

DENNIS HISTORICAL SOCIETY
NEWSLETTER
March, 1979

Lunch at the Red Pheasant

The Mid-Winter Festivity was certainly festive, with lots of pleasant sociability preceding the excellent luncheon. Between courses, Josh Crowell filled us in on some of the history of the building which now is known as the Red Pheasant Inn, where the luncheon was held. After dinner, Mrs. Anson Howes gave us the background history of the bit of Dennis on the edge of the Bay which has seen whaling, cranberry industry and a luxurious hotel--come and go--and Mr. Walter Morley showed slides of the same spot when it was Camp Dennis in the '40's and '50's. Mrs. Howes also had on display some pictures of the Nobscusset, the hotel which stood overlooking the Bay from 1880-1930. It was interesting, educational and fun. Mrs. Jean Taylor had created red, white, and blue centerpieces and Mr. Everett Durgin donated two flags all of which were won by lucky people attending. Thanks to all the above people, to Kirk Brown, Bill Taylor and Parm Fitch and everyone else who made such a nice occasion of such a cold day. Everyone went home with a souvenir menu on which was pictured the Nobscusset, as well as a happy memory of a pleasant time.

A Dennis Legend Named Murphy

No one seems to be able to tell me exactly when or why Joseph Murphy came to live in Dennis, or how long he remained. It was around the turn of the century when Mr. Murphy appeared on the scene and he probably came on a commission to practice his art as a stone mason. He is described as a colorful character who wore white overalls and a black derby hat, an excellent workman, and by his works he is remembered.

Mr. Murphy did not build dry stone walls as did our ancestors, walls which seem almost fluid and soft in their gentle heaps. Mr. Murphy's walls were plumb and solid, rigidly cemented together. A fine example exists today around the Bleak House property off Sea Street in Dennis. Most of the stones for this wall were ferried across from Sandy Neck on barges and by hours of labor. Joseph created from them a wall of lasting beauty. Another of Joseph's walls is a retaining wall on the Charles Johnson property, right at the Main Street end of Corporation Road, built, it is said, to pay for his room and board.

But his crowning effort while here was the graceful stone tower on Scargo Hill. Esther Howes has a picture of Mr. Murphy in overalls and derby at work at its building, raising stones with a lift to their place atop the growing structure. It was the third tower on the crest of Scargo, the first of wood destroyed by a great gale, the second also of wood burned to the ground by a forest fire. But Mr. Murphy's tower has withstood both gale and threat of fire and is today a popular spot for viewing the Cape from tip to shoulder. So on this St. Patrick's Day, an Irish blessing on Mr. Joseph Murphy--"May the Lord hold you in the hollow of his hand, and may you somehow know that new generations of nature lovers (and other lovers!) still watch the sun set over the Bay from the top of Scargo Tower."

Songs and Skits Planned for School Visits to Historic Houses

Sammy Freckles will find himself in a jerkin with a name like Ezekial Baker pinned to him and Debra Pigtales will become Bathsheba Dennis and be wearing a cap or apron when the time machine (a resonant bell) takes them back a century or two on their visits to Jericho and the Manse. Believing the best learning is active learning, the education committee has been studying ways to increase the participation of students in their study of local history. Singing and role playing could be simple yet effective ways, in addition to costuming the children, to get the desired participation.

Members have observed the Falmouth, Braintree and Salem programs and feel we can borrow from what we've seen and in addition add our own ingredients taking particular note of some high points in Dennis history--i.e. the salt works, the Shiverick Ship Yard, first cranberry bog, fishing and marine life, and even tourism.

At our meeting on March 12th, we will divide up our tasks and discuss how to get our job done. On March 19th, we will have a workshop to make old fashioned name tags for the children, hear about the history of the Baker family, and to share our progress in getting our program organized. Interested people, young or old, are invited to join us. For further information call Paula Bacon 394-5739.

House Dating

Mr. Edmund Nickerson has accepted Chairmanship of the House Dating Committee and Mrs. Pauline Derick has agreed to serve ex-officio on this committee to teach us some of her expertise. The committee will meet this month and hopes to hold another class in house dating, hopefully in April. Those working on their houses, if you have any questions, contact Mr. Nickerson or Mrs. Derick.

