



Dennis Historical Society Newsletter

Volume 26 Number 3

March 2003

Calendar of Events

**Thursday, March 13
Noon to 4 PM**

Antique Appraisal Day
Bring your antiques for a professional appraisal at the
R. C. Eldred Co., Inc.
Route 6A
East Dennis.

This is to benefit the Dennis Historical Society
Fees will be \$5 for a single item, or \$10 for 3 items.
See Appraisal Day article.

**Sunday, March 16
2:00 PM**

Export China
Mary Kuhrtz will show examples of china brought back from the Far East as ships' ballast and is now highly collectible.
Refreshments.

**West Dennis Graded
School**
67 School Street
West Dennis

Free Heritage Tour
Heritage Museum and Gardens on Grove Street
Sandwich Village
10AM-4PM
March 16, 19, 20, 21, 22
Proof of Dennis residency required. See Newsletter article.

Mary McLaughlin Connolly *by Phyllis Horton*

In honor of St. Patrick's Day it is fitting to tell the story of Mary Connolly, a capable Irish lass who became a blue water wife.

Mary McLaughlin came to America to escape the poverty and political unrest in her native land. She felt most fortunate to have secured a position in the household of the prosperous East Dennis sea captain and businessman, Prince Sears Crowell. Mary must have charmed the Crowells as they soon treated her as one of the family. She was well received by the village and especially by the few Irish nationals who had settled here earlier escaping from the terrible potato famine of the 1840s. Among Mary's circle of Irish friends were Thomas and Mary Ann Connolly. Their farm was just over the town line in West Brewster but they received their mail, did shopping and had sent their children to school in East Dennis.

The Connolly children were now grown and sons James and Michael were sea captains. Michael settled on the West Coast and sailed out of San Francisco. James' home port was Boston and he visited his parents whenever he was in port and had time to come to the Cape. On one of his visits he became acquainted with Mary. It is not known how long it took for the romance to blossom, but on February 25, 1873, James and Mary appeared before Dennis Town Clerk Obed Baker II to file their intentions of marriage.

Busy days followed as the Crowells helped 25 year old Mary prepare her trousseau for her wedding and honeymoon that would take her around the world on James' ship the *South American*. Surely Mary was full of excitement as she and James left East Dennis for Boston and her new life as a bride on the high seas of the world. Just think of all the wonderful things she would see! In the following years they circumnavigated the world a good number of times.

In April of 1888 the *South American* left England with James, Mary and a crew of 26 bound for the Philippines. An uneventful trip took them just about around the world to South Africa and in April 1889, shortly after rounding the Cape of Good Hope with all sails set, they struck an uncharted reef.

There was no question they would have to abandon the ship. They could see the African coast and the only prudent course was to launch the lifeboats and head for the shore. As a precaution Mary was lashed to the mizzenmast while the crew tried to launch the lifeboats. Huge waves tore the boats away as soon as they were launched. Mary was moved from place to place and finally into the rigging to escape the worst of the pounding waves. When darkness fell the entire crew joined Mary in the rigging praying they would survive the cold, pitch-black night. Never once did anyone hear a word of complaint or despair from

Mary. Instead, she was the one with words of hope and encouragement to ‘hang on and they would make it through the night.’

In the early daylight work was begun on a crude raft that would hopefully take them to shore. When it was completed Mary was lashed to the raft and they pushed off from the foundering ship. Almost immediately the raft capsized taking Mary under the water and scattering the crew in the water. The quick-thinking Captain dove under the raft and released Mary. After that she was not tied, which proved to be a blessing; the raft overturned five more times before it reached the beach.

They may have been apprehensive when nearing shore, as there was a welcoming committee of native Hottentots and several ragged men. Their fears were groundless as the Hottentots were friendly and the other men were sailors who had been shipwrecked in the past and chose to stay there. They had watched the shipwreck drama unfold and were all concerned for the crew’s well being, especially when they discovered Mary.

The locals soon had a fire going and everyone—James’ crew, the natives and the vagrant sailors—walked away to give Mary some privacy as she removed her water-soaked, sandy clothes and put on a dry man’s shirt loaned by an old German sailor. He is reported to have said, “Lord, Missus, you must have the heart of a lion!”

The Hottentots ran to the nearest village for food and blankets for the survivors and to send word of the shipwreck to the nearest seaport that could mount a rescue mission. Imagine their thrill when they finally saw a ship standing off shore and lowering boats to pick them up. James must have had mixed feelings as they were rowed past the wreckage of his ship that he had owned for nearly thirty years. Mary, too, had memories of her whole married life aboard the *South American*. A sad ending for a good ship.

