## DENNIS HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

Vol. 18 No. 5 May 1995 Compiled and Edited by Phyllis Robbins Horton



### AUNT SOPHIE

Deadbeat Dads and Disappearing Husbands that occasionally make headlines in our newspapers---a product of our present day society? Not exactly. From time to time in years past a Cape Cod mariner who visited many other ports around the world would become smitten by some comely young maiden or an exotic way of life and decide to just stay there and start a new life. The fact that they had a wife and family at home didn't seem to weigh too heavily on them as they settled into their new surroundings. Quite often they would arrange to have word sent back here they they had been lost at sea, or just disappeared. Sometimes nothing was heard, they simply vanished. Imagine the plight of a woman left in that situation. If she had young children she would have to find some way to provide for a meager existence. I'm sure she would try to find out more of the circumstances surrounding her husband's disappearance. After exhausting the usual avenues of information a wife in the latter half of the 1800's, early 1900's might turn to "Aunt Sophie". Sophia Ann Kelley was born in Dennis Port on June 17, 1830, daughter of Bangs and Priscilla Kelley. She was a sister of Laura Ann Kelley Crowell (in last month's newsletter) and they lived across from each other. Sophia married Horace Chase of Harwich in 1849 and they built a house still standing with a For Sale sign on it on the northwest corner of Upper County Road and Depot Street on land obtained from her father. Aunt Sophie was a medium. could find things that were lost--including lost husbands. If she had a piece of clothing or lock of hair she could tell if the person was still living or not--and if so, quite often she could say where they might be found. One man with "Lost At Sea" on his gravestone was said by Aunt Sophie to be living in a southern city--and he was!--with a whole new wife and family. She was able to tell searchers where to look for a child who had strayed into the woods and was lost overnight. Imagine the joy in those parents hearts when she told the searchers where to look. She helped a Dennis Port woman find her wedding ring that had slipped off while she was gardening. Many others sought her advise regarding their losses—even lost love. In addition to her deducing powers she made and dispensed herbal medicines--including love potions. I've never heard if those really worked but a number of young people were known to have visited her seeking a way to attract their true love. My mother told me she was equally famous for making those medicines as she was as a medium, especially an elixir called "Aunt Sophie's Bitters". I believe it was some kind of a spring tonic that was supposed to cure just about anything that might be wrong with a person. Mother said 'bitter' was the exact description of it. She was given some when she was young and could still remember the taste of it 60 years later. It must have worked. She only remembered having it that one time. Perhaps she was "cured" instantly to forestall the chance of Grandma giving her a second dose.

Ninety-five year old Edward Chase of Dennis Port and Florida remembers being "scared"

Ninety-five year old Edward Chase of Dennis Port and Florida remembers being "scared to death" of her. He said the kids called her a witch woman. One day he, Gwendolyn and Virginia Phillips were walking past Aunt Sophie's house, keeping a wary eye out, when she called them into her yard. They were afraid to go, but even more afraid not to—as they thought she might put a spell on them. When they got to her house she showed them different kinds of herbs and explained what each one was and what they were used for. The fact they were in close proximity to her without dire consequences did little to dispell the tall tales that kids love to pass along to other kids and for a number of years after her death those tales got taller and taller. Aunt Sophie died in 1918 at age 88 and even when I was growing up in Dennis Port 20 years later we walked on the other side of the street with a sense of foreboding as we passed the dark, empty house overgrown with lilaces that we still called "Aunt Sophie's".

## THANKS TO BOB PRESCOTT

Reservations by June 2nd.

A full house at Jacob Sears Memorial Library heard Robert Prescott speak about seals. Bob is Director of the Audubon Society Wellfleet Wildlife Sanctuary. He gave a narrated slide show in the gray and harbor seals that are so prevalent on our beaches in the winter. He also told about a research trip he went on to Antartica and showed the different kinds of seals found in the southern hemisphere. A lively question and answer period afterward showed that our members have a great interest in seals. An overflowing refreshment table that was rapidly depleted showed that they also appreciate the board member's culinary arts. Thanks to Gertrude Lailey for another fine program.

