



Dennis Historical Society Newsletter

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Send letters & stories to Dennis Historical Society, Box 607, S. Dennis 02660 or to pjhowes@verizon.net

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E-Mail info@dennishistoricalsociety.org

The next Board Meeting is Tuesday, July 12 @ 2:00 P.M., 2nd floor, Dennis Memorial Library, Old Bass River Road, Dennis Village

The Herring Still Run Every Spring

Years when Dad knew the fish contractor, who bought the seining rights, we were often given free rein to fill our basket from the big dredge net between truckloads, and be headed home in minutes. Other times, there was some scampering about to find where the fish were most plentiful, usually in the Brewster run, or at the Harwich Run, over to North Harwich Beach. (Inside joke of my father's generation, there was no beach in North Harwich. Now, they have one, on a nice little sand bottom pond called Sand Pond.) Some years when the supply of fish was not too great, the 'Powers That Be' would decree herring for only town residents. As the Dennis runs were usually less bountiful, this condition called for some strategy. A bit to the north of the Harwich run, down one of Father's pet dirt roads, was an access to the herring stream not as well known, nor as easy to fish. There were high banks to either side, and no man made 'ladder' to channel the swimmers to a narrow area where they could be caught with ease. Taking herring there meant hanging out over the water, holding a tree with one hand for balance, dipping in the water with your net in the other, and slinging your catch into a basket set a way from the edge. Herring often became caught in the mesh of the net, and everything was suspended as you removed them, resumed your awkward position, and commenced again. In all, a hard way to fill your bushel basket. It was also rather less than legal. All fishing was supposed to be done at the Fish Ladder, under supervision of the Warden, and with your proof of town citizenship available. Dad, being NOT a Harwich person, should not have been fishing that stream, and the need for identification was moot, as every body in either town knew who came from where. My Grand Mother, Nana, was with him, but as she was a rather large person, decided to watch the activities from the car.

When Dad had filled his basket, he slipped the net handle through the wire handles, lifted the very heavy load of fish, and started the climb back

up the hill to the car. He had just reached the top, near grabbing distance from the car, when a small truck came down the dirt road. Immediately the thought crossed his mind 'WARDEN!' Not wanting to be caught with the evidence in hand, he reversed direction, headed rapidly down hill to the stream, and amid loud yells from the driver of the truck, proceeded to dump the basket of painfully acquired fish back into the water. Only then did the man's words register, not "You're under arrest!", but "For God Sake, Freeman, DON'T throw them back, if you don't want them I DO!" Too late, Dad recognized a friend with intentions similar his own, a mess of illegal herring.

A two-man cooperative got both baskets filled, and both fish poachers under way with out additional incident, except for Nana's gales of laughter remembering Dad's skinny butt trucking that Basket of fish down over the bank, and his friend chasing after, waving arms in the air, and yelling. A little humiliation however did not mar the pure eating pleasure of the roe feast that night, with just a few left over to re-warm for the next day's breakfast.

Thacher, Ben, *Whose Boy Be You?* pp130

Future Dennis Seacaptain and Justice of Peace Joins Continental Army in 1780

Documents provided by the Daughters of the American Revolution Archive in Washington, DC, show that Stephen Homer -- then 17 and living in Hockanom in Yarmouth but later a prosperous seacaptain and Justice of the Peace in East Dennis - - enlisted in the Continental Army in 1780 and subsequently qualified in the early 1830s for a \$20 US government annual pension as a Revolutionary War veteran.

Homer's application for that pension over a half century after his service certifies that he was born July 14, 1763 to Stephens and Betty (Chapman) Homer of Yarmouth. Stephen Homer was a private in the Continental Army and served a six-month tour of duty in "the militia" beginning

July 6, 1780 in the 16th Massachusetts Regiment. He and his fellow Barnstable County enlistees marched to Springfield, "where we passed muster," and then on to West Point, "where we were drafted and distributed among the different regiments" under Colonel Henry Jackson. Homer notes that while at West Point, he "assisted in taking up the great chain which was placed across the [Hudson] river" to block the passage of British ships on that key waterway. Homer also cites that he was "near the place when and where Major [John] Andre was executed" in October 1780--after the spy conspired unsuccessfully with Benedict Arnold to betray West Point to the British. Homer also readily admits that during his time in the Revolutionary Army, he "was in no regular battle." Accompanying the pension application is an affidavit signed by Ebenezer Sears, who confirms that he had enlisted with Stephen Homer in Summer 1780. Clergyman Daniel M. Stearns and fellow Dennis resident Henry Hall attest in the 1832 application to Homer's character and integrity.

