



# Dennis Historical Society Newsletter

Volume 36 No. 2

Send letters & stories to Dennis Historical Society, Box 607, S. Dennis 02660 or [pjhowes@verizon.net](mailto:pjhowes@verizon.net)  
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In the October Newsletter I promised to provide additional information on the Fisk family of West Dennis. While there were many Dennis vessel owners and Masters, this family left a very lasting impact on Dennis History and provides an excellent example of ship ownership of the period.

Pete Howes

## The Fisk Family<sup>1</sup>

“The Fisks were the sons of Captain Nathan Fisk (1803-1874). Captain Nathan was a fisherman and lived with his wife Polly Baker (1801-1884) and family in that part of West Dennis known as South Village. Nathan had an interest in the wharf which stretched out one hundred and fifty yards into Nantucket Sound from the west side of Swan Pond River. It was Nathan Fisk who built the first bridge across that river to Crocker's Neck. He was part-owner of a number of the fishing vessels which used the wharf and also sailed a packet schooner between West Dennis and Rhode Island ports.

Like most Dennis boys, the Fisk youngsters began their maritime careers early, going as cooks on the fishing vessels. The sea became their calling and all four had successful careers as master mariners. Each was elected to the Boston Marine Society and both Henry and Luther served a term as president of that prestigious fraternity. All four served the Union by transporting supplies to troops during the Civil War.

Captain Uriah B. Fisk (1828-1911), as the oldest, was first to learn the art of seamanship and he was the teacher of his younger brothers. He was injured while a young officer in command of the schooner *Port Jefferson*, when his vessel was in collision with a steamship in 1857. He continued going to sea until 1880, engaged for most of those years in coastal trading. After the Civil War, Captain Uriah began investing in a fleet of coastwise schooners, most of which were built in Maine. His vessels were well-known in West Dennis, as his brothers and neighbors were usually appointed their masters.

Captain Luther Fisk (1831-1897) had a shorter career at sea. He was given a captaincy when he was twenty-one, and retired at thirty-six. Among the vessels of which he had charge were schooners *Hill*, *Carter*, *L. Fisk*, *D. Fisk* and *Maggie Fisk*. After his retirement he continued to invest in vessels with his brothers. He was a selectman of the town and served in many other offices and was twice a representative to the state legislature.

Captain David Fisk (1838-1892) was the president and designer of the Riverside Trotting Park. His interest in horses was shared by his brothers. By the time he was ready to go to sea, the two older brothers were already investing in vessels. Captain David sailed for them until 1874, being in command of the *Henry N. Squire*, *Broadfield* and the *L. and D. Fisk*, among others. In addition to his interest in racing, Captain David also served the town as selectman and on several other committees.

Captain Henry Harrison Fisk (1843-1912) was a master mariner for fifteen years, beginning with his Civil War service. He had command and was part-owner with his brothers of the schooners *James Ford*, *Ann S. Brown*, *Cora* and *Henry H. Fisk*. He also served the town as a selectman and in other offices, both elected and appointed. Altogether, the Fisk brothers owned the controlling shares in twenty vessels and most were under the command of West Dennis men. Among these vessels were the schooners *Addie Blaisdell* under the charge of the Fisks' neighbor, Captain William Garfield (1829-1902) and the *James B. Pace*, of which Garfield's son John D. Garfield had command.”

## **The Schooner Era and the Fisk Family**

By the time that the Fisk Brothers of west Dennis created their own sailing fleet, three-masted schooners (better known as Tern schooners) were the vessel of choice for navigating the New England coastline. They were far more agile than the square-riggers that preceded and which were contemporary with

them during their earlier days. The square riggers were primarily employed in cross-ocean trips to the Pacific and Europe, bringing back a wide variety of goods that then were delivered up rivers and to smaller ports by the schooner fleet.

At some time in the 1870's the company W. B. Fisk & Brothers was formed, as they are listed as such in the reference to the schooner *Oler*, below. The period leading up to the building of the *Maggie Fisk* in 1869 and followed by the contracts to build four vessels in 1872 was one of swift growth and change in the massive Bath ME shipbuilding industry as well. The Fisk Brothers had seen the economic upturn and were building a fleet to capitalize on great need for the transportation of goods. Schooners rapidly came to be the mainstay of marine cargo transportation following their introduction to this continent, and the launching dates of the Fisk fleet corresponded to the rapid rise of the schooner era that reached its peak of vessel production in Bath ME in 1882.

