



dennishs@cape.com

# Dennis Historical Society Newsletter

www.dennishistsoc.org

Volume 33 No. 2 Send letters & stories to Dennis Historical Society, Box 607, S. Dennis 02660 or pmrhorton@aol.com Feb./Mar. 2010

## *Concealment Shoes*

In packing up all the artifacts at the Josiah Dennis Manse prior to emptying the house for the restoration a number of items with “newsletter potential” came to light.

One great story is about Concealment Shoes. These shoes are almost always found near the chimney or fireplace in an old house. They were not lost but were deliberately hidden. Most often it was one old, worn-out shoe and usually could be dated to the year the house was built or underwent a major home improvement such as a new chimney, new roof or addition.



The Dennis Historical Society has such a shoe. It was found in the 1735 John Howes House at 512 Rte 6A, Dennis Village by Margaret Smith while she was cleaning out her home in preparation for moving into a smaller house. She donated it to the DHS.

The practice came here from England where they have been found in public buildings and workplaces as well as in homes. The shoes are found mainly around fireplaces or places near the elements which were regarded as magic spots and the shoes were believed to have the power to stop evil from entering the building.

Margaret actually found three shoes. The oldest was a child's (on the left) much

worn and many times repaired shoe. As with all shoes of those early years it was for neither right nor left but would fit either foot. It was made of stout leather, hand sewn with heavy cotton thread and reinforced with wooden pegs. It appears to have had a heel at one time but that is missing and was worn long enough afterward to have worn down the back part of the sole. It is a dear little shoe that speaks volumes just by its condition and is clearly from the 1700s.

The second (in age) shoe (in the middle) is probably from the mid 1800s. This is a woman's lace-up shoe that came over the ankle. It is lined with linen, the sole was originally sewn with cotton thread but appears to have been repaired with wooden pegs and is for the right foot. It also is very worn.

The third shoe is a baby's button up bootie style moccasin from the late 1800s. It is brown kid lined with cotton fabric and has four brown buttons on the side. It is the least worn of the three and was machine stitched. All three were found at the same site so it seems likely that whoever deposited the second and third shoes were aware of the tradition – or superstition.

The Northampton Museum in Northampton, England maintains a Concealed Shoe Index which now numbers about 2,000 from Western Europe, Australia and North America with the earliest concealments dating from the thirteenth century.

New England appears to be where most of the concealed shoes have been found. That is logical as we were founded by the English and many of their traditions flourished here. We are fortunate that Margaret thought the shoes were unusual enough to give them to DHS. Many single shoes found in attics would likely have been thrown away with anyone thinking it was just a stray shoe that wasn't worth keeping. Perhaps if Margaret had found only one shoe she might have done the same thing. Historic New

England (formerly Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities) has twelve Concealment Shoes in their collection representing four houses dating between 1825 and 1875. We seem to be in good company.

In the eighteen months the Manse will be closed we will try to find a way to preserve these shoes to keep them from further deterioration and find a way to display them that will tell their fascinating story.

Phyllis Horton

Here's a letter regarding a recent article ----

Hi Phyllis-

I enjoyed reading about the old Columns Restaurant where I worked after Dad (Ray Urquhart) left Vietnam in 1970 & the family left Bangkok to return to the Cape. I started as a dishwasher at age 16 during the summer of 1970 & was quickly offered a job as a busboy. The restaurant was so awesome and elegant. I used to deliver an endless supply of rolls as our patrons waited for their dinners. I always recall that when I first declared my tips for my first paycheck the owner had gathered all the wait staff together to confront me — I had declared too much in tips. I was told to modify my declarations — end of discussion. One of my favorite memories is working with a very kind waiter, Carl (if I recall correctly) who was the brother of the actress Ingrid Stevens.

Now when I visit the Cape I am so disappointed to see the Column's so run down but I always remember my bike rides to the restaurant to work.

Regards,  
Bryan Urquhart

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### ***1736 Josiah Dennis Manse – Repair & Preservation Update***

The Town of Dennis awarded the contract for the repair and preservation of the Manse to the J. K. Scanlan Company, Inc. in East Falmouth. A 'clerk of the works' will oversee the effort. Bids are being received and a selection will be made by the end of January. The contract calls for weekly project meetings by the contractor with the Architect (Newport Collaborative Architects, the current contractor), the clerk of the works, Town representatives and Manse personnel. In addition, as some of the effort is covered by MA Preservation Project Funds, project oversight will also include Massachusetts Historical Commission personnel.

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In the December Newsletter we ran one of Nancy Reid's excellent series of articles that she wrote when she was the editor. These are bits of priceless local history that well deserve another airing. This month I am pleased to be able to pair her item with another bit of local history that recently arrived.

Lora L. (Chase) Nowtone has kindly provided DHS with a wealth of fascinating information concerning the Chase family of West Dennis. I ran a piece that she provided in the December Newsletter. I am printing this excerpt from her family history so closely to the last piece as it pairs nicely with Nancy Thatcher Reid's *The Streets of Our Town* article.

Pete Howes

### ***The Streets of Our Town***

Cove Road begins on Main Street in South Dennis and goes down to Bass River at Grand Cove. Cove Road also begins at Route 28 in West Dennis and ends at Grand Cove. This is not just a coincidence, but an historical reminder of the importance of the Cove in the past, of the town of Dennis.

