



HE THAT PLANTETH A TREE.....

Like many of you, my spouse and I are planning to plant some trees this spring. The act was made necessary by Hurricane Bob, which upturned our locusts and snapped off or blew down the grove of white pine which kept the birds nesting in our yard. In fact, as the old Cape Cod saying goes, "It blew down trees that had never been blown down before." Since what might have been available as landscaping money in the budget was used to remove debris, we have opted to set out some seedlings by ourselves. The seedlings are about the size of a petunia. It will be a long time before any birds will nest in our new grove of evergreens. The poets remind us that whoever plants trees, plants for his descendants.

"He that planteth a tree...provideth a kindness for many generations,
And faces that he hath not seen will bless him."

By the size of these plants, we're talking great-great grandchildren here! There is a great deal of truth, however, in these words, written by Henry Van Dyke. Very soon, all of us who live in Dennis will have occasion to be grateful to a man whose face most of us have never seen, nor he ours. The ornamental cherry trees which were planted around town about 1957 will soon be in full blossom. Their beauty is enhanced, it seems, by the very short time in which they are in bloom. Then we must watch the petals fall like pink snow in the greening grass, and hold the beauty of the trees in memory only. Many of the ornamental cherry trees in Dennis were planted by George B. Ellis of Dennis Port. There are some folks still in town who remember him, and we are very grateful to Josh Crowell and Phyllis Robbins Horton who recently sat with Mr. Bartlett Sears of South Dennis and reminisced about Mr. Ellis. George was born in Brockton because his father, a native Cape Codder, had gone there to work in a shoe factory. When he was just a youngster, the family moved back to the Cape. He was educated in Cape schools and started out his adult life keeping a livery stable, just over the Harwich line on Route 28, across from where the Friendly's is today. It would be a few years before automobiles would come to Cape Cod. George had the mail contract and met the train with his team of horses at the North Harwich Depot (which served Dennis Port) each day. Summer times, he carried passengers to the luxurious Belmont Hotel, also just across the line in Harwich, where the Belmont condominiums have been built in recent years. But times do change and we must change with them. Automobiles were replacing horses, so George moved over into Dennis Port and went to work selling cars. He and his family lived in a house which stood about where the Dennis Port Post Office stands today, and as was true of most folks, however else employed, he kept pigs, cows, and chickens. In 1937 he was elected Tree Warden and Gypsy Moth Superintendent which meant he was responsible for the town forest, for the replanting of trees along the roads and for spraying to protect against gypsy and brown tail moths. Some of us remember a few years back when these same moths were a menace here. Environmentalists were pleading with us to suffer the infestation and wait for it to run its course, rather than endanger ourselves by spraying with insecticides. In 1937 the only method for the destruction of gypsy moths was arsenic or lead spray. Incidentally, George lived to be 90 years of age. It is not, however, for his fight against the destructive moth that we remember him. Like most town officials of his day, George had a small budget, and did the best he could with what he had. The trees which were planted along our town's streets in any given year reflected the best buy the tree warden could find. About the year 1957, Tree Warden Ellis found a very good buy in ornamental Japanese cherry trees. So he bought them. He set several out in each village, some in front of the Town Hall, some at Ezra H. Baker School, some at the new fire station in Dennis Village. George knew that new trees needed water, and so he personally carried barrels of water around town that year, to insure that the trees would survive. In fact, Josh Crowell tells us that George planted the trees at the #2 Fire Station on condition that the fire men (principally Josh himself) would guarantee that they'd be watered weekly.

There's a pleasant sequel to this tale. After the trees were planted, George had one small one left, which he planted in his own front yard on the corner of Mill Street and Main, Dennis Port. It grew there and was enjoyed until the lot was cleared to make way for the present post office and business block. Then the tree and whatever else was on the lot was removed, in the name of progress. Phyllis Robbins Horton, who with her sister Lois has an annual spring ritual which she calls the George B. Ellis Memorial Drive, going around our town to view the cherry trees, told Post Master Richard Rudow about the tree that once stood near the Post Office. As a result, Mr. Rudow has planted an ornamental cherry tree in front of the parking lot, for all the Dennis Port customers to enjoy. George B. Ellis was reelected annually by the voters of Dennis from 1937 until he retired from the position in 1961. The town report of that year says: "Mr. George B. Ellis, who has served the town faithfully for over a quarter of a century as Tree Warden, is retiring this year. His frequent visits at the town hall will be greatly missed, as he always came and left with a smile and was greatly interested in the town." That's as fine a tribute as any one could have. A new generation of Dennis residents will soon be enjoying the legacy of beauty left to us by this public servant, livery stable owner, car salesman, lover of beautiful trees. Thank you, Mr. Ellis, and bless you.

