



Dennis Historical Society Newsletter

Volume 26 Number 1

January 2003

Calendar of Events

**January 5
2:00 PM**

**Jacob Sears Library
Center Street E. Dennis**

Kathleen SanClemente
who brought us "Women
Who Went Whaling" takes
us over the edge in
"Wintering Over
in the Arctic."

If you think it's cold here,
listen to Viola Cook's story!
Refreshments.

Coming in February

**The Bonds of Womanhood:
The Art of 19th Century
Housewifery**

Lynne Horton will tell us
how it was done in the
"Good Old Days."

**And In March
Export China**

Mary Kuhrtz will tell how
china that was brought back
from the Far East as ship's
ballast is now highly
collectible.

We hope to have our new
calendar ready to send out
with the next Newsletter.

Abby Crowell's Frigid Baptism

by *Phyllis Horton*

Everyone knows about the bone chilling cold that invades the Cape and Islands in January, but that doesn't even come close to what Abby Crowell of West Dennis experienced in January 1881.

On January 27, 1881 Abby Crowell was on board the Schooner *Uriah B. Fisk* in Boston Harbor waiting to cast off for Charleston, South Carolina. Her husband, Captain William Long Crowell, was in command of the vessel. The ship was owned by the Fisk brothers of West Dennis who owned a sizeable fleet, most of which were captained by local men. At 9 A.M. conditions were good and she left the harbor with fair winds and favorable weather to round the Cape. At 10 P.M. she anchored off Chatham waiting for the tide to come up over Nantucket Shoals. By midnight the weather had deteriorated. Strong gales came up, showering the vessel with spray, which instantly turned to ice on the running parts of the schooner. The captain turned out all hands to try to beat the ice from the ship.

The weak morning sun provided enough heat for the crew to haul up the anchor and move southeast, away from the dangerous Handkerchief Shoals. Anchoring again to ride out the second night the crew watched helplessly as the strong winds and spray once more covered the ship in solid ice. The schooner was pushed by a moving ice field into the strong current. Despite heroic efforts by the crew she drifted helplessly onto the shore and struck bottom off Great Point, Nantucket. The Captain used every means at his disposal to work his ship off the shoal, but to no avail. After 16 hours of continuous effort it was discovered that she was taking on water and would have to be abandoned.

The lifeboat was very difficult to maneuver through the ice field and all hands would have perished, but the lighthouse keeper had been watching the drama unfold and he alerted some local men. The men gathered on shore, threw a line to the lifeboat, but could not pull it in. Finally, in desperation, they leaped from ice cake to ice cake, reached the lifeboat, and carried the nearly frozen crew, Abby and the Captain back across the ice cakes to the solid ground of Great Point!

The Schooner *Uriah B. Fisk* was a total loss and it was the last voyage for William and Abby. He entered into business on shore, quite possibly influenced by his dear wife Abby, who had had all the adventure at sea that she wanted.

From Blue Water Wives and Mothers Exhibit, 2002.

Holiday Celebrations *by Phyllis Horton*

DHS celebrated the 2002 holiday season with three lovely gatherings. The first one was at the 1867 West Dennis Graded School House when 95 first grade students visited the school to put up holiday decorations they had made to brighten up the town. Every year Hart Farm in Dennis Port donates small trees to the Ezra Baker students and they make decorations to go on the trees. The trees are then placed throughout West Dennis and Dennis Port as part of the Visions of Christmas Celebration.

The children arrived in a swirl of snowflakes that seemed to make the day even more special. They were split up into three groups. While one group put up their Christmas trees on the fence in front of the school, another group enjoyed refreshments of hot cocoa and cookies furnished by Paul McCormick. The third group trooped upstairs to the School House Museum where they were greeted by DHS president Ray Urquhart who gave them an introduction to school in the mid-1800s. Phyllis Horton then gave them a close-up view of the first grade as it was in 1867, including having a bucket and dipper for a water fountain, outhouses, and walking through snow to school. If the school teacher could make it through the drifts, school was in session—and you had better be there! There was no such thing as a snow day. Finally, Burt Derick toured the groups through the other part of the school museum. When they rang the old school bell on top of the building, there were a lot of big smiles and shining eyes!

Our second celebration took place as the 1801 Jericho House hosted the annual DHS Christmas Open House. Lovely Victorian decorations and sumptuous refreshments, including Colonel Negus Punch, greeted everyone when they entered the keeping room. The Christmas Open House is a very special time on our calendar. It is good to greet our old friends and to welcome new ones.

Finally, the 1736 Josiah Dennis Manse was decorated in the Colonial theme for the Visions Celebration. Every nook and cranny of the old Manse was decorated with a bit of greenery. The Manse ladies outdo themselves every year and visitors come armed with sketchbooks to take ideas home for their own decorating.

We hope your Holidays were Happy Days, and we wish you a Healthy and Prosperous New Year!

Bits and Pieces:

Lucky us! We have received more donations from friends and members. From Marjorie Medland, an aunt of Nancy Sears, we now have a lovely redwork child's quilt, probably made around 1895 by Nellie Crowell Richardson for her son George who was born in 1892. Nellie was the daughter of Prince F. Crowell and granddaughter of Prince S. Crowell. Ruth Derick tells us redwork was popular from around 1895 to 1900.

Mary Raycraft donated a small slate as well as a little chamber pot which fits nicely in the small potty chair in the children's room at the Manse.

