

CHRISTMAS 1981

Greeted by the carolling Girl Scouts of Rebecca Mulligan's troop as they arrived, our guests came up the brick path singing Christmas songs. As they left, they were singing still--"What a wonderful party, so glad we came!" Beautiful decorations, a table full of goodies and seasonal music made it a very special afternoon. Heartfelt thanks to Rhoda Babcock and Hazel Newcomb--Mary Lou Tarbell and all the other members of the Jericho committee who helped--the Girl Scouts and the Hand Bell Choir of the Orleans Federated Church for their marvelous music--to Parm Fitch--and to everyone else who helped to make the afternoon so festive.

AN OLD CAPE CODGER SPEAKS

Many of you know our January speaker, who is a life-long resident of our town. He is the proprietor of Old Sound Museum in East Dennis, which houses a unique collection of phonographs and early records. But did you know that Ben Thacher belongs to a small minority group, one which is considering applying to Congress for "endangered species" status? Ben is a member of a class of vanishing Americans. He is a Real Native Cape Codder--10th generation--born, bred and educated not ten miles from where his first generation ancestor, Anthony Thacher, homesteaded in 1639. So when Ben speaks about old Cape Codders and their unique ways of expressing themselves, he knows whereof he speaks. Come to the West Dennis Community Building on Wednesday, January 13 to hear Ben Thacher tell tales--some of them tall tales--about those hardy souls who knew the way to China by sea better than they knew the way to Boston by land. They were our spiritual ancestors, as well as Ben's direct linear ancestors, and you will all be entertained and amused by his recollections of some Old Cape Codgers. Bring a friend.

MID-WINTER FESTIVITY

Jean and Bill Taylor are busily making preparations for this annual event, designed to put some cheer into February. This year our luncheon will be held at The Columns in West Dennis on Saturday, February 27, with social hour at 12 and brunch at 1 P.M. The menu: Choice of two entrees, vegetable, potato, fruit salad, garden salad, breads and butter, pastries, and beverage. Tickets may be obtained by sending a stamped, self-addressed envelope together with a check for \$6.00 for each ticket desired to: Mr. Joshua Crowell, Box 936, Dennis, MA 02639.

MEDIA SHOW UPDATE

A contract has been given to Rick Howard of Dennis to create art work for our slide show on our town's history. We are presently searching out old pictures of the town to reproduce and lining up sites to be photographed. We must raise \$1000 to match our grant from the Massachusetts Council of Arts and Humanities. Please be willing to support some fund-raising events in the late winter and spring. The first will be held on February 26 at the Wixon School, co-sponsored with the Community Schools. It will be a concert by Banjo Dan and the Ploughboys, and pre-sale tickets will benefit D.H.S. Save the date. This fine Blue Grass group comes recommended by the Massachusetts Council of Arts and has performed with the Plymouth Symphony Orchestra. Sounds like first-class country music, and a good time for all.

WOMEN WHO WENT TO SEA

Lucy Lord may not have been as aware and fearful of the perils of the sea as her friends in Dennis, for her father was not a mariner. But after her marriage to Capt. Benj. Perkins Howes in 1860, his adventures certainly must have impressed her. Lucy accompanied her husband when he took command of the clipper ship Southern Cross, a vessel which had already made three round-the-world voyages under the command of another Dennis Captain, Thomas Prince Howes, and was owned by the firm of Baker and Morrill, of which Ezra Howes Baker, of West Dennis, was a partner. The vessel was in a foreign port when news of the firing on Fort Sumter was received. Capt. Benjamin resolved to employ his vessel in foreign trade, avoiding U.S. waters and the dangers presented by the Confederate blockade. For a while he was successful, but in the summer of 1863, his vessel was overtaken by the notorious Southern privateer Florida, off the West Coast of Mexico. Capt. Howes protested that his cargo was not American, but to no avail. The crew of the Florida plundered his vessel, including the trunk of Lucy Lord Howes, which no doubt contained the trousseau so carefully made for her by her mother, sister Priscilla, and herself. The crew and officers were removed from the Southern Cross and the ship was burned before their horrified eyes. After being put ashore in Brazil, Capt. Howes and his wife later found their way back to Dennis, glad to be alive. But further adventures awaited the couple, and I will tell you more next time.

CALENDAR

January 13 7:30 P.M. West Dennis Community Building
Ben Thacher - "Old Cape Codgers"
February 26 Wixon School - Blue Grass Concert
Tickets: Adults \$4; Students \$2
Benefit Dennis Historical Slide Show
February 27 Noon Mid-Winter Festivity Brunch
Reservations are necessary. See below.
March 23 7:30 P.M. Carleton Hall - Regular program meeting.
Subject to be announced.
Also of interest to our members: Bus Tour - "Cape Cod in the Winter" with
naturalist Bob Prescott. Call Paula Bacon,
394-5739

STREETS OF OUR TOWN

This month I will tell you about a street which will also add a chapter to the history of education in Dennis. The street is not School Street as you might suppose, nor was school ever held on this street, to my knowledge. I speak of Doric Avenue in West Dennis. A short street, it was laid out in 1879, and leads from the center of West Dennis, a few hundred yards southward. When first constructed as a town road, it led to a hall which stood opposite its intersection with Pond Street. Whether the hall took its name from the street or the street from the hall, I cannot be sure, but I suspect the latter. The word "Doric" describes the simplest form of Greek architecture. From old pictures we can determine that Doric Hall, while perhaps not Grecian in form, was certainly a simple building. It served West Dennis as a social center from 1872 until the early 1900's. At present the William Wood Memorial playground is on its former site. In its heyday, plays, concerts, dinners, dances and entertainments were offered to the folks in West Dennis in such great numbers that it caused the Methodist minister to lament that not much was happening at his mid-week prayer meetings because so much was happening at Doric Hall. And now we come to the part about education. Doric Hall began its life as a private school. Called West Dennis Academy, it was built just north of the Fisk Street cemetery, before Pond Street was laid out, on a lot of land sold to the proprietors by Richard Crowell in 1839. This was an era when parents were beginning to want more education for their children than the district schools provided. Many such private academies were established in New England, where more advanced studies were offered than the district schools covered. There were 35 academies on the Cape in 1860, many of which taught navigation, in addition to literature, geography, and, in West Dennis, a course in astronomy. West Dennis Academy also printed a newspaper called The Sheet Anchor. A copy of the first issue of this paper can be seen at the Jericho Barn Museum. The Academy continued until the 1860's when the five graded schools were built in Dennis. The building was subsequently sold to a group of stockholders. It was first known as Union Hall, but when it was moved from the Academy lot to the lot behind the West Dennis School, it was rechristened Doric Hall. If anyone can shed any light on this choice of name, I would be happy to know it. The old building where many West Dennis young people were educated and later the site of many happy gatherings of neighbors, has left its name imprinted in West Dennis' memory in the name of Doric Avenue, one of the Streets of Our Town.

NEWSLETTER'S BIRTHDAY

This issue marks the beginning of the fifth year of our Dennis Historical Society Newsletter. I would like to take the opportunity to thank all who have made such nice comments about our letter, and also all who have filled me in on additional facts and things of interest to write about. I also need to thank Isabelle and Bill Flynn, Gail Hart, the Post Office, and A-1 Printing--and all of you members who allow me to do this interesting job.

Nancy Thacher Reid

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

Postal Permit No. 2 South Dennis Mass. 02660