CALENDAR

May 5 7:00 P.M. Dennis Annual Town Meeting at Wixon School.
May 13 7:30 P.M. DHS Board meeting at Josiah Dennis Manse.
May 19 Dennis Election Day. Remember to vote!
May 30 9:00 A.M. Lady Slipper Walk on the Indian Lands in South Dennis. Please make
10:30 A.M. reservations with the Natural Resources Office at Town Hall Meet
at the Town Hall parking lot.

HATS OFF TO OUR JOHNNY

Congratulations to our 84-year-old superstar Johnny Kelley of East Dennis for finishing his 61st Boston Marathon--and best of luck in your retirement and with your new book!

WE NEED A NEW DUNCE STOOL

Our 1770 school house at the Josiah Dennis Manse needs a dunce stool. We had to return the one that was on loan. It does not need to be old--just look old. The dunce stool was an important part of the colonial school as it kept unruly students in line. If you have a suitable stool in your garage or attic and would be willing to donate it to the school house we'd love to have it. Our school program for the 3rd grade begins on May 28 and we would appreciate having it in time for that. Call 385-3689 or 385-3528. Thank you!

CARLETON HALL WHALE WATCH

Robert Prescott, Director of the Audubon Sanctuary in Wellfleet entertained a full house very nicely at Carleton Hall with his lively, informative slide show on whales and turtles. Our next whale watch trip will be much more interesting with what we learned from Bob. Thanks to Gertrude Lailey for another great program.

TOWN MEETING TRIVIA

This is the last annual town meeting before our Bicentennial. I understand that the Selectmen will issue a proclamation about our Bicentennial celebration, and it will certainly be a landmark occasion. There are some long standing traditions about our town meetings which most voters are not aware of--and this is the stuff of which newsletter articles are made. I know that all of you voters remember that the flag to which we pledge allegiance is an antique 13 star flag, used at the launching of a brig to be commanded by Captain Bernard O'Neil of West Dennis, sometime about 1860. Surely you remember that the podium behind which the moderator stands has upon its front face a carving representing our town seal, a work of art created by Mr. Robert Cummings, Sr. of Dennis Port, and recently restored by Mr. Odd Lilyhou. But there are other traditional trappings of which you may not be aware. For instance, have you ever noticed that the materials which the Town Clerk requires to make this an official town meeting are carried to the meeting place in an old-fashioned grocery basket? Many of the town's registered voters have perhaps never seen one of these traditional baskets first hand. They date back to the days when shoppers left a grocery order with their local store, and within a short time, the order was filled and delivered to the customer, carried not in "paper or plastic", but in a well-woven grocery basket. Gerard Chapman was Town Clerk and Treasurer from 1946 to 1975. He lived across the street from the C. L. Goodspeed Store. Mr. Lovell Goodspeed kept one of the better known local stores in town, and was also post master for the village of Dennis. His store is now the flower shop. One year at town meeting time, Gerard asked his neighbor, Mr. Goodspeed, if he had a basket that Mr. Chapman could use to tote the record books and voter registration lists which he needed to conduct Town business in an orderly fashion. Apparently Mr. Goodspeed could, for the basket still in use today has Mr. Goodspeed's identification on the handle. Although Mr. Chapman and Mr. Goodspeed no longer contribute the wisdom of their experience to our deliberations, Town Clerk Elinor Slade proudly carries that self-same basket to our town meetings today, and will be happy to show it to any one interested in antiquities.

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

Non-Profit Organization U. S. POSTAGE PAID Permit No. 2 So. Dennis, MA 02660
--

