

# Dennis Historical Society Newsletter

Volume 30 Number 7

Send letters and stories to Lura Crowell, Editor, Box 607, S. Dennis 02660 or [sesuettfarm@verizon.net](mailto:sesuettfarm@verizon.net)

July 2007

## Calendar

Saturday, July 14  
10:00 A.M.

### Walk Through Sea Captains' Cemetery

Guided walk in the historic South Dennis Cemetery by Terri Fox & Phyllis Horton. Meet at the South Dennis Congregational Church 210 Main St., S. Dennis which will be open during the tour so that you may view the oldest organ in the US (1762) which is still played every Sunday. You will see famous artist Edwin H. Blashfield's mural and other memorable paintings as well as the plaque which lists the Sea Captains who attended the church.

Rain Date Sunday,  
July 15 at 2:00 P.M.

Note: There is parking behind the church and school.

### Summer Hours

Josiah Dennis Manse

77 Nobscussett Rd., Dennis

June 26-August 30

Tuesdays 10 A.M. to Noon

Thursdays 2-4 P.M.

Group tours (508) 385-3528

### Jericho Historical Center

Old Main St., W. Dennis

June 27 to August 27

Wednesdays 1-4 P.M.

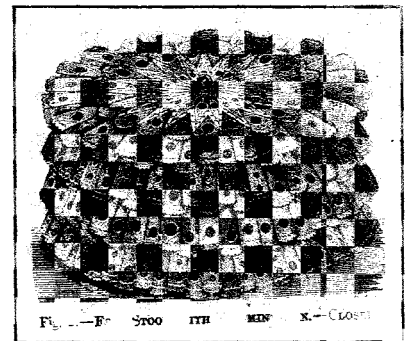
Group tours (508) 394-9303

Donations requested.

Members are always free!

## Letters are always in fashion!

Not long ago Ruth Derick and I were chuckling over some of the things that were in fashion in the January 21 Edition of *Harper's Bazaar*. You could make high or low necked blouses with "Black Lace Bretelles" or follow a pattern for embroidered cloth slippers. And I know you can't wait to find out how to cover a wicker basket to create a foot stool which would hold a warming pan. (see illustration right) Not quite what you had in mind? You could bead a cover for your lamp chimney. And the hair styles! Between crimping and curling and braiding it could take hours to get the desired effect. But there was one small article (p.41) entitled "Letters to Children." which caught our attention.



As for letters to our children, whether young or grown up, in the country or city, both for them and for us, the more frequently we write the better. A lad at school or a youth at college, a sailor on board ship or a young clerk in a counting-house, a daughter who is a wife as well as a child, a son whose own children in his own home explain a father's love and point a father's duties, are always the better for being happily and periodically reminded that there are old ties as well as new, blood relations as well as social, that a parent's love is worth more than a stranger's good-nature, and that there is one home in the world where the door is ever flung wide to receive them, and sure never to be shut except to profligacy or dishonor.

Ruth sent me the article with this note:

"Here's to letter writing! I love to get mail but rarely sit down to pen a note. Always want to write a "book" or something. I get started and oft as not am called away by something or someone...I've only stopped twice since I started this. Anyway, this time of year always brings to mind that song *Hello, Mother! Hello, Father! Here I am at Camp Granada*,... Cell phones and e-mails aren't going to leave the same kind of legacy, are they?"

Long or short, notes or volumes, letters are always welcome! Sometimes they bring news that makes us sad. Here's a note from a good friend of DHS: *Lura, Bill (Dr. William H. Sprunt III) died March 20, 2007. ....He was a wonderful man of wisdom. He loved literature and nature. He shared his love of education with our whole family. All three children have their Masters in different fields of Education. He was born in Shanghai, China. (His father, also a Dr., was considering moving to Shanghai to practice surgery....but instead decided to practice in Winston-Salem, North Carolina.) He had three sisters all trained in nursing like their mother. All the best, Priscilla Perry Sprunt 6/07* Dr. Sprunt was invaluable in teaching procedures not previously available in Wake County—ultrasound, computer axial tomography and angiocardiology—a practice now available at 14 locations with 58 doctors.

## Letters, continued:

Sometimes letters bring us new members. Now that's certainly good news! Welcome to **Melinda Conrad-Cooke** of South Dennis, **Ann Childs** of Yarmouth Port, **John & Lynn Babcock** of East Dennis and **Elaine McKenna** of Kentfield, California.

