

Dennis Historical Society Newsletter

Co-Edited by Phyllis Robbins Horton and Nancy Thacher Reid

Volume 22 Number 7

July 1999

Calendar of Events:

July 14 – DHS Board Meeting

Jericho Historical Center
7:00 PM Interested members
are welcome.

July 15 – Bike Tour of Historic Dennis Port Village

Narrated bike tour of early
Crocker's Neck telling stories
of the Port of Dennis. Meet at
the gazebo on the Dennis Port
Village Green. Helmets re-
quired for children, requested
for adults. Park in the mu-
nicipal parking lot. 9 AM.
Rain date Friday, July 16, 9
AM.

Saturday, August 21 Colonial Open House

Go back in time to the 1700's.
Costumed guides demonstrate
crafts, foods, games skills,
etc. Some audience partici-
pation. 1770 one-room school
house, children's room, mari-
time wing. Colonial militia
encampment on grounds.

10AM to 4PM

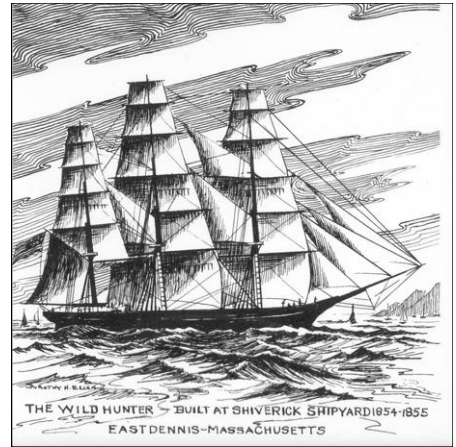
Sunday, August 22 Everyday Life in the 1800's

Demonstrations of skills nec-
essary for everyday life in an
1800's home including cook-
ing, candle-making, knitting,
rug-hooking, stenciling, quilt-
ing and gardening. 1801 Jeri-
cho Historical Center

11AM to 4 PM

DENNIS AND THE CHINA TRADE

The special exhibit at the Josiah
Dennis Manse for Cape Heritage Week and
Maritime Week this spring was entitled
"Dennis and the China Trade." Trade with
China was one of many chapters in our mari-
time history, and many men and some of
their families became familiar with Canton
and Whampoa as the result of this involve-
ment. It is interesting to note that the China
trade had many unique aspects to it, as con-
trasted with trading in many other foreign
ports, all of which offered educational op-
portunities.



The early trade with China was car-
ried on by merchants primarily from Salem and Boston, in the years following the
Revolution. China wanted the foreign goods, but was reluctant to allow strangers
into their country. Massachusetts merchants wanted Chinese goods—porcelain,
tea and silks—so badly, that they were willing to establish trade procedures as
demanded by the Chinese. There began, therefore, a very elaborate system,
whereby foreign ships could proceed only partway up the river towards Canton.
They were then greeted by Chinese merchants with whom they could do business.
After a period of becoming acquainted, the Captain and some of his officers
would be allowed to come ashore and examine the wares being offered. For many
years, the Captains' wives and the crews were obliged to remain aboard their ves-
sel, sometimes for the entire stay, which could last for months.

Among many Dennis captains who visited China was Joshua Sears (1817-
1885) of East Dennis. He began his contact with the China trade as a seaman un-
der Barnstable captains, and ended it with his voyages as master of the Shiverick
vessel *Wild Hunter* in the 1850's. The *Wild Hunter* was one of the largest Shiver-
ick vessels, at 1,081 tons and drawing 22 1/2 feet. How did they ever get her out
of Sesuet Creek! Captain Joshua, in spite of his training under the gentle hands of
the Bacons and the Crockers of Barnstable, was known by his contemporaries as a
"driver," expecting miracles from the vessels he commanded—and often getting
them. He had driven the ship *Burmah* to win many races with his contemporaries,
even though she was not a sharp vessel. And he had also commanded the ship
Orissa, called by her crew "old arms and legs" because she was so heavily rigged.

