

DEDICATION

In November, when we spoke of ForeFather's Day, I promised to dedicate an issue of the newsletter to the "ForeMothers" without whom the Founding Fathers of our land would not have been able to establish a stable settlement. This month in which Mother's Day occurs seems a good month to do this. "Woman's work is never done", was never a more appropriate saying than in the colonial era, when everything that a family required was provided at home. The job description for the colonial housewife is awesome. She must be able to cook over an open fire, as well as keeping that fire going. She must grow much of the food she cooks, and all of the herbs that are used for medicines. She must tend the poultry flock, the cow or goats and the brick oven in which the bread is baked. In addition to food, she must grow, process, spin and weave all of the materials for clothing and household linens, make candles, soap, butter and cheese, turn wild game into a palatable meal, preserve any excess food for winter. All of this and much much more must be accomplished while rocking a cradle with one foot, nursing the second youngest, teaching letters and knitting to the next youngest. She was also expected to produce another young one to feed and clothe every two years of her child-bearing life. Small wonder that most colonial men had two or more wives in their lifetime. When next you push buttons, turn knobs and set automatic timers to set your modern kitchen into action while you dash to the supermarket, think with respect of these nameless women, whose only memorial is in the memory of their descendants.

A PURE AMERICAN FOLK ART

Mr. Arnold Lett gave D H S members a glimpse into the New England whaling industry as he spoke of the development of the art of scrimshandering. He called this art form, which reached its peak of development aboard New England whaling ships, one of only two genuine original American folk art forms, the other being American Indian art. He also gave us some thoughts to ponder concerning the origin of the name Scrimshaw, and some popular sayings which he believes have been woven into the fabric of the vernacular from this art. Our thanks to Mr. Lett for an enlightening evening. Incidentally, women can take some credit for this painstaking work. Most of the scrimshaw was inspired by a longing for home, and intended for the women left behind.

TABLET TO BE DEDICATED

The Josiah Dennis Manse House Committee recently voted to place a tablet in the keeping room at the Manse to honor the memory of Esther Howes, who was from its beginning the heart and soul of this important historic restoration. Through the kindness of Mr. Harry Van Ides-tine, a former resident of Dennis, who like many of us, has fond memories of "Miss Esther", a beautiful bronze tablet has been secured. It will be dedicated at a brief ceremony at the Manse on Sunday, May 31, 3-5 P.M. The public is most cordially invited to attend the dedica-tion at 3 and refreshments will follow.

D H S has received a donation in Mrs. Howes' memory from the Christmas Tree committee of Dennis and will use it to purchase and plant a holly tree on the Manse grounds.

A VIKING IN RESIDENCE

Our thanks to Eric Andersen for sharing his knowledge of Viking explorations and retel-ling the Viking sagas for a delighted group at the Jericho house. We are grateful to have members who are willing to share their special knowledge with us, and hope to have other programs of this type.

TRACING OUR ROOTS

This year the D H S Board has decided to celebrate the town's birthday by paying a visit to our mother town. A Bruncheon will be enjoyed at the Colonial House Inn on Route 6A in Yarmouthport, and will be preceded by the opportunity to explore the historic area around the Inn. Yarmouth was incorporated in 1639 and included all of Dennis until the towns separated in 1793. Although many of the old-comers chose to live in what became the East Precinct, now Dennis, the first church was in Yarmouth, near the Ancient Cemetery, and most of the town's business was conducted there. There are many interesting things to see and do around the Inn, including a visit to the Bangs Hallett house, home of the Old Yarmouth Historic Society. We hope you will take in all the sights, and enjoy a fine meal with us as we commemorate the es-tablishment of the town of Dennis in 1793. The menu includes a choice of ham & cheese quiche, cream of mushroom crepe or creamed chicken, as well as ham, fresh fruit and juices.

Cocktails will be served at 12:30 P.M., including the specialties of the house, Bloody Marys, Champagne Cocktails or Mimosa, for \$1 each. Cost for the luncheon is \$6.50 (which in-cludes admission to the Bangs Hallett house and Winslow Crocker house). Reservations must be made, and should include your check and self-addressed, stamped envelope.

