



Dennis Historical Society Newsletter

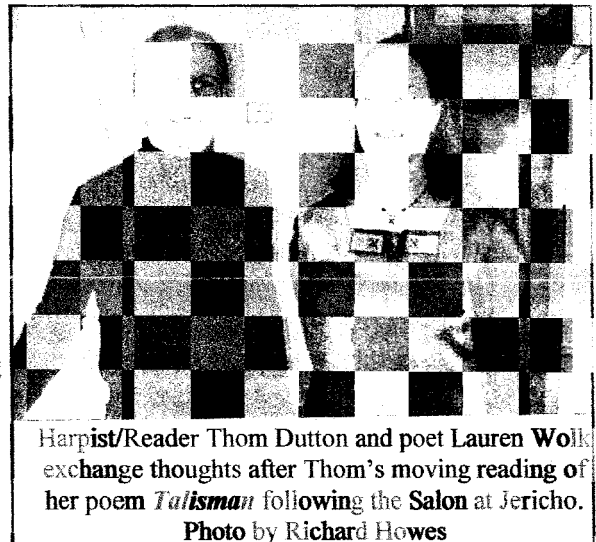
Volume 30 Number 1

Send letters and stories to Lura Crowell, Editor, Box 607, S. Dennis 02660 or sesuctfarm@verizon.net

January 2007

A Lovely Thought for the New Year Brought Fourth from the Old!

On November 12, 2006 the Dennis Historical Society presented a new program called *The Salon at Jericho*. A group of readers from the Historical Society of Old Yarmouth and the DHS presented a selection of "Sand, Surf and Sea Stories" chosen from many different sources and combined to present a spell-binding story of life by the sea. You might have recognized the selections from *The Outermost House* by Henry Beston or from *Shipmasters of Cape Cod* by Henry C. Kitteredge, those from the poetry of Joseph C. Lincoln, Longfellow and Masfield, and even from the *Memoirs of Lucy Lord Howes Hooper* transcribed for the book *Privateers, Pirates and Beyond* by Gerry Watters. Readers Joshua Crowell, Thom Dutton, Terri Fox, and Wendy Prange aided by Narrator Frank N. Watson and the staging of Cara C. Watson left the audience hoping for more. Thom Dutton's harp added a perfect counterpoint to the readings. So many of those present commented on the poem by Lauren Wolk that it seems appropriate to begin our New Year with a reprint of those magical words with the permission of their author who lives in Centerville.



Harpist/Reader Thom Dutton and poet Lauren Wolk exchange thoughts after Thom's moving reading of her poem *Talisman* following the Salon at Jericho.
Photo by Richard Howes

Talisman

In the field where the barn used to lean, like a giant, hollow ark come to ground, I once found an arrowhead the color of clouds.

I imagined it swerving wide, missing the deer it was meant to fell, before burying itself with a swift sigh.

When I tested the edge with my thumb, I found it still sharp after all those years. Still warm. And I stood in that field where I had thought myself alone, and I cleaned the arrowhead with my wetted finger and kept it for a while.

My grandfather's grandfather built our barn with nails forged one by one by hand. It sheltered big, gray horses, mangers of clean oats, rock doves nodding in the rafters, and a rope I used to swing on until I'd stitched my palms with tiny threads of gold.

*That barn fell apart one ancient, peerless timber at a time until they finally burned it down. But
once in a while, when I walk here slowly enough, head bowed, the light just so,
I'll find a stray nail that someone took the care to forge.
And I'll clean it with my wetted finger and keep it for a while.*

*What is the thing I'll leave behind when I go on, the tangible trace by which I'll be recalled?
Let it be something I've made with my own hands, to last,
to linger,
to hold my warmth beyond all reckoning,
the only one there ever was.*

Lauren Wolk

Celebrating Cape Cod Style

Back in November 2006 we told you about the book of letters sent to us by **Dr. John Fulcher** of Avella, Pennsylvania which were written to his mother, **Louise Morgan**, "Laurie," by her friend, **Louise Alexander**, who lived for a time in South Dennis. The letters written from 1902 to 1911 are signed "Hero" or "Allison." Louise Morgan had been her classmate at the Hope Street High School in Providence before financial problems sent the Alexanders here to live with relatives. This collection of letters was transcribed by Dr. Fulcher's late wife, **Jane M. Fulcher**, a librarian who recognized the importance of preserving this delightful correspondence.

In 1913 Louise Alexander graduated from Boston University, Phi Beta Kappa, then took post graduate work at the New England Conservatory and at Simmons College Library School. She and Dr. Royal Merrill Frye were married June 11, 1915, but had no children. Who Was Who in America, vol. 5, 1969-1975 calls her "writer, artist, composer," listing examples.

(*Indicates annotation by Burt Derick.)

(February 1904?)

(South Dennis, MA)

Dearest Laurie,

What is so rare as a day in February—with a letter from you!