Letters can keep us on the straight and narrow. Back in May we read about Aunt Hattie's house near the railroad tracks in South Dennis in one of Louise Alexander's letters to her friend Louise Morgan. From the information in the letter we asked our readers of the house pictured (left) *Could this be Aunt Hattie's?* Close, but not quite, according to Edmond Nickerson of South Dennis. The house we pictured was the 1829 Josiah Baker Homestead, 498 Main Street, South Dennis. But next door to that is the 1829 Judah Baker



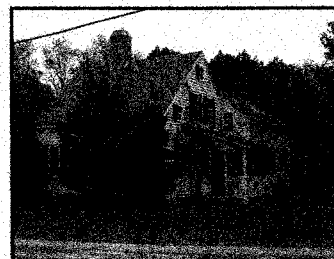
1829 Josiah Baker House

2nd Homestead at 494 Main Street which did indeed become Aunt Hattie's. Ed sent the research as follows. **Book 13, p. 225 James Nickerson to Judah Baker the 2d for \$70-piece of cleared land and woodland adjoining and is situated in South Dennis and laying to NE of James Nickerson's dwelling house—contains 1 acre and 1 1/2 rods. Mar. 18, 1829, signed James**

**Nickerson and Sukey Nickerson. Book 181 p.380 James G. Baker (son of Judah b.1834) of Harwich for \$900 to Lothrop Thacher—described same—together with dwelling house, barn, wash house and other out buildings-6 July 1889. Book 242 p. 305 Joseph E.**

**Baker and Sarah W. Baker his wife, of Peabody, to Obed S. McVea-for \$600-same bounds-with all buildings on-conveyed to me by deed of Lothrop Thacher Mar. 16 1897. 21 Feb. 1900**

Thank you, **Ed Nickerson**. And thank you, too, **Caleb Kasdaglis**, for the photos.



1829 Judah Baker House

Sometimes letters arrive following a chance meeting. Here's one which came after the **Maritime Treasures of Dennis and Yarmouth** exhibit in May. (A truly elegant affair!) Josh Crowell introduced me to Rosamond Thomas of Eastham, one of the girls who had lived on Pirates Point in East Dennis. (story in Sept., Oct., Nov. Newsletters) The story was written by her father, B. Nason Hamlin. After sending Rosamond copies of the Newsletters, she wrote:

Dear Lura,

June 7, '07

*We're just back from a trip to see my daughters in Vermont and immediately plunged into all the articles you so kindly sent me! Thanks ever so much. I was delighted to get them and go through them; the 3 little articles about my Dad, B. Nason Hamlin, and us as children and Temporary "rum runners". That was just about 80 years ago and it's all very clear and memorable to me still.*

*I noticed an inquiry in one of the Newsletters, wondering why it was called "Pirates Point". Actually it was my father who named it that after buying the land, deciding it sounded more exciting for us young fry. He very often told us imaginative tales of pirates and adventures at sea. He himself was born in Shanghai, his father being a sea captain out of Yarmouthport. When the latter died in the Far East, his widow (my grandmother) brought him back to Yarmouthport ...Her name was Jane Hallet Hamlin and was remembered as a most unusually fine woman— Another memory I have is of —? Sears, in the pretty, white Cape Cod house above Seth and Joshua Crowell's farm, cutting his long grass with a huge scythe.*

(Mr. Wallace P. Sears lived in the house on Old Town Lane where the Levines live today, across from Sesuet Farm, which is still owned by a Seth Crowell.)

*We children loved our summers there, entertaining ourselves all day long on the beach, climbing the rocks on the point, fishing for tautog, gathering blackberries.—no telephone, no radio—the big events of the day were marketing at the Davises' (Davidson's?) market, and going for the mail where Mr. Goodspeed was postmaster.*

*It was a joy to meet you and others at that wonderful exhibit in West Dennis.*

*With warm regards. Rosamond (Rosie) Thomas*

And don't you just love a—Thank You Letter? Well, we received a pile of them from the third graders after their visit to the Manse. One of them seemed to cover all the bases and others give us real insight as to how the program is "interpreted" by the children.

