



Dennis Historical Society Newsletter

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A Happy New Year to you from the Dennis Historical Society! This year is the ***FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY*** of the founding of DHS. Phyllis Horton and her team have done a marvelous job of establishing the full schedule of events for our members and the public alike that encompass all of our museums and other Dennis locations. I encourage you to join us at as many of these activities as you can. I know that we have a great year ahead!

Pete Howes

The Casa Madrid

This year has brought some interesting donations to DHS. One of the more interesting was not in Dennis but across the river in Bass River Village.

Long-time member and good friend of DHS, the late Betty Mullan, gave us a drink menu and post card from the Casa Madrid, a high class, well-known speakeasy—well-known to mid-Cape residents but very few could afford to belong. Local people did get inside, as employees

It was built in the early 1930s in Spanish design of sand-colored stucco with a red tile roof and is still standing as a private residence. It was advertised in Boston newspapers as a private, exclusive club. Well-to-do people and influential politicians arrived, many in chauffeur-driven automobiles. The men were dressed in tailored white linen suits or tuxedos and the women wore silk or satin long gowns of the highest fashion. They danced, drank and gambled through most of the night and arrived back in Boston at sun-up. The club's hours were 6:00 P.M. to 2:00 A.M. but that was loosely interpreted.

Prohibition was in full swing and anything of Latin flavor was popular. People of means flew to Rio de Janeiro or Havana for a taste of the exotic. The Copacabana, Coconut Grove and El Morocco nightclubs were opened in our major cities to attract Americans who could not afford the trip, and Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers helped feed the frenzy as they sang and danced in the movie "Flying Down to Rio". On the mid-Cape shores the Boston Syndicate landed cases and cushioned bags of illicit liquor, some of it arriving at the Casa Madrid and a few other local establishments. The rest found its way to Boston. That liquor came from Canada.

Europe and the Caribbean and was preferred if you could afford it. Bootleg liquor, produced in this country, might be made from many questionable ingredients some of which could be dangerous to one's health.

The interior of the club was well designed featuring Spanish/Moorish décor. The tables were moderately raised on a platform that surrounded part of the dance floor, but the main feature of the room was a forty foot long mahogany bar. Extensive gardens and a four foot high stucco wall surrounded patios where patrons could eat and dance al fresco. A 100 car parking lot was across the road.

The post card says "Dine and Dance in the Beautiful Outdoor Gardens to the music of Pete Fitzgerald's Orchestra. Two Floor Shows every night, including Sunday. No cover charge. Casa Madrid, Bass River, near Hyannis, Mass. Off Route 28—Follow signs. Telephone Hyannis 892 or 614.

The menu has a deep-red flocked cover showing a waiter and waitress with drink trays and martini glasses. The drink list carries many found at today's bars but also: Paris Side Car, Silver Bronx, Between the Sheets, Hop Toad, Mary Pickford, and others. The drinks ranged from \$.50 for most to \$.65 for the Casa Special and \$1.00 for Champagne. Wines were by the bottle and cost \$4.00 for Chianti (red) to \$8.00 for Piper Heidsieck. All other drinks (4 pages) were priced at \$.50 to \$.75. The back page states: "*Featuring Radio, Stage and Screen Stars, Two Floor Shows Nightly 9 and 11:30, No Cover Charge At Any Time, Special Dinner--\$1.50, Open Daily Including Sunday, From 6P.M. to 2 A.M. Special Midnight Supper Dance Every Sunday Night From Midnight until 2 A.M.*" It was rumored that every so often there was a small raid by State Police, with advanced notice, which resulted in small fines that was considered standard

MIXED DRINKS	
Ward 850
Gin Daisy50
Gin Rickey50
Sloe Gin Rickey50
Sherry Cobbler50
Whiskey Sour50
N. Y. Sour50
Horses Neck with Kick50

business practice. Finally, in 1933 the State Police arrived in force with 200 patrons inside who were scrambling to get out or find a good hiding place. It is reported that in this melee Boston Mayor James Michael Curley, who had obviously been enjoying the refreshments, was being inelegantly maneuvered out a side window by his bodyguards, also State Police, and hustled away.

