



GROWING UP ON CAPE COD

I told you you would like Don Sparrow! He certainly makes the experience of being young on the Cape in the days before World War II sound pleasant. Thanks, Don, for a great presentation and do come and see us again.

BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION PLANNED

Details of the luncheon planned at Lighthouse Inn on June 22 in honor of the town's 193rd birthday appeared in last month's newsletter. Be sure and get your reservation in to Josh as soon as possible. Remember that we will have door prizes as usual, a special presentation to invaluable members, and grand entertainment by the Liberty Hall Jazz Band, from Marstons Mills, an exceptional jazz group made up of retired professional musicians who have played with some of the greats of all time. Be with us.

A NEWSWORTHY ANNIVERSARY

The Register weekly newspaper is celebrating its 150th birthday this year, and we are all invited to celebrate with them at Carleton Hall, on June 12 from 5-7 P.M. Refreshments will be served and the slide show of the history of our town will be shown. Collecting news in 1836 when The Register was inaugurated by Nathaniel S. Simpkins was very different from today. No telephone, radio or wireless speeded news from place to place as happens nowadays. But Cape Cod did have its own "telegraph" for getting news from point to point quickly. From the highest points in each town a pole was raised and from these poles messages were transmitted by a system of flags. It was used mostly to report on shipping. As vessels were spotted in the sound, the "telegraph" went into action, and soon it was known in Boston that a vessel was about to arrive. I wonder if Mr. Simpkins got any of his "scoops" from the Cape's telegraph? By the way, this message system accounts for the fact that Schooner Telegraph was listed as a Dennis vessel in 1830, long before the electric telegraph was invented by Samuel F. B. Morse.

IN SEARCH OF THE REAL JOSIAH DENNIS

Each year during the school field trip to the Manse, Mr. Joseph Solarz dresses in colorful colonial costume and impersonates the Rev. Josiah Dennis, to welcome the third graders to "his home". The children love him, much as the members of his parish loved the real Mr. Dennis. You might think that, if a man was so well known and remembered as to have had a town named for him thirty years after his death, it would be easy to write his biography. But it is not so with Josiah. The date of his birth has not been discovered, and the date of his death is recorded differently in two places. We do know that his father was John Dennis, a farmer who died in Wenham in 1724/5. We also know that he attended Harvard College, receiving his first degree (Bachelors) in 1723 and his second degree (Masters) in 1726. Upon graduation he was called to the pulpit of the East Parish of Yarmouth, and accepted but did not at once come to Cape Cod. Whether this was due to financial problems in settling with the minister who had previously served both East and West Yarmouth, or due to Josiah's desire to complete his education, I know not. At any rate he did report to the East Parish and was installed and ordained on the 22 of June in 1727. The sermon, which was long and exceedingly dull, was preached by Rev. Samuel Wigglesworth of Ipswich, who probably had been his sponsor at Harvard. Thus began a pastorate of 27 years, during which he endeared himself so deeply to his parish that the older generation urged their fellow citizens to adopt the name "Dennis" when the new town was incorporated in 1793. From church and town records, we can deduce much about Mr. Dennis. He was conservative and old-fashioned. He looked upon the established church as the central institution of the community. He ministered to Indians and blacks, to the unfortunate and the fortunate. He brought culture and a broad education to his rural parish, which he served as pastor, teacher and sometimes physician. He was praised for his tact and described as physically attractive, outgoing and lovable. This was the only church that he ever served. Outside of his parish, he made little impression on the world, exchanging pulpits occasionally, but having none of his sermons published. He wrote no book, received no honorary degrees, and held no notable office. But by his parishioners he was deeply beloved. Of Mr. Dennis' character Isaac Freeman Hall records that the old-timers passed down nothing but praise. "For nearly 40 years, he carried the community in the hollow of his hand." What a living tribute! Josiah Dennis married twice, and was the father of nine children. Only three daughters survived, and two of them died unmarried three years after their father's death. The third, Martha, married the Rev. Isaiah Dunster of Harwich. They were the parents of an only daughter, so no descendants have carried on his name. However, the five villages of this town should be proud to bear the name of a common man who lived his life uncommonly well.