James and Mary returned home to East Dennis after that ordeal. The Captain wrote stories of their trying experience and spoke to the assembly at the East Dennis Lyceum at Worden Hall. The loving hearts of the Crowell family joyfully welcomed Mary home, but Mary’s “heart of a lion” was shattered when the child she had longed for was stillborn.

James took Mary to live in California in the hopes that a new location with a moderate climate would bring her back to health, but she died shortly afterwards, mourned by all who knew her.

Mary’s days as a Blue Water Wife had taken a terrible toll from her. After all, even a lion’s heart is not invincible.

Free Heritage Tour

The Heritage Museum and Gardens on Grove Street in historic Sandwich Village (formerly Heritage Plantation of Sandwich) will offer free admission to Dennis residents during the week of March 16-22, 10 AM to 4 PM, except for Monday and Tuesday when they are closed. Your license or another proof of residence is your ticket for admission.

The museum has undergone many renovations and changes this past year and is now open year round. The free admission to Cape towns is to acquaint Cape residents with their new image. Do take advantage of this one-time offer to visit the Cape’s premier museum.

Grandmother's Tea Set

Perhaps you are fortunate enough to have a lovely china tea set that has been handed down through the family. Many Cape homes were graced with beautiful pieces from the Orient that came back here with our clipper ship captains and crew.

On Sunday afternoon, March 16 at 2:00 PM, Mary Kuhrtz will give a talk on Export China and show some examples of the handwork done by early craftsmen in the Far East. Meet at the West Dennis School House, 67 School Street, West Dennis. Refreshments will be served.

Appraisal Day

The Cape Cod version of the Antiques Road Show is coming to Dennis on Thursday, March 13, Noon to 4:00 PM. **The Robert C. Eldred Co.** will conduct an Appraisal Day to benefit the Dennis Historical Society. Eldred's appraisers will evaluate items in the following categories: pottery and porcelain, silver, pewter, Americana, glass, paintings, maritime art, ephemera (paper collectibles), books, tools, decoys, jewelry (excluding precious stones), weapons, toys, dolls, Oriental rugs, Japanese, Korean and Southeast Asian art and Paul Jacoulet prints.

Evaluations will be verbal and limited to three items per person. Consignment of suitable items for auction is encouraged and may be made at this time. Morning appointments may be scheduled from 9:00 AM until 11:30 AM for those who cannot come in the afternoon by calling (508) 385-3116.

If you are wondering about the value and/or history of that special something Great Aunt Martha prized so highly that she bequeathed it to you, or you think you picked up a rare find at last year's yard sale, now is the time to find out for sure.

The R. C. Eldred Co. is located at 1483 Rt. 6A, East Dennis. There is a fee of \$5.00 for one item and \$10.00 for three items (maximum). Coffee and home made goodies will be served as you register and wait your turn. The proceeds will benefit the Dennis Historical Society Acquisition Fund to help in acquiring items important to Dennis history. We can't give you a spot on PBS television but can say it will be interesting, informative and, we hope, a lot of fun.

Think Snow!

February's snows were a mild inconvenience to some, a source of conversation to some, and a reminder of the old days to others.

Back in the early 1900s snow came early and often. At the turn of the century snow removal wasn't practiced. Snow was "rolled." Teams of horses would break through the snow pulling a heavy roller that compacted the snow over the dirt roads, with teams of men standing by to knock the tops off the drifts that were too high for the horses to get through. This happened after every storm and eventually built up a solid base that was perfect for sleighs. If a divot appeared in the roadway, snow was shoveled from the side of the road and tamped down to smooth out the bump.

Certain young bloods in town would have sleigh races to determine who was the best driver with the best horse. It was even better if he had the object of his affection snuggled under the buffalo robe so she had first-hand knowledge of his manly skills.

For a close-up look at an old Dennis sleigh and buffalo robe, visit the Jericho Barn and Country Store Museum next summer. We promise you won't have to fight any snow!

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THE WAY WE WERE

Josh Crowell loved a good story, especially if there was a bit of humor involved. When the East Dennis High School moved from Paddocks Path to the high school in South Dennis, his cousin Nate Crowell just couldn't seem to get along with the teachers. He quit. After hanging around the farm and giving his parents grief, Nate was encouraged to apply for training on the school ship *Nantucket* in Hyannis. Of course, he had to send in recommendations with his application. Mr. Guild, Dennis High School Principal, wrote, "*He is indolent, insolent, and a bad influence on everybody around him!*" On the other hand Dr. Hannah Crowell (cousin Nan) sent in a glowing letter. Josh said they decided to admit Nate just to see who was right.

The family was happy to report that Nate graduated with a diploma in Marine and Nautical Engineering with the class of 1927. The school is no longer in Hyannis, but has become the Massachusetts Maritime Academy in Bourne.



Nathan Stoddard Crowell
Class of 1927