Several thousand dollars worth of liquor and over \$5,000.00 of gambling money were collected as evidence.. It is also rumored that after the dust had settled Alex Finn, the owner, served breakfast to the State Police to show there were no hard feelings.

The Casa Madrid never reopened. Soon after, Prohibition ended and that elegant nightspot faded away to become a local legend.

Phyllis Horton

POEM ON MUSKRATS¹

A typed copy of a poem, no title, found in Book 1 of the Daniel Chase Papers. The book has most to do with houses and genealogies of North Dennis and Sesuit Neck.



This Janus month envy the muskrats in my marsh ----
 ("My marsh?") Their Marsh, by right
 Of ancestral possession since the year
 The last cows left, the fence posts tilted, the pines and oaks
 Came back to the upland, and again
 The ducks nested in the reeds and the muskrats
 Came back from the far reaches of Barnstable Marshes
 To take possession. This right, when I first came here,
 To Simon Musquash, native, and his wife Barsheba,
 For consideration received, wetland of six foot diameter,
 With right of commonage to marsh surrounded and adjacent upland,
 In fee simple I granted, writ the deed on the salt wind from the sea,
 The permanent record here, and to Simon in hand or paw
 Did give turn and twig in token.
 Here he and Barsheba mounded their stately dome
 And dwelt therein in quiet possession.
 Now the marsh is ice-locked, their dome
 Snow-drifted save for a patch to southward.
 In this Janus month they stir, drowse, wake,
 Nibble on sweet flag root garnered and stored in summer,
 Scent the first faint wetness of cranberry tinted water
 From the yards upstream, sigh and return to sleep.
 To dream of summer and the ducks return to nest.
 So you may envy them.



Burt Derick

Kap'n Kezzie's Komments:

- *People will accept your idea more readily if you tell them that Benjamin Franklin said it first.*
- *If you tell the truth you don't have to remember anything.*

¹ Daniel Chase Papers, Book 1

“Memories Of The Past”² (An Excerpt)

This fleet of vessels was a mackerel fishing fleet, and thinking that perhaps there might be some who perchance may read this “fish” story who are not away that mackerel were caught in no other way in those far away days than by hook and line; purse seiners are a device of a later day and were not thought of in those days of yore.

Well here we are right in the midst of the fray and I remember how cool, and yet stern, my Father seemed; his commands seemed absolute and were quickly obeyed. We steered through the throng without mishap and gaining an opening, the jibs were hauled down, fore and main sheets eased off to their proper places, main boom tackle hauled taut, and coming to the wind headway stopped. Now here is a scene that beggars description – every man has taken his place at the rail, and our headway was hardly stopped when every man (including myself) was busily engaged in taking from their natural element those striped back denizens of the deep. Artists have failed – and ever will – to produce a likeness of the picture that was now spread out – as it were – before, us, with the spouting and blowing of whales (those masters of the sea), and the squa[w]king and screaming of various kinds of birds, together with the light fantastic step on the water of Mother Carey’s Chickens^[3], and the marching from forward to aft and return, like well trained soldiers at drill, of the hosts of the finny tribes which we were in pursuit. Being surrounded by other fishing craft, some to our lee, others ahead and astern, with chances of loosing a bowsprit or boom or worse, I say the scene was indescribable.

Old Neptune had now by this time entirely released his hold upon me. As the day wore on and as the same hungry avaricious appetites of the fish seemed not to diminish, our decks began to look like some prosperous and well stocked fish market, and it became somewhat difficult to make one’s way from forward to aft without clambering over barrels of fish. All of the fleet must have done well – some better than others perhaps as is always the case, and as the sun is now getting well down in the western sky, the ferocious appetites of the fish had been appeased, and as they made their exit to parts unknown, we, together with many others in the fleet, made sail and stood in towards land to find anchorage for the night.