CALENDAR

- May 31 10 A.M. Town Hall parking lot. Meet us to take the annual Lady Slipper Walk on the Indian lands. It's spectacular!
- June 7:30 P.M. Board will meet.
- June 22 12:30 P.M. Lighthouse Inn - Socializing and Luncheon, in honor of the 193rd birthday of the Town of Dennis. Reservations necessary. See article. "Liberty Hall Jazz Band".
- June 2-6 Ezra Baker Field Trips.
- June 9-13 Junior High bus tours of historic sites.
- June 12 5-7 P.M. Slide Show on the History of Dennis, and refreshments, courtesy of The Register, Carleton Hall.
- June 27 3-5 P.M. Opening Tea at Jericho, Ann Chalmers, Chairman. All welcome.
- July 16 7:30 P.M. West Dennis Community Building. Kathy Swegart. "Moby Dick".

HISTORICAL HOUSES TO OPEN

Following a week-long series of field trips for the Ezra H. Baker schoolchildren, the Historic Center Committees will prepare to open for the season. Jericho will hold its annual tea on Friday, June 27, from 3-5, with Ann Chalmers in charge of arrangements. The Manse Committee will be preparing a new and different maritime exhibit for the "Summer Kitchen" area, under the chairmanship of John Gill. The committees of these two lovely houses work diligently all year to keep the buildings in good condition. They both house collections of many artifacts of great interest, and if you have not been to either of them, make it a point to visit this year. Hours are as follows:

Jericho - Mon., Wed., and Fri. 2-4:30 P.M.
Josiah Dennis Manse - Tues. and Thurs. 2-4 P.M.

IN SEARCH OF AN OCCASIONAL TABLE

The acquisition committee for Jericho is seeking a small table for the west parlor of that 1801 Cape house, suitable to be placed below a window, and to provide a place for a lovely glass lamp. The room contains fine furniture, of the 19th Century, mostly in dark wood, and we are looking for a fine small table in dark cherry or other similar wood. If you would like to donate such a table, please call Hazel Newcomb, 398-2878. Your gift will be appreciated, and is tax deductible.

LAST BUT BY NO MEANS LEAST

At a Memory Day last year, a newcomer to town talked with me briefly at the end of the enjoyable afternoon. "I have learned to tell a native from a non-native," she said proudly. "Natives say 'Dennis Port' with the accent on Port, and non-natives say 'Dennisport' with the accent on Dennis." Is this really true? I'm going to do a survey someday.

Of the five villages which memorialize the Rev. Dennis, Dennis Port was the last to receive its name. As the town developed from the earliest settlement on the north shore towards Nantucket Sound, all of that part south of Setucket Road was called "South Dennis". The neighborhoods had names - Searsville, Crowe Town, Crocker's Neck, Battle Town, etc. - but all were served by one post office in South Dennis. In 1833 the southwestern part had grown big enough to have its own postal service, and a new post office was established in "the House of 1815" on Route 28, and was called West Dennis. Crocker's Neck in the southeastern part of town continued to be served by South Dennis, until 1862. In that year the post office department set up a new office "between South Dennis and West Harwich". Thomas Howes was appointed postmaster and he named the office Dennis Port. Standing on Sea Street Beach today, it is hard to imagine, but in 1862 this was indeed the busiest port in town. Three huge wharves extended 600 feet into the Sound. Lining each were chandleries, rope walks, sail lofts and all of the other industries which are necessary to a busy port. The port boasted a large fishing fleet, many coastwise schooners, and regular packet service to New Bedford and Providence on the schooner Simon P. Cole. So, Dennis Port seems to have been the proper name for our southeastern village.

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