Homer, who received his War Department pension from 1833 until his death in 1840, is buried in Red Top Cemetery in Brewster. His wife Thankful (Chapman) Homer applied in 1843 for a widow's pension, also \$20 per annum, which she received until her death in 1857. She is buried in the Worden Cemetery across the street from the federal home--still standing--that she and Stephen built in 1798.

Submitted by Kevin N. Keegan, who continues to research the Stephen Homer family of East Dennis and seeks documents and other artifacts pertaining to Stephen and his descendants. He can be reached at Kevin.N.Keegan@gmail.com

The Evening Mail

The afterglow of the sunset lingered in the west, sharply silhouetting the pine woods along the river, and the summer twilight was falling softly and fragrantly as people set out along every road and lane to converge on the Post Office for the evening mail. No one minded in the least if the mail was late, as it usually was, for going to the Post Office was a social institution in itself. You met and exchanged news with friends from all directions, and plans for this or that picnic or

clambake or entertainment were made then and there. The gathering served equally well as a committee meeting or a publicity campaign. When all such pleasant business had been transacted and the mail had actually come and been "salted," the young folks would get together and decide whose house was to be the meeting place for that night, for talk and singing or games. Now and again when the beauty of a moonlit night was irresistible we would walk to the beach or go out in the boat to glide through the liquid silver of the moonglade.

There were no street lights then so each of us always carried a pocket flashlight for the homeward walk. We rarely used them though for our feet were familiar with every bend and dip in the sandy paths and every other house or so would have a lamppost by the fence with its kerosene lamp making a friendly, yellow patch of light for our guidance.

The evening mail was a custom as old as the mail service itself on the Cape. The earliest Post Office in West Dennis was kept by Luther Child, in the front room of his home on Main street, the house now occupied by the Dohertys. Some years later Zadoc Crowell was Post Master and had the office in conjunction with a small dry goods store in the front room of his home, also on the main road. That was the first Post Office my father remembered going to as a small boy. He said that folks used to gather there in considerable numbers, at the edge of the evening — the Captains to exchange news and the young people to chatter and make plans together.

In the winter when everyone sought shelter inside from the searching wind, the small room would be very crowded and noisy with the talk and laughter. Oftentimes, when the boys got to scuffling and the young folks to jostling and giggling, Uncle Zadoc would slap down the packet of letters in his hand and — looking sternly over his small, steel-rimmed spectacles — exclaim, "Elbow room I must have. Elbow room I SHALL have!" Not until quiet and order was restored would he resume the distribution of the mail.

It was a happy evening when a long-awaited letter from a sea-faring father or brother was handed out from the tiny case of pigeon holes. Then footsteps would hurry homeward, so that the hoped-for good news might be quickly shared with those waiting in the lamplit sitting-room. Mail was

more significant then, when families were separated by months of silence and by countless miles of restless ocean.

Ryder, Marion Crowell, *Cape Cod Remembrances* Dennis Historical Society/Sullworld Publishing. 1972 pp19, 20

"This is based upon the English yarn, but embroidered in true Cape fashion." E. Reynard

The Flying Spouse

All "edicated seafarin' men" have heard of the ship built from designs of a Cornishman, the frigate that scraped off Dover Cliff, trying to wedge through the Channel. Young sailors went into the shrouds of her and came down with long white beards on them; and one of her discarded jackstays, sunk into the London mud, made "Piccalilly Circus."

The New Peninsula built such a ship under direction of Asey Shiverick. She was so tall that sailors took their wives when they went up to furl the toproyals. Later they sent down their grandsons to report that orders had been filled.

