



### FAREWELL, TEACHER AND FRIEND

A Dennis institution left us on Christmas Day. Susan Perry (Chase) McHenry passed away at the venerable age of one hundred three and one-half years about two miles from where she was born.

Known variously as Mrs. McHenry, Susie P., Susie, or - to some of us as Aunt Sue, she was a great teacher, good friend, and possessed a lively wit that endeared her to all.

She started teaching the Dennis Port Primary classes in 1920. A substitute teaching job at the school during the previous two years caused her to complain to Dennis Port school committeeman T. Frank Young about the lack of discipline in the classroom. It seems a bunch of big, unruly boys were disrupting the whole primary school and the teacher, Mary LaFavor, was not able to deal with it. She submitted her resignation, leaving a vacancy. Susie had remarked that she'd like to have one week to "straighten out those awful boys scraping their feet and making spitballs and throwing them all over the room, so Frank Young asked her to give it a try for a year. Forty two years later she retired from Ezra Baker School where they named a new wing in her honor.

Those forty two years spanned a great change in Dennis schools. In 1920 she taught grades 1-4. When she retired she was one of eleven teaching grades 1-4. It has been said that "a really good teacher is born, not made". In Susie's case that was true. Her first year of teaching was accomplished with no formal training. She impressed Superintendent Alberto Small so much he suggested that she take some courses at Hyannis Normal School during the summer and they would hire her for the next year. She followed that course of teaching and summer study until she finally received her teaching degree six years later.

School conditions also changed remarkably during her forty two years. At the Dennis Port school she had all four classes in one large, drafty room lit by kerosene lamps on dark days and heated by a wood stove which she needed to keep filled during the day. The drinking fountain was a wooden bucket with a dipper for all to use, and the toilet facilities was a double two-holer out behind the school - left side for the boys and right for the girls. She said when she first entered the new Dennis Consolidated School (now Ezra Baker) she thought she was going into the Taj Mahal.

Susie's stories about teaching were legion. A favorite one concerned a student who was as disenchanted with the new Taj Mahal as she was delighted. It seems that the boy had never used a modern toilet. He asked to go to the boy's room and was gone so long she sent another boy in to see what the problem was - and he didn't come back either, so she went in to see what was going on. The second boy dusted out of there post haste when she arrived. The first boy was sitting in the toilet, with the seat up, in water up to his stomach. His pants and underpants were draped over the paper rack. She said, "What in the world are you doing in there? Now get up." The boy said, "I can't. I'm stuck." He was wearing what was called "easy blouses" - the pants buttoned onto the shirt. One of the buttons had caught underneath and he was stuck there. She pulled him out and was going to give him a spank on his bottom, but it was already bright red and she decided not to add to it. She gave him some paper and told him to wash up, get dressed and come back to class. The unlucky lad declared he "never wanted to use a toilet again, he preferred an outhouse!"

Over the years Mrs. McHenry's class size ranged from 16 to 48 (1934-35 class). That must have been a challenge. Ask any Ezra Baker teacher now to find room for 48 students in one classroom! Through it all she maintained that lively, upbeat spirit - and always a firm authority that would tolerate no misbehavior, learned in 1920 when she tamed "those awful boys". Any student who attended her first grade class is welcome now to join me in singin:

"Good morning to you,  
Good morning to you,

We're all in our places  
With sunshiny faces,

And that is the way  
To start a new day."

Every morning started with that song, and perhaps that was the philosophy that kept her going year after year. Most of her forty two years as a teacher were spent in the first grade. It was decided in the mid-40's to move her to the third grade "to make it easier for her". After five years of "the easy life" she demanded to go back to the first grade and she remained there to the end of her career.

Teacher of reading, writing, arithmetic, the social graces, and discipline, she touched and molded the lives of about 1250 Dennis children, some who went on to become leaders of industry, church, or state, and the rest of us who have lived ordinary lives made more meaningful by her influence.

Well done thou good and faithful servant. Rest well, Aunt Sue.

