

OUR PAST.....

...was celebrated in style at a luncheon at the Lighthouse Inn on June 17th, commemorating the 191st anniversary of the incorporation of the Town of Dennis. A lighted birthday cake, on which was written "I Love Dennis", was cut by Edward Chase, who is a life-long resident of the town and presently an Historic Commissioner. The proceedings were recorded and reported by Channel 58. Thanks are due to Jean and Bill Taylor, who chaired the event, Elinor and Josh Crowell, who each year take on the thankless job of keeping track of reservations, to Larry Nyberg, who offered grace, and to Ann Hawkins and Peggy Carver-Schad for the excellent entertainment.

OUR PRESENT.....

...members are reminded that it is about time to pay dues (before Sept. 1st, please), and a few of you have not paid your dues for 1983-84! If you wonder about your dues status, you can do one of two things. You can call membership chairman Isabelle Flynn, 385-2966, and ask, or you can send in dues to her at Box 607, So. Dennis, 02660, with a stamped, self-addressed envelope, and see what year your membership card is for! By the way, a pat on the back to the membership from Isabelle, who says that many of you send in your dues in response to the newsletter appeal, thereby relieving her of the tiresome and costly task of making out and mailing dues reminders. Remember, if you wish to have a membership card, you must send along a stamped envelope, or pick up your card from Isabelle at any meeting of D.H.S. Dues are \$4 an individual, \$6 a family, and \$100 for life.

OUR FUTURE.....

...depends on attracting new members. If you are not presently a Dennis Historical Society Member, you are receiving this newsletter because someone thinks you might like to be. To prove them correct, simply mail your dues to Isabelle Flynn, P.O. Box 607, So. Dennis, 02660. Those dues, \$4 for an individual and \$6 for a family, will entitle you to receive the newsletter each month, with notices of our activities and items about the town's history and your membership will be effective from now until Sept., 1985.

BASS RIVER LIGHT

The Stone family and their staff were our gracious hosts for the birthday luncheon at what is certainly the most visible and well-known inn in Dennis. Many may not realize, however, that it was once a working lighthouse. The harbor afforded by Bass River was economically important despite Dogfish Bar, which makes navigation into the mouth difficult. Earlier on in history, the mouth was located somewhat to the east of its present site, and mariners could round the bar and head in. It is said that a light was kept burning in the attic window of Warren Crowell's house (Loring Avenue) and the returning seamen could locate the river's mouth by this light. As the Federal Government became involved in marine safety, there was some agitation to have a lighthouse at West Dennis. I have told you about the first effort, when in 1837 the stone breakwater was begun. (See Vol. 6 No. 8 Aug. 1983). The original plan was for a lighthouse to be built upon the breakwater, but when it was found that the breakwater only increased shoaling, the plan was abandoned. There followed a great deal of hemming and hawing, hearings and reports, but no lighthouse, much to the exasperation of local seafarers. At last, in 1853 the U.S. Govt. purchased a piece of land - "known as Thomas Follings Island" says the deed - and began to build the light. It was finished in 1855 and the light burned for the first time on May 1st of that year. It could be seen for 11½ miles out to sea, and, except for a brief period in 1880, remained in service until the Canal was built in 1914. A picture of the early lighthouse is included in a display currently in the large hearing room of the Town Hall, and is also in our slide show of the town's history.

THE LAST OF THE CUP PLATES ARE HERE

The wait was so long and indefinite for cobalt plates that the Board decided to have our last casting in copper blue. The result is lovely. If you have not yet purchased one of our "Seal of the Town of Dennis" Pairpoint cup plates, you had better hurry. These are the last that will be pressed before the mold is broken. You may order by mail from Josh and Elinor Crowell, P.O. Box 963, Dennis, 02638, enclosing a check for \$8.50, which includes the cost of mailing. Or visit one of the Historic Centers during July where the plates will be available for \$7. Warning! This pressing will go very fast!