BIRTHDAY PARTY RESERVATIONS JUNE 14 COLONIAL HOUSE INN

Please make reservations for _____ people.

I enclose \$ _____ @ \$6.50 per person.

Enclose a self-addressed, stamped envelope and send to:

Mr. Joshua Crowell
P.O. Box 963
Dennis, MA 02638

CALENDAR

- May is planting time. Watch the oak leaves, and don't plant your beans and corn until they are as big as a mouse's ear.
- May 27 Program; Panel on Old King's Highway Regional Historic District
7:30 P.M. Carleton Hall
- May 31 3-5 P.M. Dedication of tablet at Josiah Dennis Manse, in honor of Esther Howes.
- June 14 Birthday Luncheon, Colonial House Inn. Reservations necessary. See Article.
Also of interest to DHS Members... Bus tour to Rockport and Gloucester, including the Saugus Ironworks and Hammond Castle. June 16. Cost \$20.00. Call 394-5739.
- NOTE: June 1-5 and 8. Ezra Baker Field Trips.

NATIONAL HISTORIC PRESERVATION MONTH IS MAY

Our May program will emphasize historic preservation. A panel of speakers, including Henry Kelley II, Jack Clarke, and Robert MacPhee will discuss the Old King's Highway Regional Historic District, which the recent Special Town Meeting voted overwhelmingly to retain. They will put forth some of the proposals for modification and management of this, the largest regional historic district in the country. We will also hear of the proposal to place this district on the National Register of Historic Places, a move which would have many advantages for property owners, especially of commercial property. We hope many will attend and learn about one of our towns most precious and fragile assets, our visual historic heritage.

THE STREETS OF OUR TOWN

One of the more time-consuming occupations of early Cape women was raising flax and putting it through the more than a dozen processes by which it was prepared for spinning into linen thread. The colonies encouraged flax cultivation as a cash crop and for domestic use, in order to lessen the dependence on importation of clothing. Spinning bees were an important social gathering, as the small wheel could easily be carried to a neighbor's for a day's sociability. In our town, we have a Flax Street on the north side, near the Yarmouth border, and a Flax Pond in the same neighborhood. Flax grew wild around ponds, but perhaps its name derives from its use in an important step in flax production, that of flushing the cut flax in the running water of the streams leading into ponds. Scargo Lake was called Flax Pond on the map of 1834 and is referred to by that name in many early deeds, although the hill seems to have been always referred to as Scargo. Many towns on the Cape have a Flax Pond, but Dennis also has a street which recalls this important crop of yesteryear, Flax Street, one of the Streets of our Town.

WHAT'S IN A NAME - PART II

Just a quick addition to our item on Cape Cod names, this time in the feminine gender. Family names were as important for the girls as for the boys, and after many generations there were many Susan Bakers, or Mary Howes, much to local genealogists dismay. In an effort to identify a particular Mary or Susan, a young bride would be identified by adding her husband's given name to hers. Kirk and Fran Brown live in a home once presided over by Susie Seth, wife of Seth Baker. When my uncle Fredson married Edith Ellis she became known as Edith Fredson, and still is lovingly so-called by family and friends. I do not know whether this is common in other parts of New England, but the custom has long been part of the colorful speech of Cape Cod.

THOSE WHO GO DOWN TO THE SEA IN SHIPS

We think of Iron Men when we think of our Golden age of wooden ships. But not all those who went to sea were men. Women who were lucky enough to marry the Master of a vessel had an alternative to anxious loneliness while their men were on their long voyages. They could go along. Quarters were cramped, privacy was non-existent, food was monotonous, but at least the uncomfortable conditions were shared. I have a list, compiled by local historians in 1941, of 141 women of the town of Dennis who chose to share the hazards of the ocean rather than remain at home. I will share some of their adventures with you from time to time as space permits. If you know any tales, will you share them with me?

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