### DINING FOR DENNIS HISTORY

The series of fund raising dinner to aid the preservation of Dennis history is well underway. Chairman Jim Coogan reports a lot of enthusiasm from his committee and the membership. Anyone who has not signed up to support this worthwhile project is invited to call Jim at 385-2332 for placement in a dinner group that is bound to be interesting - and a gourmet's delight. Some of you will be invited to dine at Josiah Dennis Manse, which is sure to be a treat. Call Jim or send in the form below - and Bon Appetit!!

Name \_\_\_\_\_

To: Dennis Historical Dining  
Box 607

Tel. \_\_\_\_\_

South Dennis, MA 02660

### CALENDAR

Jan. 10 7:30 P.M. DHS Board meets at the Manse.  
Jan. 22-28 Dining For DHS (See other side.)  
Feb. 24 12 noon Annual Mid-Winter Festivity at Christine's Restaurant.

### VETERANS MARKERS

The markers to honor World War II servicemen who made the supreme sacrifice (Dec. newsletter) will be dedicated on Memorial Day of this year. Too many family members of the servicemen are in warmer climates this time of year and it seemed only right that their families should be here for this special occasion. Donations have been received to help the Dennis Historical Commission with this project, but more would also be welcome. Please make the check payable to: Prue Foundry with a notation: For DHC - Veterans Markers. You will receive a tax-deductible receipt from the DHC, and a special thanks from all.

### MOTORING IN THE 1930'S

Our sometimes guest writer, Josh Crowell, has another recollection to share with us. This one was prompted as he put gasoline in his car when the thermometer hovered around 15°.

The recent cold weather and the observation of current driving practices brought forth memories. First of all, heaters in automobiles are now quite efficient and all to our driving comfort. Even when the outside temperature is below freezing it is not uncommon to notice passing cars operated by a person in his shirt sleeves. In addition, that person is sometimes drinking coffee or talking on his car phone while motoring along at or above the speed limit. By contrast my thoughts go back to the early 1930's. Several then young men of the area were furthering their education by attending Wentworth Institute in Boston. Commuting was not a common practice and rooms were rented in the Boston area with occasional week-end home visits. Boy, did home cooking taste good! The trip home was usually via the now defunct NYNH&H Railroad. Classes were over at 4 P.M. and barring accident the Boston Elevated, now known as the MTA, got us to South Station in time to catch the 4:47 train to the Cape. On occasion the trip home was more of an adventure. The late Norman Hallett, one of the group that attended school in Boston had an automobile. Well, sort of. It was one of the earlier Model A's and had not had the best of care by previous owner or owners. It was an open touring car, gray in color, with canvas side curtains and no heater. A necessary piece of equipment was a 2 gallon can of drain oil (oil that had been used in some other vehicle's crankcase, and which could be obtained for little or nothing from some service stations). It would usually take the full 2 gallons to accomplish the 80-odd miles to the Cape. Gasoline could be obtained from certain gas stations at 8 (or more) gallons for a dollar! The pumps did not display the major brand-names of the era, such as SOCONY, TYDOL, ESSO, etc. The one best remembered displayed a sign reading MERIT. Remember, there was no heater in this vehicle and considerable cold air found it's way in. In hopes of improving the interior climate a hole had been cut in the wooden floor of the seating area. This was supposed to let in some heated air from the engine compartment but fumes would be a better name for that which passengers were subjected to. At least one person was skeptical of the touring ability of this vehicle. A local boy, whose home was in Orleans, was invited to ride to the Cape one Friday night. After he observed the molasses-type liquid being added to the crankcase he opted to take the train instead. He was told that it was his choice but that the scorned vehicle would be waiting for him at Yarmouth Depot. As you may guess, when "Doc" stepped off the train, probably about 6:45 P.M., the gray touring car with it's occupants in carefully staged, relaxed positions was there for him to observe. The passage of 60 years dims the details but "Doc" was probably offered a lift to his home in Orleans, but undoubtedly chose to take the New England Transportation bus instead.

Thanks, Josh! I'm sure you can all picture Norman and Josh bundled up to their eyes, pushing that Model A to its limits with brief stops to pour more sludge into the crankcase, as they flew down old Routes 3 and 6. Ah, youth! The two were best men for each others wedding and remained lifelong friends until Norman passed away in 1977.

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

Non-Profit Organization U. S. POSTAGE PAID Permit No. 2 So. Dennis, MA 02660
--