While the following list does not provide the full extent of the Fisk & Brothers fleet, these ships, all three-masted schooners, were the product of the Bath and West Bath Maine shipbuilding concerns and are all listed associated with the name Fisk at the time of launching:

**The Fisk Fleet Built in Bath and West Bath, Maine<sup>2</sup>**

NAME	YEAR	TONS	MASTER	BUILDER	OWNER	PORT
Maggie A. Fisk	1869	418	Uriah B. Fisk	Daniel O. Blaisdell	Daniel O. Blaisdell	Bath
Alfred W Fisk	1872	395	Elihu Kelley	Guy C. Goss	Elihu Kelley	Providence
Henry H. Fisk	1872	259	Henry W. Fiske	Geo. M. Adams	Adams & Hitchcock	Bath
L. & D. Fisk	1872	248	C. F. Baker	Alexander Robinson	Alexander Robinson	Bath
Uriah B. Fisk	1872	513	Uriah B. Fisk	Daniel O. Blaisdell	Daniel O. Blaisdell	Bath
Kate M. Hilton	1873	538	Henry H. Fiske	Adams & Hitchcock	Adams & Hitchcock	Bath
W. H. Oler	1880	693	F. Crowell 3 <sup>rd</sup>	Daniel O. Blaisdell	Uriah B. Fisk	Dennis
Addie Blaisdell	1868	373	Uriah B. Fisk	Daniel O. Blaisdell	J. D. Robinson	

Note: *Fisk & Fiske* are used interchangeably in Baker<sup>3</sup>

These vessels, while named for the Fisk brothers, were owned and financed by others usually through the issuance of shares, with the managing owner of record being the person who was the largest share owner. The planning and effort to contract for and build four schooners in a single year must have represented a major investment risk by the Fisk Brothers.

The almost flood of multi-masted schooners built by the various shipyards along the Kennebec River in Maine began with the launching of the three-masted *Addie Blaisdell*, above, built by Daniel O. Blaisdell in 1868. Notably, it was the *first three-masted schooner* that was built without square sails at Bath. In addition to her managing owner, James Robinson of Bath, Captain Uriah B. Fisk of West Dennis and thirteen others held shares in her. Three years later Daniel O. Blaisdell also built the second three-masted schooner without square sails, the 417 ton *Maggie A. Fisk*, also with Uriah Fisk as her master.

In July 1887, the *Blaisdell*, which had her port in Dennis, and Captained by J. L. Crowell of Dennis, was “wrecked on Frying Pan Shoals off the North Carolina coast while southbound with a cargo of coal from Philadelphia and Charleston, South Carolina. Valued at \$41,000, the *Addie Blaisdell* was then owned by Captains Crowell and Fisk...”<sup>4</sup>

“The W. H. Oler was Mr. Daniel Orrin Blaisdell’s last vessel, which he sold to W. B. Fisk & Brothers of Dennis Mass for \$34,000 a few days before his death on 4 October 1880 at the age of 47. He had built ships from 1861 to 1880”.<sup>5</sup>

**Notes**

<sup>1</sup>Reid, pp 520, 521 <sup>2</sup>Baker, Appendix A, Years 1860-1880 <sup>3</sup>In Baker’s book, the names are listed as *Fisk(e)*, *Fiske* or *Fisk*. The painting by Stubbs that is hanging in the Jericho Historical Center clearly ends this ambiguity, and the name Fisk is used throughout except in sections quoted from a particular work. <sup>4</sup> Baker, pp 673 <sup>5</sup> Baker, pp 519

**We Need A Mulberry Tree(s)!**

Our Dennis Mulberry trees all hark back to those returned from China by Captains who wanted to start a silk business on Cape Cod. Do you have a Mulberry tree to donate to the Manse? Our Grand Old Lady has seen better days, and we would like to add one or more of these historic trees. Contact Nancy Howes 508 385-3528

***Dennis Source Records, Vol. 2: Annals of South Dennis by Burton N. Derick***  
**Seth Weldon Collection, 1841-06-23, Indenture**

