



Dennis Historical Society Newsletter

Volume 32 Number 2 Send letters & stories to Dennis Historical Society, Box 607, S. Dennis 02660 or to pmrhorton@aol.com March 2009

Memories

Note from Phyllis: Cleaning out a file cabinet the other day brought some old correspondence to light. We have memories of West Dennis from Charles P. Buckley of Brockton and of Dennis Port from Betty Dean Holmes of Swampscott. Both are delightful reminders of what were simpler times. The characters they wrote about are gone but the memories can stay with us forever. I offer you one for this month and one for the May issue.

Betty's Memories of Dennis Port

"When I was a kid growing up on Main Street in Dennisport, in the 1930s, we Dean kids had a front row seat watching what happened in the center of town. I remember seeing the peddlers that came to town, mostly in the summer. The scissors and knife sharpener man came, pushing his grinding wheel before him like a wheelbarrow, and ringing a bell. All the ladies would hurry out to see him, bringing their dulled knives and scissors. I suppose if he traveled any back roads he could also sharpen farm tools, but there were no farms on Main Street. Mr. Nickerson's farm was only one block away, on Upper

County Road. I do not know if the man with the grinding wheel ever went there or if Mr. Nickerson had his own grinding wheel, which he pumped with his foot as he sharpened his axe and sickle and scythe.

One man came down Main Street with his big hurdy-gurdy on wheels and he stopped beside Frank Estey's Drug Store and cranked the handle of the hurdy-gurdy which made it play a pretty tune and then he'd pass the hat. Back then not everyone had a radio, so the hurdy-gurdy was a real treat.



The shabbily dressed man that brought the cinnamon ringtail monkey to town came from Somerville and he told me the monkey was already twenty-six years old. Although monkeys live a long time, he already had another younger monkey in training. The man had a small hand cranked hurdy-gurdy that he balanced on a single attached stick when he was not playing. The monkey would take a penny from your hand and tip his hat as he quickly tucked the penny in his costume pocket. Every summer the man and his monkey drew a big crowd. He'd stay for a couple of hours and then move on to the next village shopping area in Harwichport.

At that time Dad had acquired a cinnamon ringtail monkey for a pet and he and the man chatted. The man told my Dad he parked his Cadillac far away from Main Street and walked into town so people

would not realize how successful he was. He told Dad that with the monkey he often took in as much as one hundred dollars a day, an enormous amount of money in the late 1930s.

Another itinerant was the tin man, or tinker. He mended leaky pots and pans. He rang a bell to announce his arrival on Main Street. He may also have sold pots and pans, but we never bought a pan from him.

I remember a young man who was a one-man band, with cymbals between his knees and a harmonica on a frame around his neck. I don't remember how he managed the drum on his back. Perhaps he kicked a foot? He was very funny looking with all the contraptions hanging off his body to make music.

There may have been other peddlers, but these are the ones I remember.

We three Dean girls, probably five, six and seven years old, decided we could make music and make money. So we put an old wind-up Victrola record player Dad had given us, with its 'morning glory horn' on our younger brother, Louis Jr.'s red wagon and pulled the wagon all down Main Street. We put a record on the Victrola, wound it up with the crank, and when the record finished playing, we passed the hat. We came home with some coins and our parents were horrified. In their eyes we had been begging. We were not allowed to do that again."

Thanks, Betty!

The Past Re-Born

The lady said, "I have some old deeds that might be of interest to you." She was Mrs. Lynda Howes Erickson of Northampton, MA, and was put into contact with me through the Howes Family Association and Nancy Howes of Dennis.

The deeds arrived folded up in an antique spaghetti can. And they turned out to be a treasure, consisting of the earliest deeds to Sesuit Neck following the proprietors' division of the Common Lands of 1710. Most land there had been bought up by Jonathan Howes before 1730, and subsequent deeds divided the land to his heirs. Nearly all of these deeds had been lost when the Court House burned and they had not been re-recorded, and so had been lost to history.

The deeds were scanned, digitized, and the originals were returned to Mrs. Erickson in archival quality folders and notebooks. She also received an annotated transcription of them, as well as digital images on a CD. An additional transcription and CD was made available to the Howes Family Association.

The cost to DHS for this work? Three days of my time (I work cheap) and about \$40 in materials. The value to DHS and history? Immeasurable. Something we were sure had been lost was re-born.

Do you have any old family letters? Probate documents? Deeds? We can return them to you in better condition than we receive them, together with transcriptions and digital images. Better yet, we can return copies which look as good as the originals, and put the originals in the DHS Library where they will be kept available to the public in perpetuity.

Call us and see what we can do – and contribute to the preservation of our history.