Fishing As Part of the Cape's History

Henry C. Kittredge says, "The story of the Cape fisheries begins and ends at Provincetown."¹ Mr. Cyril Patrick, president of the Provincetown Historical Society, will talk on two aspects of the history of Cape fishing--trap fishing and the beautiful schooner Rose Dorothea, winner of the Lipton Cup, and presently being recreated as a scale model in the Heritage Museum of Provincetown. Come and learn from Mr. Patrick's lovely pictures and interesting talk. The program will be presented at 1:30 at the West Dennis Community Building on Wednesday, March 28.

¹Kittredge, Henry C., Cape Cod--Its People and their History, Houghin Mifflin, Boston, 1930, p. 182.

CALENDAR

March 10 7-10 PM Old Fashion Family Square Dance, South Dennis Congregational Church Parish Hall, Dudley Briggs-Caller
March 12 10-12 Education Committee Workshop, Home of Diane Cash, Setucket Road.
March 13 8 PM House Dating Committee, Home of Edmund Nickerson, High Bank Road.
March 15 7:30 PM OPEN MEETING "Geology of Cape Cod", Mr. Donald Eldredge, V.I.C. Hall, Dennisport
March 19 10 AM Education Committee Workshop, Jericho House
March 20 7:30 PM Regular Board Meeting, Home of President Peirce
March 25 Happy New Year (Old Style)
March 28 1:30 PM OPEN MEETING "Trap Fishing" and "The Rose Dorothea", Mr. Cyril Patrick, Provincetown Historical Society, West Dennis Comm.Bldg.

COMING EVENTS

April House Dating Class. Date and place to be announced.
April 22 2 PM Bike tour of West Dennis
May 7:30 PM Talk by Dr. Williston Holbert, "The Cape Verde Islanders of Cape Cod", V.I.C. Hall
June 17 Birthday Party Luncheon, Lighthouse Inn, West Dennis

The Story of Our Narrow Land

Donald Eldredge of Chatham is no stranger to our society. This time he brings us his talk on "The Geology of Cape Cod". The program will be presented at V.I.C. Hall in Dennisport at 7:30 PM on Thursday, March 15. It is open to the public, and guests are certainly welcome. Mr. Eldredge's talks are well known and recognized for their excellence. Don't miss this one.

Phyllis Robbins Horton has furnished us with some interesting information about the hall where this meeting will be held. We will tell you more next month, but let us just mention that this is the newest of the municipally owned meeting places having been built on the site of the Dennisport District School which burned on March 17, 1929. Coincidentally, our meeting is almost the 50th anniversary of this fire.

The Streets of Our Town

King Philip Drive, off Scargo Hill Road, is a fairly new street, but it recalls some of the earliest history of our town. When the Pilgrims landed in Provincetown, and later settled at Plymouth, they found the native Americans in the area friendly and helpful. The local Indians were the remnant of a larger tribe, belonging to the Wanpanoag Nation, whose numbers had been greatly depleted by an epidemic (perhaps typhus).

King Philip was the son of Massasoit and leader of the Wampanoag nation. He became alarmed as the small struggling settlements strengthened and he determined to make war. Some of his braves attacked Swansea, Mass. in the spring of 1675 and burned the entire town thus precipitating the year long struggle known as King Philip's War.

Although no Indians attacked the Cape settlements, it was an uneasy time until the final battle on August 16, 1676 when King Philip was killed. The tensions created by the battles were prolonged into the Post-war months as a result of the financial drain suffered by the farmer colonists. The assessment made on the town of Yarmouth (which then included Dennis) for the final months of the war was 296 pounds 1 shilling, a terrible burden for these farmer-fishermen who lived by the work of their own two hands. No help was received from the Mother Country, indeed none was sought--but unsolicited help came from a different quarter. Nearly 1000 pounds was raised and sent to the Plymouth Colony by "divers Christians in Ireland", an act of friendship which the impoverished folks here must have gratefully received. Although March 17 is more likely to be remembered on the Cape as Evacuation Day than St. Patrick's Day, it might be in order to offer a toast to the "divers Christians of Ireland" who extended their kindness to the early settlers.

This was the first of the Colonial Wars which financial drained the meager money resources of the colonists and it is commemorated in the name of King Philip Drive, one of the Streets of Our Town.

Dennis Historical Society
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MAR 19

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