



FINNEGAN'S

Nancy calls it Finnegan's Meadow but old time Dennis Porters call it Finnegan's Farm, or simply Finnegan's. It needed no further explanation. In the first part of this century Finnegan's stood out from other places because the whole place was rather overwhelming. It stands out today as a tourist attraction known as Sea View Playland.

When World War I came to America Michael Finnegan, a Worcester contractor, became concerned that his only son, Michael, would be called into the army. Knowing that certain occupations meant an automatic exemption from being conscripted, Michael decided his son would become a farmer. He purchased land on Lower County Road from Ella (Baker) (Wixon) (Read) Adamson of Pawtucket, RI. Today no one knows what brought Mr. Finnegan to Dennis Port. It would have seemed logical for him to have a farm in the Worcester area, or further west in Pioneer Valley--that's great farming country. It's quite possible that he had been a guest at the nearby Hotel Belmont in West Harwich, or was acquainted with Mrs. Adamson. The property had become hers at the death of her first husband, George W. Wixon. Mr. Finnegan purchased other properties and finally had an extensive farm of upland and meadow.

Mrs. Adamson's cottage was expanded in all directions--up and out--to make a splendid country home with rooms for the live-in cook and maid on the third floor. A magnificent state-of-the art barn was built and stocked with prize cattle. Out-buildings were erected to house the bulls, chickens, sheep, tools and machinery; also a garage and two water towers were built. A farm manager, other farm hands and household help were brought from away to keep the place humming and young Michael became a farmer--or perhaps gentleman farmer is the correct term. One of the people brought here was Louis Byrne, a landscaper who, local legend said, "arrived with a wheelbarrow and shovel and died a millionaire,"-- but that's another story.

No one seems to know when young Michael gave up farming and left Dennis Port but it appears to have been sometime in the 1920's. Starting in the mid-1930's, my father kept his dairy operation in the small barn in the meadow. The barn and the road into it from Lower County Road was where the stream runs now. That was relocated from near the center of the meadow to the east boundary when the miniature golf course was built. During the 1944 hurricane the whole meadow was flooded by Nantucket Sound and father's bull drowned. (see DHS newsletter, September 1995.)

The house was occupied only in the summer when the elderly, widowed Mrs. Mary Finnegan arrived with her daughters, Mary and Francis, both single ladies. They brought Kathleen Cullinane-- their cook and maid, --and Raymond Magnuson--their chauffeur and groundskeeper. All of their canned provisions wore S.S. Pierce labels and were purchased from O'Neil's Grocery in Hyannis. Fresh produce was bought from local pedlars as was the fish, delivered from my grandfather's fish market. The meats were primarily from Toby's Market in Harwich Center and Mrs. Finnegan insisted on a chicken pie from "Pop" O'Brien at least once a week. They were counted among the faithful at Holy Trinity Church in West Harwich, had season tickets at the Cape Playhouse, and entertained many Worcesterites.

All winter when the place was closed it became a playground for local kids. It was a rite of passage to climb up the windmill, with knees shaking, stick your head inside the tank and yell at the top of your lungs. The reverberating echoes scared the "livin bejusus" out of you the first time. After that you vied to see who could yell the loudest. I believe the ladder was finally taken down when it became unsafe. No doubt some of the hearing problems of my generation can be traced to "hollering in Finnegan's windmill." The "other thrill a minute" came from the ride in the cleaned out manure car. Remember, this was a modern farm with many labor saving devices. One was a metal car with rounded bottom, suspended by chains from an overhead track. After the stalls were cleaned out the car was pushed to a side door which automatically opened when the car hit it. The car proceeded outside on the track and automatically overturned, dumping the contents. Our "thrill" came from getting into the car and being pushed around inside of the barn by other kids. On one ride I got more of a thrill than expected. Louise Higgins, Doug Robbins, and Ray Eldredge pushed me a little too hard. The car hit the doors which flew open. I sailed outdoors and was dumped down the hill, being knocked out in the process. When I came to they were standing over me and crying, as they thought I was dead. I don't recall taking another ride.