Burt Derick

Mom Says, Always Wear Your Apron

After my mother died in 1952, I was cleaning out her house and came across one of her many homemade aprons on a hook next to the kitchen sink. In the apron pocket, along with a lace-edged handkerchief, I found a neatly folded \$1 bill.

An apron pocket seemed to me a strange place for my mother to tuck money – something that was always more or less scarce in our family. She certainly never wore her apron when she went shopping, so

it couldn't have been change from a purchase. With the obvious care with which the bill was folded, I am sure she had a special purpose for it. But what purpose? I had no idea.

I kept that \$1 bill in my desk for a long time. It carried too much sentiment for me to spend it. But, somewhere in the busy years between then and now, I lost track of it. I suspect it may be with the collection of family photo albums in my closet or was slipped into one of my folders of family records and is still there, waiting to be re-discovered.

Though I saved that \$1 bill, I didn't save the apron. I wish I had, because that apron also held many precious memories of my childhood. I wasn't old enough at the time to appreciate such memories. And I didn't save any of the other aprons neatly folded in her bureau drawer.

Actually, I have an apron she gave me in 1950 when I married and moved into my own house. It came along with that many-times echoed advice: "Always wear your apron." I confess, I almost never remembered to wear it. The thrifty habits of my mother's generation never did quite stick with me.

So, how historic are aprons? For instance, where can you buy one today? I called The Vermont Country Store in Rutland, Vermont, where you often can buy items that were common in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, but are no longer around. I talked with "Theresa," who was very helpful, but her search of their inventory came up empty. She said she remembered their having aprons in stock about 10 years ago, but none at present. She said they do have some jumpers and smocks with big pockets that are "a lot like an apron."

Theresa turned my question over to the store's research department and "Linda," who was also very helpful, called me back and said much the same as Theresa. "Old-fashioned aprons just don't sell anymore." She suggested I go online to www.tipnut.com, where she had found they offer free patterns for making a number of different styles of aprons. And so they do – 52 different styles.

This is all very interesting, but I should get to my point: On June 28, 2009, Jericho Historical Center in West Dennis will hold an open house Victorian Tea, featuring, among other things, an exhibit of "antique" aprons. We have located quite a few, but I'm sure there are a lot more out there in Dennis closets. If you have one – or more – that you would be willing to loan or donate for this exhibit, please let me know. If your apron has a story – and most of them do – that would be great also. My phone number is 508-398-8592. And my email is meleastman@aol.com (Some people have asked me what the "mel" stands for: Margaret E. Leach, my maiden name)

Peggy Eastman

Happy Birthday to DHS Founding Member, *Margaret Barker*, 105

Our Margaret and her husband, Roland, became members in 1963 when the Dennis Historical Society was formed. For a number of years Roland served as First or Second Vice President and occasionally as President Pro Tem of the society. He also chaired many committees within the society doing his best to give us a firm foundation. As any woman, and some men, too, knows behind every good man is an even better woman. There's no doubt Margaret was often a big help to Roland. Margaret served many years on the Friends of Jericho Committee. She also volunteered on other local committees.

The Dennis Historical Commission awarded the Boston Post Cane to Margaret in 2004 at a ceremony in Dennis Town Hall when she became the oldest resident in Dennis at age 100. She no longer volunteers but is happy to be home greeting friends and looking out at Bass River. Her eyes still twinkle when she laughs and her great sense of humor is 105 years young and ageing well. Margaret celebrated her 105th birthday on January 23rd. Best wishes for another good year, Margaret!

Phyllis Horton

Greetings can still be sent: P.O. Box 914, West Dennis MA 02670

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

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Non-profit
Organization
US POSTAGE
PAID
Permit No. 2
South Dennis,

Mark Your Calendars – Upcoming DHS Programs

Story Of The Shiverick Shipyard



Sunday March 15, 2009 ~ 2:00 p.m.

At Jacob Sears Library
23 Center St. East Dennis

Historian Brendan Joyce will present this fascinating era when the Shivericks built clipper ships that sailed the world.

Refreshments



www.dennishistsoc.org

Information ... 508-385-6492

Antique Appraisal Day

to be held at

ELDRED'S

ROBERT C. ELDRED CO., INC.
1483 Rt. 6A, P.O. Box 796
East Dennis, MA 02641

Tuesday March 17 10:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.

Donation: \$5 an item or \$10 for three (maximum)



Eldred's appraisers will provide verbal evaluations of your treasures.



Consignment of items for future auction is encouraged.

Please NO Jewelry
Coins and Stamps by appointment only - call 508-385-3116

To Benefit the
Dennis Historical Society
and the

Historical Society of Old Yarmouth
508-385-9308 Additional Information 508-362-3021