Dear Volunteers,

*Thank you for letting us come to visit the manse. It was fun seeing what life was like back in colonial times.*

*There was no heat so they had to go to the keeping room fill the bed warmer with hot ashes, and then they carefully rubbed the mattress to get it warm. In the colonial times people didn't change their clothes for sometimes months. All the children had to sleep in one bed, but when the boys got to be about 9 they got to sleep in front of the fire in the keeping room.*

*They used turkey, pheasant, seagull and swan feathers for their pens. Crushed up berries were used for ink. If a child was bad they had to sit in the corner looking at the wall with a dunce cap on.*

*One of the Sea Captains let his daughter bring her pony on the ship around the world. In colonial times they killed whales and boiled the blubber for oil for lanterns. Two brothers who were sea captains from Dennis met in India and had a race back to Boston. They both got to Boston on the same day.*

*An important job for the boys was to get wood and keep the fire burning. They hunted for deer, chicken and turkey for meat. Feathers from the chickens were used to make the mattresses. It takes a bushel of bay berry leaves to make a bayberry candle.*

*The barn loom is 307 years old and it works. First they shear the sheep. Then they wash the wool lots of times. Once it's clean they cart (sic) it. Now it's ready for the loom.*

*Your friend, Mercy*

Sukey wrote, "It was fun to make the butter. I would like to make the soap as well." Uriah says, "I liked it when you made the spark with the flint and little steel bar." Content noted, "I would love to pick the mayberries. I want to see what it is to milk a cow." Chloe observed, "I never would have guessed that soap was made of bayberries." In the Maritime Room Freeman liked counting the little people (in the diorama of the Shiverick Shipyard.) And the "salt mine." Winslow tells he liked "when we learned about the whales — the right whale floats." Noah declares the best ship was the *Cross Rip*. Elijah agrees that the "froze ship" was best of all. Everyone loved a visit to the one room school where they wrote on slates and tried a quill pen and ink. Zerviah announced, "I WOULD NOT like to get hit with the switch!" and Josiah noticed "That was a tiny school compared to ours."



Others were taken with the weaving room and the bedchambers. "That sheep in the book got a really big hair cut!" "I liked the way you let us try to weave on the loom. I liked the way you taught us about flax pond."



About the "chambers" Ethelinda said, "I thought the games were fun. I like the pig that kept the bed warm. I think I would look charming in that night cap." "Thank you for telling me the real meaning of don't let the bed bugs bite."

"Thank you," Denisa said. "My favorite part was the end when we ate the bread and butter."

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

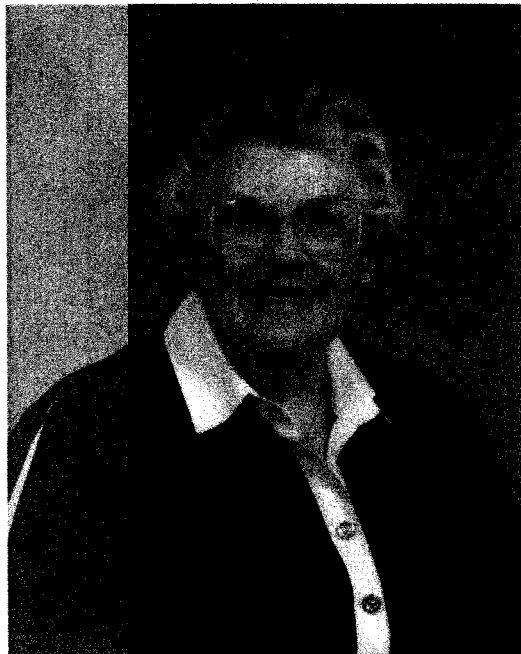
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## The Way We Were An Invitation

There are other letters that are fun to receive, and here's one for **you!** It's an **open invitation** to DHS members and friends to a **birthday party** in honor of Phyllis Robbins Horton on July 22. We do not allow thoughts of rain on that day so the party will be on the lawn at the Josiah Dennis Manse from 2 to 4 P.M. We are looking for an old-fashioned gathering of friends to share memories of all the wonderful years Phyllis has given to the Manse, to the Historical Society, the Town of Dennis and to her many friends. Bring a lawn chair and plan to sit and visit awhile. Oh, yes, there'll be cake. Cutting time is planned for 3 P.M. Just a couple of years ago Phyllis would admit to seeing 39—at least twice. This special lady is celebrating 80 wonderful years. We are so very lucky to be celebrating with her!

Admitting, alas, that we really are not in control of the weather, we have a back-up plan. We'll party inside at the West Dennis Graded School in West Dennis, same date, same time.



**Phyllis Robbins Horton**