

### THE CHRISTMAS PARTY THAT WASN'T

Great plans do often go astray and this year's first blizzard really scuttled the planned Christmas Party at the Manse. Susan Kelley and her helpers had decked the house in garlands and greens and the refreshment committee had goodies and "Negus" all prepared. But it was not to be. Due to the rush of the season we could not reschedule, but we did manage to have the house open for viewing on the following Saturday, so that those who were lucky enough to see our announcement did have an opportunity to see the beautiful old house, softly lighted and dressed up for the season. We are grateful to Susan and her helpers for the beauty of their work, of which photographs were taken and will be displayed. Learning from experience, next year we'll plan a snow date.

### BEFORE US, THERE WERE THE INDIANS

Fred Dunford is an expert on the pre-history and history of the Cape Cod Indians. A graduate of Harvard College, and now teaching at U. Mass., Mr. Dunford is associated with the Cape Cod Museum of Natural History, and has conducted archeological digs over the past year which could lead to more insight into the society of the native Americans. You can hear about his discoveries at the January meeting on Wednesday the 19th at 3 P.M. at Jericho.

### GROWING UP IN DENNIS

Yarmouth Register, Jan. 25, 1879: "For the last week Fresh Pond has presented a beautiful sight to see, from the little boys to the gray-haired sires, some of whom have not been on skates for years, from the little girls to the beautiful maiden, wife and mother." It has not been that kind of a winter, in 82-83 - not yet. But this report brought back memories of winters past when we seemed to skate after school every afternoon. I learned to skate on Tobey's Swamp, now Crook's Swamp, near the South Dennis Library. In early winter the fire department would flood it for us. Skating in a cedar swamp is like visiting a fairy land. Paths curve under tall cedars, trimmed with ice, and wind around hummocks of bright green moss, perfect for "Hide and Go Seek" and "Cops and Robbers." At the back of the swamp was a wide path - we called it The Avenue - probably an ancient cartway, for the cedar was valuable to the joiner and ship-wright of old. I liked to sneak away to skate alone on the Avenue, competing in fantasy for the "World Championship Medal", against Sonja Heinie! Cold toes could be defrosted at the tiny Post Office across the street. Mr. Bayles had a wooden bench where we had to sit while he waited on us - 5¢ for a coke or candy bar. After a long cold spell, the fathers would get together over the noon mail and decide it was time to see if the Fresh Pond was safe. Those of us who tagged along for this inspection heard tall tales about ice boating, ice fishing and falls through thin ice, but what we wanted to hear was the verdict - the ice was safe. That night after supper, muffled to the tops of our ears, and skates over our shoulders, we walked to the pond, picking up the kids along the way. Some adults would be there and a small bonfire would be built at the pond's edge. The pond being spring-fed, cedar logs were laid on the ice to mark the bounds for safe skating. After a few games of "Snap the Whip", Frenchie or Hank, or one of the other big boys would decide to cross the safe bounds and skate to the opposite shore. We scardy-cat girls would stand at the perimeter, listening to the "clack clack" of skate blades in the dark, terrified that the brave ones would fall through thin ice, but they always returned safely. As the church clock struck 8, skates were removed and we trudged to the Old Parsonage for cocoa, before walking back up the Main St., rosy cheeked, with perhaps one or two couples holding hands, just to warm them, you know. Having grown up in Dennis, that's what Fresh Pond means to me - and that wasn't so long ago. Now, you gray-haired sires, you can tell better stories than that! Write me or call me and share with us what you remember about Growing Up in Dennis. (Nancy T. Reid, Box 607, So. Dennis, 02660. Call 398-8842).

### A PERSONAL GLIMPSE AT SLEEPY JOHN

Through the efforts of Henry Kelley, III and the cooperation of Bill MacCaskie, book dealer, the Dennis Historical Commission has acquired an interesting document pertaining to our town's history. You will remember John Sears, Jr., better known as Sleepy John, whose inventive contraption for producing salt by solar evaporation of sea water was termed "Sear's Folly". His "Folly" turned into a multi-million dollar industry that benefited the Cape's economy for decades. This recently discovered document is an agreement between Nathaniel Freeman and John, and gives Freeman the right to build the patented salt works in Harwich, Chatham and Orleans, and it is signed by John Sears, Jr. The Commission is in the process of obtaining a copy of the original to be placed in the archives with this agreement. If you know of any such antique manuscripts which pertain to our history, diaries, letters, ship's logs, agreements or deeds, we would be grateful to hear of their existence. In this way, we will build a treasury of information which documents our past. You can see this 1790 paper at the Jan. 19th meeting at Jericho.