The Dover cliff was a thornberry scratch compared with what befell Cape Cod when the *Flying Spouse*, as she was christened, tried to turn around in the Bay. She could not make it, could not come "nigh to it," so Asey sawed off her flying jib boom at the cap. That took three years. Still she could not make it, so he sawed off her Dolphin striker and her whisker boom. That took five years. Still she could not make it so he sawed off her jib boom and her bowsprit. Hard sawing and Sunday work, that took him ten years. Then he put her helm down hard and swung her till her nose knocked, whacking Billingsgate Island, plunging it under water. After that, Asey thought: how about taking her out stern first? So he cleared her neatly, but by that time the good meadows of Billingsgate, all owned by ministers, had disappeared in the Bay. The pirates up by Wellfleet had buried their gold on Billingsgate Island, and they lost a "deal of treasure."

Asey's ship was rigged with sheets so heavy that no gang could haul them. A team of mules was put aboard, and with this and that, so many mules were required to work ship that no room was left in the hold for cargo. She was nothing but a fancyman's dream. Yet Asey was so proud of her that he bet Captain Obed Paine of Eastham that the *Flying Spouse* could sail to Ireland, there and back

in six days and rest upon the seventh. Obed took Asey up, and went along to see fair play. The mules hauled anchor on a Monday.

For all her size the *Flying Spouse* was no faster than the wind blows, so Obed was sure that Asey could never get her to Ireland and return in a matter of six days. What he forgot when he made his reckonings, was that her bow, when her stern was three days out, would be wedged tight into Queenstown Harbor and likely to get stuck there.

"You're a right smart sailorman, Asey," said Obed, when the ship reached Ireland, Wednesday night, "but how're y' goint' pull 'er out an' swing 'er aroun', Asey?"

Captain Shiverick grinned. "God save King George!" he yelled, jumping on the foredeck. "God save England! Horray for Parlyment!"

The Irish were that mad they pushed the prow of the *Flying Spouse* so hard out of Queenstown Harbor that she shot backward across the Atlantic into the Clay Pounds. Broke them up with a blow from her counter, scarred them, cracked them; all in strips they are, grooved by her stern timbers.

Saturday night at six o'clock Obed shook hands with Asey, and he handed over his old woman's recipe for quahog fritters, due money on the bet. Asey ate fritters on Sunday morning --- bad ballast amidships --- and that night he gave orders to scuttle the *Flying Spouse*.

¹ Reynard, Elizabeth, *The Narrow Land*, Chatham, MA, Chatham Historical Society, 1978, pp 256, 257

And Finally----

*There once was a man from Nantucket,
Who kept all of his cash in a bucket,
But his daughter, named Nan,
Ran away with a man,
And as for the bucket, Nantucket.*

*But he followed the pair to Pawtucket,
The man and the girl with the bucket;
And he said to the man,
He was welcome to Nan,
But as for the bucket, Pawtucket.*

*Of this story we hear from Nantucket,
About the mysterious loss of a bucket,
We are sorry for Nan,
As well as the man—
The cash and the bucket, Pawtucket.*

Dennis Historical Society
P.O. Box 607
South Dennis, MA 02660-0607



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Sunday, July 10, 12:00-3:00 P.M.

Family Picnic at Jericho

Join us in celebrating community and family
with games and Jazz music by "Leaving Campus".

Bring your lunch.

Beverages and treats will be served.

Visit the Cranberry Exhibit!

1801 Captain Theophilus Baker's House & Barn
Museum

90 Old Main Street, West Dennis

Friday, July 22 10:00 A.M.

Walk Through Sea Captain's Cemetery

Please join Terri Fox for a guided walk in the historic
South Dennis Cemetery.

Enjoy the legends and facts of this area.

Meet at the South Dennis Congregational Church

210 Main St., South Dennis

Date Sunday, July 24, 2:00 p.m.

1877 Rose Victorian Events:

Mark your calendar NOW!

Friday, July 29 9 A.M. – 2 P.M.

4th Annual Yard Sale

House, Shop & Barn Items
485 Main St., Rte 28, W. Dennis

Saturday, August 6th 7 - 9 P.M.

"Music 'n More" with the

"Sound Dunes Swing Ensemble"

at the W. D. Graded School

Dance, sing-along, listen & music trivia.

Light refreshments or bring your own.

Donation: \$15.00 per person. This is a

Fund Raiser for property improvements

for our painting & fence projects.

Questions? ask June @508-385 0208