

#### ONE MAN'S VIEW FROM A LOFTY PLACE

Parnassus is the name of a mountain peak in Greece. It is also the name of a book store in Yarmouthport, of which Ben Muse is proprietor. (I would like to say he is curator for Parnassus is more than an ordinary book store.) Mount Parnassus was known to the ancients as the home of the Muses. Mr. Muse is certainly very much at home in the world of books, and will tell us about rare books and books about Cape Cod at our May meeting on May 12, 7:30 P.M. at Carleton Hall. Please come, and bring your questions.

#### IT'S BIRTHDAY TIME

As the town gets nearer and nearer to her 200th birthday (1993) your Historical Society Board becomes increasingly aware that there is no comprehensive history of Dennis. However, through efforts of many, much of that history is being explored and recorded. One group which has done some intensive research is the East Dennis Ladies Aid. This winter they researched the history of the Shiverick Shipyard and presented it to their group. We have the pleasure of hearing about this fascinating chapter in our past at the Birthday Luncheon on June 20th. This annual event will be held appropriately at the Dennis Yacht Club on the shores of Sesuit Harbor, where, from 1849-1863 the Shivericks built the only Clipper Ships to Cape Cod's credit. Weather permitting, we will also walk along the harbor to the site of the shipyard and try to imagine how it looked in those busy, exciting days. A brunchon will be served, and price and menu will be announced in our next edition. In the meantime, save the date for another pleasant and informative day.

#### A WALK (AND A TRIP BY CANOE) UP HERRING RIVER

Mr. and Mrs. John White of Dennisport charmed us with their delightful pictures and poetic narrative description of this neighboring river. This is a perfect season of the year to view it yourself, so if you missed the slides, you may view the scene first hand. A canoe is a help, but many of the beauty spots can be seen afoot. Wear your boots! Thanks to Mr. and Mrs. White for a well-done show.

#### A FINAL CHAPTER ON OUR SCHOOLS

I will tell you this time about 2 schools - the oldest and the newest in our town. Each will be the site of an interesting community event this month, but there any similarity ends. The newest of our town's schools was built in 1969 on 35 acres of typical Cape woodlands. The school is built for about 600 pupils, and is surrounded by athletic fields, which are reached by walking along trails edged with huckleberry bushes. The school was named for Nathaniel Hawes Wixon, who in his lifetime served this community well, especially on the School Committee. Annual Town Meeting will be held in the auditorium of the Wixon Middle School at 7 P.M. on May 4. Than Wixon will be there in spirit, if not in person. A fine portrait of this man hangs in the school, watching over the children he loved, as well as over the deliberations of the citizens of the town he served.

The oldest school in Dennis is the West Schoolhouse, which now stands on the grounds of the Manse. Built in 1771, this one-room structure served the neighborhood known as District 14 until the large graded school was built near the Union Church in 1859. The school boasts of no facilities whatsoever, save only a large fireplace, which probably didn't even keep the ink from freezing, never mind the children. Since it was moved to the Manse in 1974, the committee has seen to its restoration and is planning to hold a dedication on the last weekend of May. Part of the room is set up like a typical 18th century district school, and part is devoted to an exhibit of early school equipment, and pictures of other old Dennis schools and classes. Check your attic and see if you can add to our collection. You are all invited to the dedication, so whether it be at Wixon for town meeting, or the Old West School for tea and goodies, "See you at school!"

#### MAY WEATHER

Speaking of Town Meeting, I recently treated myself to a visit with Mr. Dean S. Sears, who was Town Moderator for 24 years. It happened that the visit took place soon after the April storm. Mr. Sears told me that he had seen snow in April before, and even in May, but nothing like the April Blizzard of 1982. However, he did recall that in May of 1918 the town had experienced a tornado! As he remembered it, the twister came out of an ominous black northwest sky, and touched down in East Dennis. He counted fourteen chimneys which were knocked down, as well as several trees. The funnel then lifted up and traveled cross Cape, where it settled down again, uprooting all of the large trees which lined the Main Street of Harwichport, before heading out across the Sound. So hang on to your hats, folks, May may have a weather surprise for us, too.

## CALENDAR

### MAY IS NATIONAL HISTORIC PRESERVATION MONTH

- May 1 Gypsy Moth caterpillars scheduled to begin munching. Do you have your birdhouse yet?
- May 4 7 P.M. - Wixon Middle School - Annual Town Meeting
- May 12 7:30 P.M. - Carleton Hall - Mr. Ben Muse will speak on Rare Books.  
NOTE: Board will meet at 6:30 P.M. at the Hall.
- May 23 2-4 P.M. - 50th Anniversary Alumni Tea at Ezra H. Baker School
- May - last weekend. Dedication of the Old West School House
- June 7-11 - Ezra H. Baker School Field Trips to Historic Centers
- June 20 Noon - Birthday Luncheon and Shiverick Program at Dennis Yacht Club  
Check the June Newsletter for menu and reservations

#### THE BELLE OF THE WEST REBORN

Although not the fastest of the Shiverick vessels, The Belle of the West is generally conceded to have been the loveliest. Designed by Samuel Hartt Pook of Boston, Captain Thomas F. Hall has said of her: "She was, in my opinion, the finest specimen of naval architecture ever seen. Every line in her hull was grace and beauty." It is awesome to recall that this ship, built by the craftsmen of East Dennis and manned by East Dennis mariners, was once the pride of the entire American Merchant Marine - and this in an era when American Clipper ships were acknowledged to lead the world in beauty, swiftness, and seaworthiness. This clipper did much to enrich the town, for it was owned in shares by many of the townspeople, as was the custom of the times. Each shareholder held a fractional share in the vessel and its profits, so that not only was the income from the ship widely shared, but also the risk of an unprofitable voyage. Dennis citizens once again have an opportunity to be share holders in the Belle of the West. Well-known model maker James White of South Dennis has created a 1/78 scale model of Belle, using the hull plans owned by Mrs. Fischler, a Shiverick descendant, and the rigging and sale plans owned by Mr. Dean Sears. D.H.S. is offering shares in this model to Dennis citizens, each share of 1/192 costing \$10 to buy. This effort may prove to be the beginning of a collection of models, ship paintings and other artifacts and documents which will illustrate the maritime history of this town. You can purchase a share at the Dennis Town Meeting, or at the May 12th meeting of D.H.S. Stock certificates can also be purchased by mail. Send your check to D.H.S. at P. O. Box 607, South Dennis, MA 02660. By investing in the acquisition of this lovely model, you will be joining in the maritime heritage of a legion of Dennis citizens who, in the Golden Age of Sail, built, manned and owned the most beautiful and romantic vessels ever to sail the seas.

#### STREETS OF OUR TOWN

May is National Preservation Month. Here on Cape Cod it is also the month when the tourist business flexes its muscles and prepares for the vacation rush. So it is appropriate that this month's street leads to an historic landmark, preserved and recycled as a prime vacation spot. Lighthouse Road, in earlier days was simply the road to the shore, where small dories and lighters landed to load and unload cargoes from the large vessels moored in the Deep Hole port at the east end of Dogfish Shoal. Small schooners and sloops sailed in and out of Bass River and docked at the many wharves which extended from both banks of the river. The only navigational aid to all of this activity was a lantern hung in the upper window of Warren Crowell's home near the Fingers off West Dennis beach. But in 1855 the U. S. Government constructed and opened the Bass River Light, which it maintained until the ship canal was built in 1914. Now tastefully remodeled, the Lighthouse is one of Dennis' landmark resorts. So, the street is still appropriately called Lighthouse Road, one of the Streets of Our Town.

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