The first day of my experience as a sailor and fisherman had now come nearly to a close, and it was some little time after dark when the anchor was let go, sails furled and the work of cleaning and salting our day’s catch was proceeded with. The number of barrels caught by our crew on that memorable afternoon was one hundred or perhaps a few more. I well remember the first catch I made and as I stood there with boyish pride an in high glee, with my first fish dangling upon that fatal hook, my young shrill voice was heard to exclaim “Look everybody and see what I have caught”. With a laugh and words of encouragement from some of our crew and advice from my brother not to waste time, I shook my first prize off into a barrel, and at the end of the day’s fishing had two full barrels to my credit, which I think was quite good for a green boy not yet ten years of age.

Joshua Eldredge Howes October 19th 1841

THE PORTLAND GALE -Another Memorable November Storm

WHEN the first chilling winds of a piercing November gale come swirling into the harbors and inlets along, the New England Coast, there are gray, aging mariners who recall a night in 1898 when the steamer Portland sailed from Boston never to return. The loss of the side-wheeler Portland and 118 lives was the worst marine tragedy of the 19th Century in New England waters. Her fate was unknown until bodies washed ashore from Race Point to Chatham. The Nov. 26, twenty-four hour gale that caused the loss of the Maine side-wheeler was one of truly cyclonic proportions. By the time the Portland, departing Boston against advice, had reached a point off Gloucester, almost 200 vessels were trying desperately to reach a haven. In all, 141 different ships were wrecked because of the Portland gale in New England. She sank in Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary, just north of P’Town.

DID YOU KNOW

→ *A large post supporting the upper rear deck of the Portland washed up on the beach in Dennis and is now on display in **The Barn at Jericho**???*

² Transcribed and annotated by Burton N. Derick

³ Also called Stormy Petrels, which seem to walk on the surface of the water, with wings spread, picking up droplets of oil that come off the mackerel.

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“Bits ‘n Pieces!”

The year is 1963 ... From The Dennis-Yarmouth Register January & February. The subscription price 50 years ago was \$4 a year or 10¢ a copy.”

January 1963

- **POSTAGE RATES INCREASE:** As of January 1 the cost to mail a postcard became: 4¢, a 1st class letter: 5¢, an airmail letter: 6¢.
- **PURITAN** in Dennis Port is having their annual 50% off sale.
- **DENNIS POLICE ASSN.**, organized in 1941, paid honor to Mervin Sears at its 17th annual banquet at the Riverway. Although Mr. Sears was in the hospital for surgery, the testimonial dinner and Ladies Night went on anyway. (I wonder what Mr. Sears dined on that evening?)

February 1963

- **ELMS BEING REMOVED:** Dennis losing many of its beautiful Elm trees along Rte. 6A to the Dutch Elm disease. State tree men are taking them down.
- **TOWN OF DENNIS PROFIT FROM BEACH STICKERS:** the town netted \$3,000+ on its beach program in 1962. Gross collected: \$25,777 from stickers; town costs: \$22,707.99 for attendants, police, lifeguards & maintenance such as “oiling the parking spaces.”
- **“DENNIS SOON TO FORM HISTORICAL SOCIETY:** A meeting is being planned in Dennis to form an historical society. The society would form around the town’s recent historic acquisition, Jericho, the old homestead on Center St., South Dennis.

The Selectmen and a committee have been overseeing upkeep of Jericho. The historical society would be charged with developing it as an historic center for the town.

This year town meeting will be asked to provide sums to restore the northwest front room to the 1800 period, renovate the northeast front room to make it suitable for exhibits.

Selectman Kirkwood Brown is working out a date for the historical society organizational meeting, at which time the future of Jericho will be discussed.”

Watch for “Bits ‘n Pieces 1963” in the next DHS Newsletter.

June Howes