(Continued on page 2)

DENNIS AND THE CHINA TRADE

(Continued from page 1)

As a result of his hard use, both vessels spent considerable time in dry dock, being repaired. Nevertheless, the command of the *Wild Hunter* was given to Captain Joshua when she was launched in 1855, and off she flew to the Orient. With the Captain were his wife, Minerva, who had already been around the world several times on the *Burmah* and the *Orissa*, and their adopted daughter, Louisa Marie, lovingly called “Lulu,” by her doting father. As tough as he could be with his crew, the Captain had a soft spot for Lulu, even allowing her to take her pony along on the voyage. She exercised him by riding on the deck of the vessel in calm weather.

Captain Joshua had seen the best of the days of China trade in his early voyages. The market at home had become saturated with China goods, even the families of crew members had a set of blue china porcelain. With nothing but tea to trade for, Captain Joshua grew tired of kowtowing to the formal demands of the Chinese merchants. Anyway, believe it or not, all of the fabulous places he had visited, all the glamorous ports where he had been, Joshua Sears liked Cape Cod best – and particularly East Dennis. He was constantly homesick when away, and according to his grand daughter, often seasick as well. We know quite a lot about this particular sea captain, for he kept his own log of his journeys. My favorite quote, as recorded in [They Built Clipper Ships in Their Back Yard](#) by Admont Clark is, “Oh, for a cot in some vast wilderness where I shall never see a ship again. If ever one poor fellow was tired of anything, it is I, Josh Sears, that is sick and tired of going to sea.” And in another place; “Oh, for a cot in the wilderness – but Cape Cod will do.”

Captain Joshua came ashore to stay in 1857, and devoted his incredible energy to benevolent deeds in his home town. He and Captain Prince Crowell, a principal backer of the Shiverick shipyard, were ardent emancipationists, and together they provided a flag pole and American flag to be displayed in East Dennis, when war between the states began. The picture of Joshua Sears which was used in the [History of Barnstable County](#) by Simeon Deyo, shows him with a full beard, a symbol of his crusade for abolition of slavery. I like fully as well the picture which Dr. Clark used in his Shiverick history – of a smiling Joshua Sears, anticipating his years of retirement in his comfortable East Dennis home.

NTR

Calling all DHS Cooks and Bakers...

On August 22nd, during Dennis Festival Days, your Society is going to try something new as a fund raiser. We will have an old-fashioned pie sale on the Dennis Village Green from 1-3 PM. The pies will be available by the piece or the whole pie. Freddie Trahan’s Goodtime Guys Dixieland Jazz Band will be playing on the green to add to the day’s festive air.

To make this a successful fund raiser will mean the collective support of all DHS members. Most importantly, we will need many of you to make pies. We know there are a large number of great cooks in our organization because of what was presented at our covered dish luncheon in February. (I rather suspect that every DHS member is a talented cook – that’s the Cape Cod way!) Please help us raise money for our Acquisition Fund. If you can bake a pie for the sale, please call Ray Urquhart at 398-0376 or Phyllis Horton at 398-0017. Let’s show everyone how good we are!

PRH



Recent Acquisitions -

The DHS has recently received the gift of a flax spinning wheel from Jane R. Anderson and Helen R. Lavelle to be displayed at the Jericho Historical Center.

Also received was the gift of a beautiful collection of sea shells from around the world from Lois Thomas.

A gift of two early dolls was received from Althene and John Marsh, which are now on display at the Josiah Dennis Manse.