This Indenture Witnesseth, That the undersigned Directors of the House for the Employment and Reformation of Juvenile Offenders in the City of Boston, County of Suffolk, and Commonwealth of Massachusetts, by authority of an Act of the Legislature of this Commonwealth, entitled "An Act concerning Juvenile Offenders in the City of Boston," passed on the fourth day of March, 1826, have placed, and by these presents do place and **bind out Thomas W Johnson** a minor, unto **Seth T. Wheldon of Dennis** in the County of **Barnstable** and Commonwealth aforesaid as an **Apprentice**, to be by **him** employed and **him** to serve from the date hereof until he the said **Thomas W. Johnson** shall arrive at the age of **twenty One** years, to wit: the **first** day of **March** one thousand eight hundred and **forty seven** And the said **Seth T Whelden** doth hereby promise, covenant and agree to teach the said **Thomas** or cause him to be taught, to read, write, and cipher, and give, or cause to be given, proper moral and religious instruction; and also the art of **farming & Navigation** And the said **Seth** doth further promise, covenant and agree, to pay the said **Thomas** when he shall arrive at the age of **twenty one** years, the sum of **One hundred dollars** and that he will provide the said **Thomas** with sufficient food, apparel, and all other necessaries, both in sickness and in health, during the time aforesaid; and that at the expiration thereof, that he will furnish the said **Thomas** with two full suits of good clothes, one for the Sabbath, and the other for working days. Also, that the said **Seth** shall present said **Thomas** to the Directors of said House, immediately preceding or at the time said **Thomas** is of lawful age; and in case said **Seth and Thomas** for any cause which may be deemed sufficient and reasonable to the Directors, cannot appear as before stated; he the said **Seth** further promises and agrees, within thirty days from the time said **Thomas** is of lawful age, to furnish said Directors with a certificate from the selectmen of the town in which he resides, certifying that the said **Seth** has fulfilled all the conditions of this indenture; and the said **Seth** further promises to give or cause to be given to the said Directors, written information, at least once in each year, relative to the health, character, and well-being of said **Thomas W Johnson** And for neglecting to fulfil any of the above named conditions, he the said Seth T Whelden further covenants to pay said Directors, the sum of one hundred dollars.

**In Witness Thereof**, the Directors aforesaid, and the said **Seth T Whelden** to this, and one other instrument of the same tenor and date, have set their hands and seals, this **twenty third** day of **June** in the year of our Lord, one thousand eight hundred and **forty One**

*Signed, sealed and delivered*

*in presence of*

Sparrow Crane

Seth T Whelden Signed in

presence of

Willis Howes

Henry K Loring

[On back]

this may Certify Whom it May or doth Consern that it tis Agread between Seth T Whelden and Thomas W. Johnson that the Said Thomas Agrees to Pay Said Seth fifty Dollars on the first Day of January A1847 it being for His time and Compensation Said Seth was to Pay Him when Said Thomas Arives at the Age of Twenty one years -

Said Seth Agrees to Board Said Thomas washing and Mending for him untill the first Day of March A 1847  
As witness our Hands

Jno. L. Dimmock

John D. Fisher

Henry D. Gray

Samuel G. Howes

W<sup>m</sup> Parsons

Jas C Wild

Seth T Whelden

Seth T Whelden

Thomas. W. Johnson

South Dennis 7th february A1846

***Kap'n Kezzie's Komments:***

- *Some days you're the bug, other days you're the windshield.*
- *Suppose you were an idiot. And suppose you were a member of Congress. But then I repeat myself. -- Mark Twain*

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### **Bits 'n Pieces – March 1963 – from The Dennis-Yarmouth Register:**

- 3/01: All 5 villages continue to report “local” activities. The reporters by village:  
Dennis – Ina B. Howes; Dennis Port – Mrs. Edward P. Chase; East Dennis – Helen B. Richardson;  
South Dennis – Gladys Kelley; West Dennis – Marion A. Tiernan.
- 3/08: “Mrs. Mary Crowell, widow of Prince Crowell, will celebrate her 100<sup>th</sup> birthday Friday.”  
Town Meeting voted to pay \$50,000 (over 10 years) for 90 ft. of beach frontage on Inman Rd.,  
D’port.
- 3/15: POLIO CLINICS: “Sabin Oral Vaccine to be distributed to adults & pre-school age children on  
Mar. 20; school age children will receive theirs in school at a later date.”
- 3/29 Dennis Water District, on March 20, voted to take by eminent domain 53 acres of land on Airline  
Rd., So. Dennis for a well field.

#### **Famous Events from other sources:**

- 03/05/1963 - **Patsy Kline** country music superstar dies in a plane crash.  
03/12/1963 - **Beatles** perform as a trio, John Lennon ill with a cold.  
03/15/1963 – Recital by **William Warfield** to take place on March 19<sup>th</sup> in Hyannis.  
03/21-1963 – **Alcatraz** Island penitentiary closes.

#### **Famous People born in March 1963:**

- 03/18/1963 – Vanessa Williams; 03/20/1963 – Kathy Ireland; 03/29/1963 – Elle Macpherson.  
June Howes

Wednesday, March 20, 2:00–4:00 P.M. “**Old Houses of Dennis**”  
An Illustrated lecture by *Burt Derick* and *Phyllis Horton*.  
Also introducing DHS’s new publication ---- “**The Gazetteer of Dennis**”  
West Dennis Library, 260 Main Street, West Dennis