*We're still up and doing on the Cape. There's a triumvirate of jolly old sea-captains that spend the winter months here, their vessels snug in port, and (bless their sea-worthy souls!) they have hustled the good times right along. The last was a wedding anniversary in the little hall in the "park." (*Liberty Hall on the South Dennis village green.)*

After the bustle of the evening train (for Cape etiquette allows nothing before) the lanterns came twinkling up the icy road from far and near. In spite of slips and jostlings Ruth and I arrived without mishap to our fine paraphernalia, for, as Cap'n Asey said, the walking was 'mighty ticklish.'

It takes something more than bad walking to keep us country folk away from a good time though. Honestly, Laurie, you'd laugh to see how giddy the old uncles and grandmas are—they're all boys and girls here. I told you, didn't I, that everyone goes by the first name. So we were not surprised to find the wee hall well-packed except a little space before the platform where two benevolent armchairs awaited the happy couple.

*On the stage a three-piece orchestra droned to itself over the hum of voices. But hark! The door! The music took a new delicious burst, the audience rose en masse with waving handkerchiefs. In at the door came a lantern waved aloft by "Jim" (comical "Jim" not a bit less boisterous for the gray hairs that fringed the bald spot way up on top of his head), followed by "Wat" and his bride.... (*Watson F. Baker and his wife Hannah D. [Kelley] who were married 7 Feb 1878.)*

Down the center aisle they come through a volley of cheers to be seated with many a flourish in the open-armed chairs. Fate, knowing "Wat" to be a small man, had supplied him with such a huge and rosy wife that (thanks be) her chair made no complaint. Then "Anna Jeet" (so named for her husband Jethro) (Jethro Baker the furniture dealer.) stepped forward and presented a huge glass dish in the name of the people of South Dennis. Her little speech was elegantly worked up in prose with occasional flights into poetry, and rendered with effusive gesticulations and emotions.*

After the applause, an awed and expectant silence followed, so that poor Wat (no doubt thinking his time had come) half rose, cleared his throat, and rose some more. "We're waiting for Jim," announced a clear voice. Forthwith from some unexpected cranny "Jim" was hustled to the front.

*"Well, boys," he said, pulling a little roll from his pocket, "you sh'll have it being's you'm so set. But it's short, as I said." Here he set his glasses astride his nose and looked convincingly over them at the multitude. "Quite short." With this there was a crash! And the roll opened to such an astounding length that the lower end disappeared under Mrs. Wat's chair. And how everybody roared. Mr. Alpheus (*Alpheus Howes Baker [1839-1910]) was so tickled he swayed back and forth 'til he doubled up like a jack knife and choked, and in the commotion of putting him to rights again, Jim's first verse was lost.*

Now Jim is certainly a long fellow—but not a poet, and Mr. Alpheus was not the only one to resort to spasms before he finished. Precious little rhyme or rhythm—or reason—was wasted on that roll. I couldn't remember a word of it ... and I know its author had to throw in occasional explanatory phrases with ridiculous little scraps of bows.

*Other speeches followed, for of course both Mr. and Mrs. Wat had to express their heart-felt thanks. Then they called on the minister, Mr. Harris (who is still studying in Boston, but comes down for over Sunday.) (*Rev. Frederick Harris) His tall, well proportioned figure loomed up in front as he told some ridiculous story. It's strange but true that his thoughtful sermons are delivered to a scanty congregation. I think he was surprised to see such a crowd on this occasion. When he had finished his story he said he'd learnt something new that night which he must tell them. It was, he went on, that the people of South Dennis do go somewhere, don't they?*

After this telling shot the audience was very glad to be treated to ice and cake, while Mr. Alpheus ripped off his coat and with superabundant energy piled up the settees for a dance. The orchestra tuned up afresh and burst out with such persuasion that half the crowd were wafted up and away over the boards.

The dear old square dances are the best after all! Your partner twirls you 'til you're dizzy, then you fly at a tangent to somebody else's partner, given another spin and on. The feet that cut the flightiest capers are topped by the grayest heads—and I do wonder how so many porpoise-shaped ladies dare to venture into the arena. But, as I said, none ever grows old on the Cape. Jim stopped the dance promptly at eleven (to the dismay of the youngsters) and invited all present to a service at church the next morning

Jan 200

Dennis Historical Society
P.O. Box 607
South Dennis, MA 02990-0607

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

Non-profit
Organization
US POSTAGE
PAID
Permit No. 2
South Dennis, MA
02660

Extra
2007

The Way We Were

Nancy Reid's History refers to Liberty Hall on page 305-6. "What is now the village of South Dennis developed into a business center after the Upper Bridge [across Bass River] was opened. In 1844 Watson Baker (1807-1882) and Isaac Downs (1816-1852) established a store at the four corners created by the Main Street, Bridge Street (now High Bank Road) and Upper County Road. Their old store still stands at the intersection and is the present Liberty Hall. It was the stage coach stop and after 1844 it was also the South Dennis Post office. The building was moved from "Searsville," a section of town along the western side of Swan Pond."



Liberty Hall
Edmond R. Nickerson Collection

It is interesting to learn from Burt that the homestead of Harrison Alexander (letters of Louise Alexander p 2-3) was on what is now Upper County Road, east of the Upper County/Searsville Road intersection by a few hundred yards, on the north side of the road.