BOB BARLOW'S HISTORY COURSE A WINNER

Mr. Barlow's course on the History and Natural History of Cape Cod was enjoyed by all. The "Students" marvelled at Bob's depth of knowledge and pleasant style, and have asked him to present a sequel in the Fall. Be alert for an announcement of time and place.

CALENDAR

July and August Historic Centers are open
Jericho Mon., Wed., and Fri., 2-4:30
Josiah Dennis Manse Tues. and Thurs. 2-4
August 26-Sept. 3 Dennis Festival Days
Sept. 10 DENNIS HISTORICAL SOCIETY ANNUAL MEETING V.I.C Hall 7:30
Leonard Willcox "Come Walk With Me"

WHAT, NO FEATHER BEDS?

I had occasion to stop at the Dennis Chamber of Commerce last week. This is always a pleasant occasion, for the people there who represent our town to visitors are so nice. As I waited while one of them explained to a tourist how to get across Route 28, I picked up a brochure for an inn called The Isiah B. Hall House. It is classified as a Bed and Breakfast Inn, 'within walking distance of the beach, the Village, shopping, restaurants and the Cape Playhouse and Cinema.' Certainly a nice neighborhood to visit. Tourists will be accommodated for \$45 double in the house, \$35 in the barn, which includes a complimentary continental breakfast. Not bad at today's rates, and the Inn, located on Whig Street in Dennis, certainly does put you in the geographic center of the Cape. But I think accommodations in the 1880's, when Aunt Hannah Crowell let out rooms to tourists, was an even better deal. Aunt Hannah lived in the same neighborhood. She was one of the first to let rooms for the accommodations of tourists in her own home. No fancy brochure was distributed, but it was well known that Aunt Hannah was one of the best cooks in town and her price of \$7 per week included three meals a day. Of course, there wasn't any indoor plumbing, nor electricity, and Aunt Hannah was 'strict temperance' and dead against card playing. But in every one of Aunt Hannah's rooms there was a featherbed, and maid service was available without tipping or tax. Somehow, even knowing that today's rates reflect an economy where income has risen to meet the current prices, \$7 a week for room and board, and a feather bed to boot, sure sounds like a good deal.

AND WHENCE ALL THOSE FEATHERS?

It is said that Cape Cod feather beds of by-gone days were so deep that the children had to 'rig up a jury-mast and rattle down the shrouds' to get into bed. Did you ever wonder where all of those feathers came from? I have heard or read that one of the jobs of the young women in the household was to pluck down feathers from the underside of the farmyard geese. No goose of my acquaintance would ever submit gracefully to such a procedure, but perhaps the farmyard geese of yesteryear were of more docile disposition. You may be interested to know that feathers provided the financial cushion for at least two of the town's early families. In 1825, Ezra Howes and Barnabas Wixon had a poor season fishing in the sloop Phoebe. They had pulled up on the coast of Labrador to mend gear and spotted a huge flock of moulting ducks, 'sitting ducks', as it were, unable to escape. They provided a fine dinner for the fishermen, a welcome relief from the staple codfish. But of course, the meat of all these ducks would not survive the trip home, so what should be done with this bonanza? The logical answer was, the feathers could be stripped from the poor ducks, and transported home for a substantial profit. So thousands of these poor, helpless ducks were slaughtered, their feathers stripped and packed into the empty hold of the Phoebe. At home, the feathers brought a lively price, for feather beds were much more comfortable than corn husks or oak leaves. In fact, the feather industry prospered at the expense of the duck flock for several generations, before the ducks figured out that there was something wrong with the coast of Labrador and went a-moulting at some more distant place. Hopefully, both Ezra and Barnabas found other means of turning a profit from a fishing voyage when no fish were found. But as late as 1836, Thomas Thacher, merchant, of Yarmouth Port, was advertising that he had 460 pounds of prime feathers for sale. How many pounds of feathers do you suppose it takes to make one feather bed?

Dennis Historical Society
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July 84
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