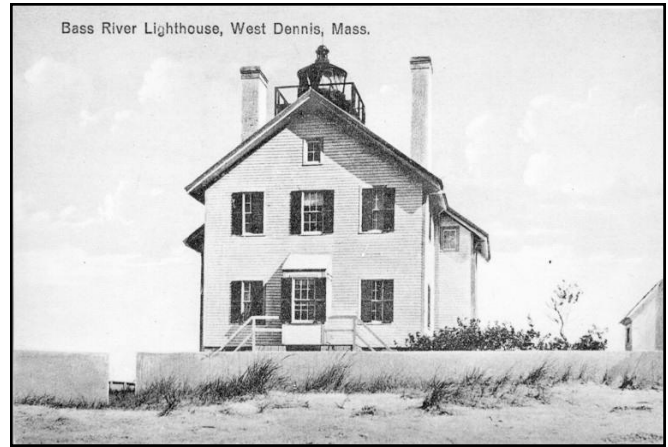
We greatly appreciate these gifts to the Society!

Learning About Lighthouses

Everyone who attended the DHS annual birthday luncheon enjoyed being together and learned a lot about lighthouses. Admont Clark gave his presentation, "Lighthouses of the Lower Cape: from Monomoy to Billingsgate." The number of mariner's lives saved over the years by the presence of those lighthouses is unknown, but must number in many hundreds of thousands.

Three lucky DHS members went home with some nice door prizes. Tom Pereira won a lovely, very large, hanging begonia; Jean Packard won two tickets for admission to Strubridge Village; and Beverly Barker was the recipient of two certificates for lunch at Christine's Restaurant. Congratulations to all!

PRH



Bass River Lighthouse, West Dennis, Mass.

In Memoriam

The Society Remembers Dr. Norton Nickerson

In May of 1983 our newsletter informed its members that Dr. Norton H. Nickerson, Jr. would act as interpreting naturalist guiding a June walk on the Indian lands Conservation Area behind the Town Hall. Members and friends were invited to view the Moccasin Flowers along the pathways and other interesting plant and animal life in an unspoiled setting. Every year we have looked forward to this special walk.

Museum Hours

1736 Josiah Dennis Manse Museum

77 Nobscusset Road, Dennis

Saltbox home of the first minister and man for whom the town was named. Artifacts of early Dennis life, children's room, spinning and weaving exhibit, and Dennis Maritime Wing. 1770 one-room school house on grounds. Listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Open June 22 – September 30

Tues. 10 AM–Noon; Thurs. 2-4 PM

Saturdays in September 2-4 PM

Admission: Free/Donations.

1801 Jericho Historical Center

Old Main Street, West Dennis

Historic house built in 1801 by Capt. Theophilus Baker. Exhibits include antiques, glassware, costumes, tools, driftwood zoo. Barn exhibits include country store, salt-works model and cranberry cultivation displays.

June 23 – September 24

Wed. 2-4 PM; Friday 10 AM-Noon

Sundays Sept. 15, 12 & 19 from 2-4 PM

Admission: Free/Donations

Dennis Historical Society

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A letter from our President...

In September, I will step down as president of the DHS. I am honored to have played a small part in the continuance and growth of this society and of working with board members and other volunteers who give countless hours to the organization.

Much change has taken place since the inception of this society more than thirty years ago – by a small group of preservationists to form a historical society and to accept the gift of the Jericho House from Elizabeth Raynard. The decision to purchase the Manse several years later endowed the Town with two important preserved buildings of different eras and different importance to share with visitors.

Meeting the expectations of our visitors is essential to the future of the society. Our mission is to preserve our historic buildings, to use the artifacts within those buildings to tell the story of our town, and to manage our organization in a business-like manner so as to preserve our resources. Following procedures and working as a cohesive board, and using our committee system, will insure continuance of the Dennis Historical Society by training newer members in the “how to” of carrying out events and tasks.

We as a board have devoted much time and attention to improving our operations these past few years and the results have been encouraging. A great deal has been accomplished but much remains to be done.

Our board meetings are open meetings held in one of the two historic houses each month and we invite members to come, share your ideas, and give input and direction to the DHS. New members and new ideas are essential to the growth and perpetuation of our society. Our lives are richer when we work together for a common goal.

Kitty McNamara