



WE BEGIN OUR TWENTY-FIRST YEAR

Volume 21, number 1. Wow, we never would have guessed back in 1978 that our newsletter would continue for two decades. As Historical Society Newsletters go, ours has been a great success. Published each month, mailed to members and to other societies and interested persons, we have distributed a lot of Dennis history in our 240 issues. Furthermore, our newsletter is indexed, thanks largely to the efforts of the late Harold Merriam, who began the work for us several years ago. The index is kept at the Josiah Dennis Manse Library and has been very helpful to researchers, and especially to the third grade students who annually are assigned to write a report on some aspect of their town's history.

This is a good time to thank all those who have helped to get the newsletter to you, including Sarah Kruger, who does the mailing labels, the Flynns, who for many years did all the work of addressing and mailing, the Reyliks who recently relieved the Flynns and all who have written, typed and delivered the letter to our faithful printers, the Ives of School Street, West Dennis.

If you have joined DHS in recent years, you might wish to have copies of early editions of the Newsletter. They are available singly for 25 cents an issue, or in complete sets for \$20, plus postage if mailed. Better yet, come to the February luncheon, where sets will be available, no postage or handling required.

APPOINTMENTS MADE BY OUR NEW PRESIDENT

Ruth and Burton Derick have been selected to be librarians for the DHS library at the Josiah Dennis Manse. Ray Urquhart, a new board member, has accepted the duties of Program Chairman. Peg Eastman has also accepted an appointment as Publicity Chair. She needs the help of "poster people" in each village who will take on the task of putting up posters for DHS events in visible places. Can you fill this small but important role? One of the goals of the Board for this year is to increase attendance at our meetings. Posters in conspicuous places will help us with this goal. To volunteer, call Kitty at 394-6114. In addition to these appointments, another DHS member will be present at Board meetings. She is Joan Montiero of West Dennis who will represent the Jericho House committee and Friends of Jericho. Welcome all!

MANSE OPEN HOUSE A GREAT SUCCESS

Thanks are due for the efforts of Phyllis Horton, chairman of the Manse Committee, Susan Kelley and her elves, who decorated, Nancy Howes who superintended refreshments and all the wonderful volunteers who served as costumed guides at the DHS Christmas Open House held at the Manse on December 14, 1997. Approximately 200 people visited the old house that Sunday afternoon. A special tour was given by Phyllis for town officials before the party began. Thanks also to the voters of the Special Town Meeting on December 8, who voted to match the Massachusetts Historical Commission grant with an additional \$20,000 for much needed restoration and repair at our beautiful historic center.

MID-WINTER FESTIVITY PLANS ARE MADE

Our annual Mid-Winter luncheon is scheduled for February 14 at Christine's Restaurant in West Dennis. "Attitude adjustment" hour will begin at noon, with luncheon at 1 P.M. The menu: choice of Chicken Christine, a boneless chicken stuffed with broccoli, mushrooms and almonds, or Baked Scrod, with bread crumbs and lemon butter. Both entrees are served with soup, potato, fresh vegetable, rolls, dessert and coffee or tea, and your cost will be \$13.00, tax and gratuity included. We will be entertained by the Men's chorus of the Dennis Union Church, who will serenade us on this Valentine's Day with lots of Golden Oldies--(bring your hankie!) Make your reservations soon, so you won't be left out. Our Mid-Winter gatherings are always fun and full of surprises. Reservation blank below.

MID-WINTER LUNCHEON RESERVATION FEBRUARY 14 CHRISTINE'S

Please make reservations for _____. Enclosed check for \$_____ (\$13.00 per)
(Tax and gratuity included)

Choice of entree: _____ Chicken Christine _____ Baked Scrod

Please enclose self-addressed stamped envelope and mail to:

Lura Crowell P.O. Box 216 East Dennis MA 02641

CALENDAR

Jan. 1 12:00 A.M. Happy New Year!

Jan. 14 7:30 P.M. Board meets at the Manse

COMING IN FEBRUARY Mid-Winter Festivity See article, page one

THE LITTLE HOUSE THAT COULD

I promised to tell you more about the Little House which recently made the slow journey from West Dennis to Uncle Stanley's Way in South Dennis. All I can tell you right now is how difficult it is to re-search our old houses. Two trips to the registry, and I have only documented the house's history back to 1943. I stalled at this date because, although I could prove ownership by Land Court certificates to George Richards in that year, the only prior deeds to George Richards appeared to be for land along the river. I did locate a property which seemed to match the description of the lot now number 100 Uncle Barney's Road, but it was deeded to Mary L. Richards in the 1920's, and the description was different enough to make me wonder if it was indeed the right site.

Following a tip from Dave Ellis in West Dennis, I called Herb Chase who grew up in the Wrinkle Point neighborhood in the hope that he might remember from his childhood who owned the Little House. Guess what! He did. He remembered Dr. Richards and his son Lyman, and also recalled that they owned a boat called "Mary L.", named for the doctor's wife. Herb also remembered that the Richards family owned extensive property in the neighborhood, including the Little House, which was used for guests. So, on a subsequent trip to the Registry, I may get the Little House back to the 1800's. Wish me luck! NTR

ANOTHER ANCIENT BUILDING CRIES OUT FOR HELP

It's the West Dennis Community Building, which has been declared to be structurally unsound. Many concerned citizens attended a hearing held by the Selectmen and voiced their wishes that an attempt be made to save the building. At the hearing, even many who were in support of saving the building were unaware of its history. It was built in 1867, and was one of five buildings, one in each village, which were erected in order to comply with the state recommendation, later a mandate, that all towns abandon their educational system of one room, neighborhood district schools. The town were asked to establish graded schools, which would offer more than reading, writing and cyphering to the town's children. Of course, the adoption of a new system of education met with much angry debate, not only because of the cost of the new schools, but also because many felt that the education recieved in the district schools was adequate--"if it was good enough for me, it's good enough for today's children." But those who championed the modern approach won, and from 1859 to 1867, a graded school was opened in each village of this town. The West Dennis Community Building is the only one of the five which remains.

Graded schools such as this served the town's children until 1931, when the Dennis Consolidated School, now Ezra H. Baker School, was opened. After 1931, the old schools were used for other purposes. The West Dennis School served as the polling place for West Dennis from 1923, when the Australian Ballot was adopted, until the present, and as a Town Meeting place from 1923 until 1952. when Town Meetings were moved to the new wing of the Ezra H. Baker School. At that time, and again in the 1970's, the demolition of the building was considered but preservationists lobbied hard for its use as a social center. Now, heeding the concern expressed for saving the building, the Selectmen have appointed an Advisory Board to assess the fate of our ancient school.

Dennis Historical Society
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