us a tantalizing snapshot of Dennis in 1820. The next Census, from 1850 provides a nicely detailed look at occupations and other tidbits – but that’s next time

This census also sorted the number of people in each family by age groups, with the final grouping being >45 years old. One can only speculate why that upper limit was set. Men were grouped differently than women by the inclusion of an additional age 16-18 category instead of only the single age 16-26 grouping for women. Evidently the school vs. work demands created a closer examination of the male population – or was it the sexism of the times? *PDH*

**Dennis Historical Society**  
**P.O. Box 607**  
**South Dennis, MA 02990-0607**

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**Mark your Calendars!**

Saturday, November 1, 12:00 p.m.

*Dennis Historical Society  
Annual Meeting and Luncheon*

Lunch and a brief business meeting at

*the SeaView*

followed by Mr. Ben Thacher, an old Cape Codger, who will offer a parcel of Cape Cod yesterdays. Ben is a Cape native and the Author of "*Whose Boy Be You?*"

The public is encouraged to attend!

Reservations & Information – 508-385-9308

**Membership** – If your dues have not been paid (yep- September was renewal month) we would really appreciate receiving them now, even if we goofed and did not send everyone a renewal reminder. Pleeeeeeze!

**Newsy Tidbits!!!** - Continue to send your thoughts, ideas, stories, jokes, etc. so that we can include all of our readers in the happenings of past and present Dennis.