### DENNIS HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER Vol. 15 No. 6 June 1992 Compiled and Edited by Nancy Thacher Reid



# ONE HUNDRED NINETY-NINE YEARS OLD --- 200 HERE WE COME!!

Our annual Dennis Birthday celebration will be held at the Lighthouse Inn as usual, but we are having a Birthday Dinner on Saturday evening instead of the usual Sunday luncheon. It will be on June 13th with Social Hour at 5:00 in the Lower Deck and Dinner at 6:15 P.M. overlooking the water from the Dining Room. Program Chairman Gertrude Lailey has arranged for The Surftones to entertain us. This group also features a barbershop quartet. I understand they are very good so we are looking forward to an enjoyable evening that will launch us into the preparation for our Bicentennial Year--1993. The reservation form is below and the deadline is June 8th. The Stone Family will present us with our Birthday Cake again and this year they're adding ice cream! Do join us for a sunset dinner with a beautiful view.

## STREETS OF OUR TOWN--GREAT WESTERN ROAD--PART II

Now, there is an interesting detour which I made on my way to researching this street name. How much do you know about the Mexican War? For me it ranked right up there with the presidency of Millard Filmore. I knew it happened, and where, but when and why was very sketchy. One day, while persuing an entirely different area of our history, my eye was attracted to the words Great Western in a front page article of the Yarmouth Register of 1847. Being interested in that street name I made a photocopy and filed it, unread, in my "Streets" folder. A while ago, again looking for other information, it caught my attention once more and I took it out and read it. And that's how I became much better educated about the Mexican War, and also learned the story of an interesting woman whose name was Sarah Bourdette (or possibly a somewhat different but similar name). Details of her early life are sketchy and somewhat contradictory, but the basic legends that surround her are consistent. She was born about 1812, and raised in Clayton City, Missouri, where, just prior to the Mexican War she married. The name of her new husband is not known, but apparently shortly after their marriage he was moved to enlist in the United States Army at Jefferson Barracks and Sarah also "enlisted" as a laundress and cook. It would appear that physically Sarah was well suited to the rough life of a frontier Army Post. She is described as being a comely woman, with an hourglass figure, over six feet tall and proportioned accordingly; with the strength of two men and the heart of a lion. She could also cook, was motherly, an able nurse, and was willing to travel along with the men, mounted on a mule, as they moved to combat positions in the southwest. All of her qualities earned her the nickname of "The Great Western"! Stories of her adventures as she moved about with her regiment became popular sidelights to the history of the campaign, so much so that the remote Yarmouth Register treated its readers with reports of her adventures. She is credited with being an inspiration of courage to her regiment when they were besieged for 8 days by the Mexican forces, encouraging them until the heavy artillery of General Zachary Taylor arrived to turn the tide of battle. She is said to have remarked that if she had trousers, she would have personally pursued the retreating Mexicans. And apparently those who knew her and admired her from afar believed that she would have. She was fiercely devoted to the regiment's commander, Capt. George Lincoln, who she defended publicly when he was killed in battle. Her husband was also lost in action, but she continued to serve her regiment as long as the need was there. In later months she opened a series of hotels, popular with her Army acquaintances. Legends place her in several romantic liaisons, and tell of her selection of at least two more husbands, the last of whom was Alfred J. Bowman, by whose name she is known to history. Sarah Bowman died on Dec. 22, 1966, only 54 years of age. A biographer of "The Great Western" says that reports that she received a commission and a pension are not based in fact. However, she was buried with full military honors, after a Requiem Mass said by a priest who had known her well, and described her as a "good woman" who had been a friend to many who were otherwise friendless. Now, there is of course a possibility that our road was named as a tribute to Sarah Bowman, "The Great Western" of the Mexican War--a comely, flamboyant camp follower, this red-headed Amazon of prodigious strength and talent. What do you think?

#### AN AFTERNOON OF ... JAZZ BY THE SEA

A splendid afternoon of jazz is being planned at the Lighthouse Inn, West Dennis on Sunday, May 31st from 2-5 P.M. to benefit the Dennis Bicentennial. The featured pianists will be Marie Marcus (Celebrating 60 years of entertaining), Billy Marcus, and Jack Bumer, with special appearances by other fine musicians. Our Bicentennial Celebration will cost a fair amount of money and the Committee is trying to raise as much as possible to assure that our year will be a memorable one. There will be a cash bar and Lighthouse Inn is graciously donating some delicious hors d'oeuvres. Advance sale tickets are available at the Dennis Chamber of Commerce, the Town Clerk's Office at Town Hall, Bicentennial Committee members or at the door, for a donation of \$7.50. Don't miss this one--it will be great!! BIRTHDAY DINNER RESERVATIONS JUNE 13 LIGHTHOUSE INN--WEST DENNIS \_\_\_\_ people. I enclose a check for \$\_\_\_ (\$12.50 per person) Please make reservations for Tax and gratuity included. Baked Stuffed Chicken with Cranberry Sauce Choice of entree:\_ Baked Stuffed Sole Seafood quiche and Salad