Once it was filled with two and three masted coast-wise schooners, packet ships, and fishing boats, taking refuge against a strong sou'wester. The roads from the homes of the Captains and crews of these vessels in South and West Dennis to the Cove were once connected by a wooded draw bridge--and formed a vital link between the two villages. In the early 1900's the bridge was destroyed by storms and the town voted not to rebuild it. Folks who now have to brave the hazards of Route 28 may wish it were back, to unite two of the loveliest streets of our town.

Nancy Thacher Reid  
August 1978 Newsletter

### *A Chase Family Romance*

Great Grandmother Sarah Chase, wife of Captain Theophilus Chase, was born in West Dennis in 1831 and christened Sally Kelley Crowell. Because she disliked the name of Sally, she took the name of Sarah as her legal name. She was the daughter of Freeman and Elizabeth Sears Crowell. Great grandmother Sarah's mother was Elizabeth Sears of North Dennis, MA. Sears, of Sears and Roebuck Co. was a cousin of Elizabeth's on her father's side, and on her mother's side was a descendant of Chief Iyanough, and Indian Chief for whom Hyannis was named. Great grandmother Sarah was the beauty of the Chase family. She was very intelligent, loved music and had a beautiful contralto voice that was outstanding. She sang at all kinds of social gatherings.

As a young woman she opened a dressmaking business in the old Cellar House that was the first building on your left as you passed over the Bass River Bridge and entered South Yarmouth. She employed seamstresses from both the villages of South Yarmouth and West Dennis. Here most of the bridal dresses for prospective brides in the area were designed and made.

One day as she was standing outside her shop, the stage coach from Sandwich was bringing passengers from the train from Boston into town. Along with others inside the coach was Capt. Theophilus Chase. As the coach approached the draw of the bridge the conditions of the roadway caused the springs of the coach to acquire an up and down motion, giving grandmother Sarah the idea they were all waving to her so she in turn waved back. Great grandfather was so impressed with her beauty he asked a companion traveler who she was. Oddly enough he did. Grandfather offered him \$25.00 to get off the stage with him once over the bridge into West Dennis, and to walk back with him to introduce him to her. That is the way he met her. Love triumphed.

Lora Nowtone

Note: They were married in 1848.

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### *Dennis News, March 1853*

The Launching.----An elegant clipper ship of 936 tons, called Belle of the West, was launched at East Dennis, from the yard of Messrs. Shiverick, on Saturday last, at 12 o'clock. The failure to launch her on the day previous was owing to some imperfection in the arrangements; but she went off in fine style on Saturday, in the presence of an estimated assembly of 2000 persons. She belongs to Glidden & Williams line of San Francisco clipper ships, and mostly owned by them. We hear that shares on her are owned by Messrs. Shiverick and that enterprising and prosperous shipowner at East Dennis, Capt. Christopher Hall. We are glad that the reputation of Messrs. Shiverick for building fine ships is extending, and hope that they and other shipbuilders in our country will be abundantly prosperous, and that this branch of business may be extended and enlarged in our midst.

*Barnstable Patriot; Date: Mar 29, 1853*

**Dennis Historical Society**  
**P.O. Box 607**  
**South Dennis, MA 02660-0607**

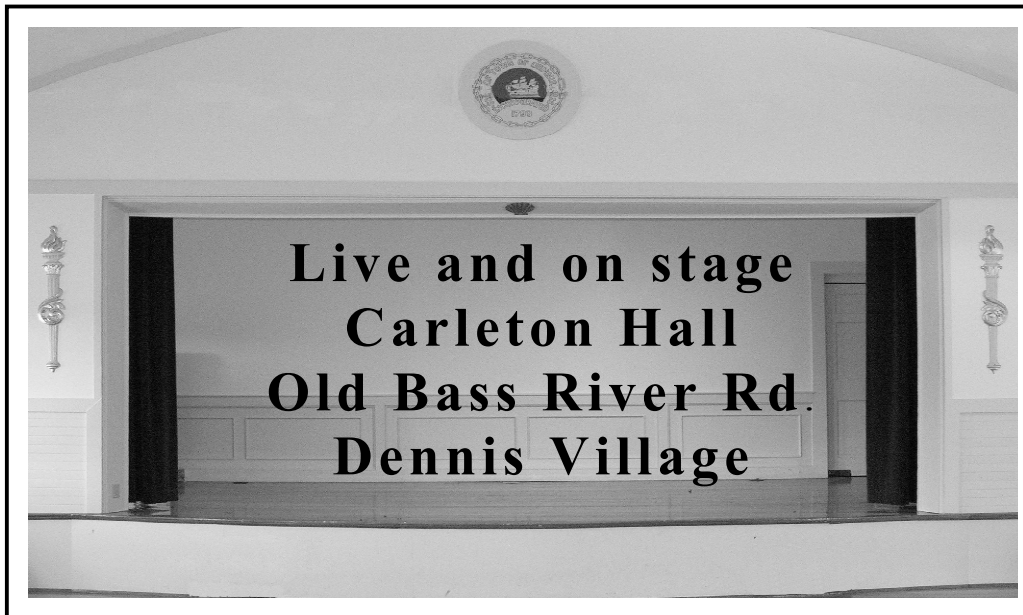


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- 1600s-1700s: Dennis was the “East Precinct of Yarmouth”
- 1793: The “East Precinct” becomes the Town of Dennis
- 2010: Dennis and Yarmouth together again to present:

*“Tales From Our Past”*

*Saturday*  
*March 20*  
*7 p.m.*



*Sunday*  
*March 21*  
*2 p.m.*

**Reserve Early – Space is Limited – Call Nancy Howes 508-385-3528**  
**DHS and HSOY Members \$12.00 Non-Members \$15.00**