The house is now a summer guest house, the "Barn of Fun" is still entertaining kids--and you are supposed to replace the divots if you are in Finnegan's Meadow! PRH

A STOVE FOR THE SCHOOLHOUSE

The 1770 Old West Schoolhouse needs a small to medium size pot bellied stove to enhance the 1800's side of the school. It does not need to be in working order as it will serve only an aesthetic purpose. If you have one tucked away in the back of the barn and would like to donate it to DHS it would be gratefully received. Please call Phyllis Horton 394-0017.

JUNE CALENDAR

- June 4 and 5 Ezra H. Baker School 3rd graders visit Jericho
June 6 9:30 A.M. Indian Lands Lady Slipper Walk, DHS, Dr. Norton Nickerson
June 7 10 A.M. Indians Lands Lady Slipper Walk, APCC
June 10 7 P.M. DHS Board meets at the Manse
June 13 noon Annual Birthday Luncheon, Scargo Cafe. See below
June 13--21 Cape Heritage Week
June 20 1--4 Josiah Dennis Manse -- School Teaching in Colonial Times and Early American Sampler Exhibit
June 25 12--4 Jericho House -- Interpretive Flower Show and Opening Tea

ALL SUMMER

Jericho Historical Center and Barn Museum is open July 1--Aug. 28, Wed. & Fri. from 2 to 4
Josiah Dennis Manse is open June 23 - Sept 29, Tue. 10A.M.to noon and Thurs. 2 to 4

COMING IN JULY

July 23 Bike tour of historic Dennis Village, meet at Carleton Hall, 9:30. Rain Date July 24

LAST CALL FOR LUNCH

We have already received a large number of early reservations for the annual Birthday Luncheon, which will be held this year at Scargo Cafe. Seating is limited, so if you have not made a reservation as yet and wish to go, better check with Lura Crowell, 385-3268 before mailing in your money and stamped envelope. Hope you're not too late! See last newsletter for details.

LADY SLIPPER WALKS

We also expect a good number of folks will want to go on one of the walks on the Indian Lands to view the display of Lady Slippers. If you plan to join us, we suggest that you clad yourself in long pants and long sleeves to protect yourself from ticks. Binoculars also suggested and maybe some bug spray? Dr. Norton H. Nickerson will once again be our guide.

A SPRING CRANBERRY NOTE

You will notice as you drive past the Cape's bogs that some are greener than others. That's because there are several varieties of berries commonly grown here. Sometime during June, however, all varieties will flower. The blossom of *Vaccinium macrocarpum* is delicate pink and white, and lovely. Like its European cousin, *Vaccinium oxycoccus*, the blossom has a long neck and elongated flower. It looks in shape like the bird called the crane of Europe. The smaller, European variety was named "Kranebere" because of this blossom. Undoubtedly, the Pilgrims knew of this vine from their stay in Holland, and recognized the similarity in the New World variety. So they called the berries "cranberries," corrupting the Dutch word to English. One of the Native American words for the berry, which they used extensively, was "sassamaneasch." More about the cranberry industry as the growing year goes by.

FROM OUR MEMBERSHIP CHAIRMAN

Isabelle Flynn, membership chairman, reports the following new memberships:
Life member --Virginia L. Devine; Family members--Mr. and Mrs. Roland Barker, Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Forkin, Mr. and Mrs. Hugh Wheeler and Mr. and Mrs. Thomas G. Sebastyn; and Individual member John C. Weld, Jr. Welcome, folks! We hope to get to know you real soon.

WHO WAS UNCLE BARNEY, ANYWAY?

He was Captain Barnabus Baker and in 1810 he inherited a large part of the real estate which now lies on both sides of Uncle Barney's Road. We will devote more space next time to Uncle Barney and his family. Too much going on this month!

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