Henry Kelley has given us a new book for our library. *A Captain from Cape Cod* by Paul C. Morris tells of the merchant fleets of Crowell and Thurlow of West Dennis. Once Burt has finished reading it from cover to cover, it will be available for members in our library.

Due to a big demand Admont Clark's book *Lighthouse of Cape Cod* is out of stock. We have only one copy left! We do have copies of his new book *Sea Stories of Cape Cod and the Islands* which sell for \$39.97. Members have the advantage of a 10% discount. Shipping and handling \$5.

If you have concerns or questions, do contact one of the board members who will bring them to our attention. A list of board members with addresses and phone numbers was sent out in the October Newsletter.

Two new dateboards have been ordered for houses in Dennis Port: for Mr. & Mrs. Stephen Wilkins' 1820 Solomon Wixon, Jr. house and also the 1845 Freeman R. Wixon house.

Meet Your Board Members

Joan Martin—Treasurer

Joan and her husband Jim came to Dennis in 1991 from Ashland, Massachusetts. They had spent many years as weekenders in Dennis before retiring. Joan had worked for Dennison Manufacturing Company for 33 years and prior to her retirement she had been Secretary of the Corporation.

Once in Dennis Joan became a docent at Jericho Historical Center and then a member of that Committee. She also became a Director of the Dennis Historical Society. The Board soon recognized her skills and ability and asked her to take on the duties of Treasurer. She served on the West Dennis Graded School House Restoration Committee to save and preserve the last example of this kind of school in town. In addition she is Assistant Treasurer and a Director of the Friends of Dennis Senior Citizens, Inc. and has been appointed to the 1867 West Dennis Graded School House Oversight Committee by the Selectmen.

Brendan Joyce, Col. USA (Ret.) moved from Boston to East Dennis in 1986 with his wife Maureen after they purchased and restored the 1836 Captain Dean Sears House (**The Cap'n's**) on Quivet Neck. He graduated from Manhattan College and the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and received a Ph.D. in biochemistry from the University of California. He served for over thirty years with the Army Medical Department in the United States, Europe, and Vietnam, where he received the Bronze Star. When he retired in 1986 as Commander and Scientific Director of the Army Research Institute of Environmental Medicine at Natick, MA, he was awarded the Legion of Merit.

Since coming to Dennis he has served on the Old King's Highway Historic District Committee (1987-1991), is a Trustee of the Jacob Sears Memorial Library, Vice-President of the Village Library Society, Vice-President of the Quivet Neck Homeowners Association, and a founding member of the "Save the Crow Committee." Both he and Maureen have been active in the DHS since 1986, he as a member of the Executive Board and Past President (1996 and 1997) and she as a member of the Manse Committee, and as "Mistress Joyce" with the Manse School Program. Both are avid gardeners--tomatoes for him and flowers for her!

Susan Kelley was brought up in a 1735 saltbox in Danvers, MA. (Her father, Richard V. Ellery, was the artist who painted the fine portrait of Nathaniel Wixon which hangs in the Wixon School.) During her growing-up years she played classical piano and sang in the church choir. She also raised chickens and goats. She walked to the four-room elementary schoolhouse about a mile from her home; then after high school went on to major in philosophy first at VT College and then at BU. It was here that she met her life-long mate, Henry Kelley II. They shared an interest in antiques which they started collecting when they were first married. When they learned that the Manse, which had been built for Josiah Dennis, was for sale, they joined with others to propose that the town buy it for a museum. They then lived there as caretakers in the summer of 1968, painting the interior woodwork and readying it for display. With the Kelleys' antique furnishings in place the Manse was first open in August for the 175th anniversary of the Town of Dennis.

In the early 70s Henry and Susan built their own home in Bound Brook Valley in East Dennis, by the pond. However, when the school program was started at the Manse, Susan volunteered to teach the children about spinning and weaving, even though she was busy raising a family, tending their gardens, sheep, goats, chickens, wild turkeys and, thanks to their daughter Laura, horses. Today in addition to playing the cello, teaching adults the skills of spinning and weaving, and spending time as a docent at the Manse, Susan works at Eden Hand Arts. Daughter Laura now lives in N. Eastham, and son, Jonathan lives with his wife and son in Dennis. With family and other activities to keep her busy, Susan still delights in learning more about life in colonial days-- how people wove and spun, used plants for food, medicine and dyeing, and how they lived.

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THE WAY WE WERE

The Poetry of Lucy Thacher Baker of South Dennis

In past newsletters we have featured some of the poetry of young Lucy Thacher Baker of South Dennis. She was born in South Dennis on January 2, 1822, the daughter of Peter Baker and his wife Sarah Sears. She married in June of 1843, the second wife of Captain Jonathan Nickerson, Jr. Captain Jonathan was born May 29, 1807 and lost at sea of the coast of Ireland, as master of the Schooner *Sarah Adams*, in April of 1847. Their lone child was Jonathan Nickerson, born February 16, 1845 who died unmarried in Elgin, Illinois on October 20, 1880.

The originals of this poetry are in the collection of the Dennis Historical Society, donated by Jane Chase (Mrs. Robert P.) of South Dennis, June 2002.

Writing Wondrous

*Whence did the Mystic art arise
Of painting speech, and speaking to the eyes,
That we, by tracing magic lines, are taught
How both to colour and embody thought.*

L. T. Baker