



Dennis Historical Society Newsletter

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www.dennishistsoc.org

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Requiem To An Apple Tree

Old Shube's apple tree is gone. It had stood across the lane from my home for probably 150 years. I have watched it bloom every spring for nearly 62 years since I moved here as a bride, minus a few years when I lived away.

The tree was planted Ca. 1850 by Capt. Sylvanus Wixon Jr. who built a lovely home next door and planted a fruit orchard between the two houses.

Capt. Wixon was born in Dennis Port in 1834 and settled on the lot just west of his father's homestead near Pound Pond. It is not known now what he did at sea but he had earned the name of Captain--a title not given lightly in those days.

To my mother-in-law, Millie Gage Horton, and other neighbors he was known as "Old Shube". I never thought to ask why when there was someone I could ask; now we'll never know. He died in 1922 and his heritage followed down in his homestead and his orchard.

The homestead was purchased by Howard and Mary Stomm and became a tea room and guest house. The land was subdivided, some of the fruit trees were cut down, and a couple of summer cottages were built in the orchard. When I moved in--coming a half-mile south from Main Street--there were three apple trees, a pear tree and a quince tree that produced a small crop every year. Over time all but one apple tree succumbed. A hurricane took two apples and the pear. The quince just faded away. The last apple tree kept hanging on year after year blooming profusely in the spring and producing knobby little apples that were useless. The deer, birds and ants loved them and by first snow they were all gone.

Neighbors came and went next door until the late 1970s when new neighbors decided they wanted a lawn instead of a Cape Cod yard. Fertilizer and watering gave the old tree a 'shot in the trunk' so to speak, and it began to prosper. In springtime it was a sight to behold, like an old lady with a new spring bonnet, and the aroma permeated the neighborhood. The apples were larger, but still not much good, as they were not sprayed against a myriad of apple pests and diseases.

The last few years it was plain to see that the tree was going downhill. My neighbor, Jean, begrudgingly asked her son to take it down. When I heard the chainsaw--a tool Old Shube might not have believed even if he had seen it--I knew it was all over for the tree. I'll miss seeing it in bloom this year with the birds flying in and out of it but I'll bet if I close my eyes, and concentrate, my memory will conjure up that lovely aroma.

I know that on cool nights next fall I'll smell apple wood smoke drifting through the neighborhood. I'll inhale with pleasure and thank the old Captain for setting it out and tending it so many years ago.

Phyllis Horton

Reflections On Asparagus

May and June are wonderful months for a lot of reasons, but when it comes to the vegetable garden the best thing about them is asparagus. This earliest arrival in my vegetable garden -- now nigh onto 25 years -- has a long history of successful cultivation on Cape Cod. It also has a worldwide reputation in the annals of ancient history as a medicinal plant, as well as a source of excellent nutrition.

But, considering the circumstances of my childhood experience with it, some might wonder why I ever would want to see those green stalks on my dinner plate again.

In May 1942 I was 9 years old and in the Fifth Grade in the Parker School in Woburn, about 10 miles from Boston. (Although my parents had built a summer cottage in Dennisport in 1938-39, we didn't move there permanently until June 1944.)

Our then rented home in Woburn was next to Lexington in an extensive area of small market farms. Besides a large area for an annual vegetable garden, our small farm had an apple orchard, a substantial grape arbor, two patches of currant and gooseberry bushes and a large, mature asparagus bed.

America in the spring of 1942 was in the midst of World War II. The winter of that year was also the time when a significant epidemic of scarlet fever hit our region. School activities were curtailed, theaters closed, and people were advised to avoid crowds. Scarlet fever was a serious illness, and even if there were antibiotics at that time, they were not available to the civilian population.

By the end of April, the worst of the epidemic had subsided. Joint school programs were again allowed and I was chosen to represent my school in a downtown musical event. During a rehearsal I remember sitting next to a girl who complained constantly of a sore throat and not feeling well. A few days later, I spiked a high fever and had an extremely sore throat.

In those days, when a doctor was called, he came to your house. The doctor diagnosed my illness as scarlet fever and immediately put our house and my whole family under quarantine

Only my father was allowed to leave the house to go to work, because his job was deemed essential to the war effort. I was confined to my room and my mother was the only person who was to go near me. I knew I was seriously ill, because my mother slept beside me in my room for several nights.

The doctor made several visits over that first week and finally decided I would "probably survive." The swelling and soreness of my throat gradually eased and my fever went back closer to normal. But, it wasn't over. The doctor prescribed total bed rest for a full month. I was to stay in bed and not to leave my room for any reason. He explained that those who survived scarlet fever often suffered severe heart damage and other chronic ailments from resuming regular activities too soon.