Please enclose a self-addressed, stamped envelope and send to Mr. Joshua Crowell Box 963 Dennis, MA 02639

			CALENDAR
May	31	2-5 P.M.	An Afternoon Of JazzBy The Sea. See related article.
May	28–29		3rd grade program at Josiah Dennis Manse. Volunteers are desperately
June	1–5		needed for this worthwhile program. Please call 385-3910 or 385-3528
			if you can give just a few hours.
June	13	5:00 P.M.	Dennis' 199th Birthday Dinner. See related article.
June	14		Flag Day. Hopefully the new Dennis Bicentennial flags wil be ready
			for sale. Watch for an announcement.
June	21		Happy Father's Day to all you Dads out there!
June	28	2-4 P.M.	Opening Tea at Jericho House and Barn Museum
		3-5 P.M.	Open House at Josiah Dennis Manse. Visit Jericho then come to the Manse

## JOSIAH'S NEW MARITIME WING

For the third year in a row we are announcing the opening of a "new" room at the Josiah Dennis Manse. Our new Maritime Wing will open on Sunday, June 28 from 3-5 P.M. and you're all invited to the party. Before the present Maritime Room was opened two years ago it was quite apparent the space was too limited for the number of marine artifacts we would like to display, so, when the Manse closed last September our veteran renovators Richard Howes and John Burton started working on the old unheated, uninsulated summer kitchen that had been used for special exhibits. When John left for sunny Florida Seth Crowell teamed up with Dick and spent the winter transforming the wing into a first rate exhibition space. They removed a wall, two windows, and a door; insulated and finished off the walls, built storage closets and a great exhibit case, installed blinds, and painted everything from top to bottom. Dennis Electrical Inspector Ray Speakman installed heat. The Marguerite Ickes Fund supplied the materials used to update the room. While this was going on Nancy Howes and Phyllis Horton were airing, sorting and refiling 3 file cabinets full of records, clippings and other ephemera from 1968 to the present that had become musty from years of being in an unheated room. Now we're ready to show off our new room that will help us tell the interesting story of Maritime Dennis. John Gill and John Burton (on Florida time) have been working on a diorama of the Shiverick Shipyard what hopefully will be ready for the Open House. Stop by on the 28th to see our new room, our old house, have some refreshments, and thank Dick, Seth and John for \$4,000.00 worth of donated labor.

## BICENTENNIAL BIT.... The Other Dennises

Our 199th birthday! and counting....counting down to a gala year of celebrations in honor of our incorporation as a separate town. Your Bicentennial Committee has great plans, something to suit everybody, whether your taste is for social occasions, community improvement projects, or parades. (I love a parade!) One of my responsibilities has been to assist the schools in planning projects and accumulating information and materials for the students, to help them learn about our town's history. The work book for grade three is coming along nicely, and the fourth grade teachers and Mr. Colby are working on an expanded local history unit. In the meantime I have searched out other towns in the U.S. of A. which bear the name "Dennis". My purpose is two-fold. It has been suggested that pen pals in other parts of the country, between youngsters in the schools of Dennis, MA and those who live in other Dennises would be fun and beneficial. Also, I want to know if the town took its name from us, as a result of our citizens moving to other areas.

The other Dennises found so far are in Mississippi, Texas, North Carolina, New Jersey, and Kansas. Except for New Jersey, they don't have much in common with our seaside town. I haven't found out much that is helpful as far as how each got its name. The Post Mistress of Dennis, Texas tells me her town was named for a lawyer who moved there from Boston. Missisippi has 3 villages named Dennis, and one called Dennis Crossroads, but none seem to have grown from us. Dennis, Kansas is a railroad stop but no one remembers how it was named. Dennis, New Jersey is older than we are--but there is a connection here.

And I will tell you about it next time.

Dennis Historical Society P.O. Box 607 South Dennis, MA 02660 Non-Profit Organization U. S. POSTAGE P A I D Permit No. 2 So. Dennis, MA 02660