### MID-WINTER FESTIVITY

Designed to beat "Februaryitis", the annual luncheon will be held once again at the Columns, Capt. Obed Baker 3rd's "spacious and beautiful home", in West Dennis. Social hour from 12-1, luncheon at 1, fun and entertainment by local talent, all will help to cheer the dark days of February. Reservations at \$7.00 each will be necessary. Please send check and self-addressed, stamped envelope to treasurer Joshua Crowell, Box 963, Dennis, 02638. (Did I finally get it right, Josh?)

#### CALENDAR

- Jan. 19 3 P.M. Jericho House "PreHistoric Inhabitants of Cape Cod"  
Fred Dunford, archeologist for the Cape Cod Museum of Natural History
- Jan. 22 St. Vincent's Day If the sun shines, the grape crop will be good.
- Jan. 25 D.H.S. Board Meeting, home of Pres. Don Bacon 7:30 P.M.
- Feb. 15 3 P.M. Wixon School Our slide show "Dennis" will be shown to the public, no charge. All welcome, and if you haven't seen this fine show, do take this opportunity.
- Feb. 19 The Columns Mid-Winter Festivity See Article.

#### SCARGO HILL OBSERVATORY PART III

May 15, 1900

It was a balmy day for May, with a sultry southwest wind following the Gulf Stream from the tropics, and blowing across the still cool land of Cape Cod - what the old-timers called a "Weather breeder". The day's work had begun early at Southworth Nye's slaughterhouse near the present location of Grose Galleries on Route 6A in Dennis. Mr. Nye employed several helpers and they were working in early afternoon, butchering the steers and pigs grown by neighbors, when someone noticed a small fire in the thatch near the barn. He tried to stomp it out, but without success. Others helped, but in moments the wind had fanned the sparks to flames which soon engulfed the barn and slaughterhouse. Soon embers flew across the street, destroying another barn of Mr. Nye's before moving up the hill and along the ridge. By this time help had been summoned from other villages, by the frantic ringing of the church and school bells. Now the fire-fighters concentrated on saving the village and, as the fire progressed rapidly along the ridge, the village of East Dennis as well. At last the efforts were successful and the fire was contained, just short of Patia Nickerson's house on Scargo Hill Road, without the loss of any homes. The fire had burned a large area of woodland along Rocky Ridge and Scargo Hill Road. A victim of the fire was the wooden tower atop Scargo Hill. True to the prediction, the tower had withstood wind and weather for nearly 24 years, but not the threat of the flames.

The old-timers were right about the weather. Late in the day, a thunderstorm struck, so severe that it kindled a second fire at the home of Widow Robinson. Exhausted neighbors saved the occupants and some furniture, but the house was destroyed. In spite of these calamitous events, Cape humor prevailed. The reporter calls this day "the hottest 15th of May in Dennis for a great many years," and ends his report, "From another such day, Good Lord deliver us." To which I say, Amen.

Next month: A Tower of Stone

#### HAPPY ANNIVERSARY, DEAR NEWSLETTER

This edition is the first in the sixth year of our Newsletter. My thanks to all who help to get the newsletter to you, especially Isabelle and Bill Flynn who often do the tedious job of folding, sorting and mailing, assisted by Mr. and Mrs. Gene Hastings. If you could volunteer to help, just call Is - she'd be delighted. Thanks to Byron Peirce and Gail Hart are also due, for getting the newsletter started. And many, many thanks to all of you for your fine comments - the compliments, which I love, but also the corrections and additions. I consider myself a "student of history", not an historian, and as such I am always glad to learn. As I index the newsletter, your information is noted for future reference. For those who collect and save the newsletter, we have a limited number of back issues on hand, and will fill in any gaps you may have if we can. We would appreciate a contribution of 25¢ for each newsletter requested, as the cost of printing and mailing far exceeds the \$1 of your dues which was added to cover this cost in 1978.

#### SPEAKING OF DUES

If you are one of those very few people who have overlooked paying dues as yet, please note that Mrs. Isabelle Flynn has taken over the duties as membership chairman, as Mrs. Elinor Slade is now serving as 2nd Vice-President. Mail your dues to Mrs. Flynn, Box 607, So. Dennis.

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