**The 12th Annual Old Fashioned Pie
Sale on the Green**

**Rt. 6A Dennis Village
Monday July 6, 6PM**

**All DHS Members are invited to
support this endeavor by the 1736
Josiah Dennis Manse Museum
Committee by baking homemade pies
to sell at this sale. Call June
Howes (508-385-9308) for pie plates
& more info.**

And he prescribed not only complete rest, but he told my mother "give her good, nourishing meals – milk, eggs, fish, meat, and especially, fresh vegetables every day." His view of the importance of good nutrition in healing showed he was "a doctor ahead of his time."

My mother pointed out to the doctor that since it was spring, fresh vegetables were scarce and expensive. "There's a war on," she said. "All we have in the garden right now is asparagus."

The doctor replied that there was nothing better than fresh asparagus, especially homegrown in a well-tended garden. "She should have it every day," he told my mother. So, it was that for the whole month of May, at least once a

day, sometimes twice, there was fresh-cut asparagus on my plate.

It seemed to me that I was completely well long before my month-long confinement ended, but my mother was firm about following the doctor's orders. One day near the end of the month, however, I sneaked out of my room just to look out a window that overlooked our backyard. I had gone into that room when spring had hardly begun, and what I saw out there near the end of May was a world transformed.

Confined to my room, I had not considered that Spring was still going along without my watching it. The soil of our vegetable garden had been freshly turned, leaving only the large asparagus bed on the side to its own devices – the bed was a forest of green stalks, a few gone tall and beginning to show the feathery growth of summer. Apple and pear trees in the orchard were in bloom and starting to leaf out. It was, I think, a child's first inkling that the inevitable cycles of the natural world would always go along – with or without me.

My recovery from scarlet fever left me with no heart problems or other physical difficulties that I have known of. And what of asparagus? Twenty-five years ago, after many years without a proper vegetable garden, my late husband and I finally had a home with room for such a garden. My husband (who didn't like asparagus, but knew I loved it) insisted I should have an asparagus bed and he helped me prepare the ground and plant it.

It took three or four years to get asparagus production up to speed, but once it took hold, there was no holding it back. That's the way it is with asparagus. When friends tell me they want to plant their own asparagus, I often chuckle and ask, "Just how long do you plan to live?"

These days, we see asparagus in the fresh produce section of grocery stores almost every month of the year. I am never tempted by imported, out-of-season asparagus. It looks pretty good, but I know better – much better. I can wait. Spring will always come again to Cape Cod.

The first sign of asparagus never fails to bring back the memory of scarlet fever and that month-long confinement of my long-ago childhood. I've always believed that the doctor, whose name I have long since forgotten, and the advice he gave my mother, not only helped me to survive a dangerous illness, but also introduced me early-on to the concept that it matters what food we eat, where it comes from and how fresh it is.

Surely, my present asparagus bed will outlive me. But, after 67 years since May 1942, and I'm still counting the years and still cutting spring asparagus, I have no regrets.

Peggy Eastman

What Barn Is This?

Where is this Dennis Barn?

What's hidden in there?

Can you visit it?



Is this a Town treasure?

How old is it?

What's under it?

Please call me with your information. My number's in the next article.

Help Wanted (Yep!)

It's time to inventory the DHS Library!! We need & want some hardy folks to inventory our collection & put it in boxes– such things as checking them off on the past list, making a brief list for each box etc. You don't have to know Dewey or the decimal system. If you can help, call Pete Howes (385-9308) or e-mail pjhowes@verizon.net.



Don't forget Quivet Neck Walk with Brendan – June 13, 10:30 a.m., Jacob Sears Library



New Members

We are very pleased to welcome Chief & Mrs. Mark Dellner into the Dennis Historical Society

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



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Organization
US POSTAGE
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ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

Mark Your Calendars – Upcoming DHS Programs

Opening Reception



1736 Josiah Dennis Manse Museum
Saturday, June 20, 1 - 4 p.m.

Costumed Interpreters
Maritime Exhibit



1745 Schoolhouse
Herb Gardens
Refreshments



77 Nobscusset Road, Cor. Whig St.
Dennis Village
www.dennishistsoc.org 508-385-2232

A Victorian Tea Party

Sunday June 28, 2009

1:00 - 4:00

1801 Jericho Historical Center
90 Old Main Street, West Dennis

Featuring
A Marvelous Display
of
Antique Aprons



Tea & Refreshments

At

Captain Baker's Historic Home



Sponsored by Dennis Historical Society
www.dennishistsoc.org 508-385-9308