TOLO DIDOUDAY OTHER AGAIN
IT'S BIRTHDAY TIME AGAIN
It seems like "just the other day" I was writing the article for the 1994 Birthday
Dinner and here it is time to do it again. We'll assemble below decks at the Lighthouse Inn
on June 9 for some social enjoyment at 5:00 P.M. and dinner upstairs overlooking beautiful
Nantucket Sound at 6:00. This will be the 15th time the Stone Family has hosted our June
birthday party and we are delighted with our long-standing association. Gertrude Lailey is
looking for some special entertainment and I'm sure we'll all be pleased with her selection.
The reservation form is below. Fill it out and send it to Josh. See you there!
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202nd BIRTHDAY DINNER RESERVATIONS JUNE 9,1995 LIGHTHOUSE INN-WEST DENNIS
Please make reservations for people. I enclose a check for \$ (\$15.00 per person)
Tax and gratuity included.
Choice of entree: Seafood Newburg in Patty Shell Chicken Bianco (white wine and
mushroom sauce)
Please enclose a self-addressed, stamped envelope and send to: Joshua Crowell
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#### **CALENDAR**

May	10	7:30 P.M.	DHS Board meets with Susan and Henry Kelley.
May	13–14	2-4 P.M.	"Maritime Disasters" exhibit at Josiah Dennis Manse.
	20-21		
May	16		Town Elections. Get out and vote!
June	4	9:00 A.M.	Annual Lady Slipper Walk led by Dr. Norton Nickerson on the
		10:30 A.M.	Indian Lands. Reservations required. See below.
June	9	5:00 P.M.	Annual Birthday Dinner at Lighthouse Inn. See other side for
			reservation form.

### MARITIME DISASTERS

The annual Cape Cod Maritime Week this year will run from May 12-21. This will be a Cape-wide celebration featuring all the best and most interesting of the Cape's maritime past, present, and future. Seven lighthouses will be open and special open houses and exhibits will be held in a number of places. Look for a brochure in your post office or library. The Josiah Dennis Manse will have an exhibit on Maritime Disasters. Dennis people have been involved with the sea from our very beginning and have come to know the dangers of the sea very well. Nancy Thacher Reid has compiled a list of 330 Dennis people who have lost their lives at sea. Three great storms accounted for a large number of our losses. Come to the Manse and find out what ones they were. There will also be parts of shipwrecks on display from private donors. The exhibit will be open May 13, 14, 20 and 21 from 2-4- P.M.

# THE DENNIS ORCHIDS

One of the nicest things that happens in Dennis is when our native American orchids bloom--better known as Lady Slippers. The ones that grow on the Indian Lands Conservation Area are one of the premier displays on the Cape. The usually are at their peak at the end of May or first of June. We are most fortunate to have both the Lady Slippers and a peerless guide. Dr. Norton Nickerson, who grew up and still lives a stone's throw from the Indian Lands will lead the walk again this year. His wealth of information makes the walk so much more enjoyable. As always, there will be two walks on Saturday, June 4 at 9:00 and 10:30 A.M. Please make reservation with the Natural Resources Office at Town Hall, 394-8300 ext. 23. Each walk can only accommodate 40 people and last year we were at that limit, so call early to make your reservations. We will meet at the Town Hall parking lot.

# ADDITIONS, CORRECTIONS, AND ET CETERAS

Ye Olde Ed does try to be correct in these monthly missles but sometimes it doesn't quite work out that way. To set the record straight: Long-time archivist at the Cape Playhouse Margaret Adams' middle name is Hoxie, not Hollis..... Mary Raycroft donated to the Jericho Fence Fund.....Rebecca Crowell Munroe's mother Pearl was not the daughter of William Gillion (Jan. 1995 newsletter). Pearl came from Taunton. William's daughter was Harriet who married William Kelley of North Dennis. Thanks wo their daughter Amy Kelley Babineau for setting this straight.....There was more to the H.M.S. Somerset story that I reported (March 1995 newsletter). Although Provincetown and Truro men did take items from the wreck they were not allowed to keep them. The state confiscated everything which was later sold at public auction. A decision of the Maritime Court held in Boston on March 30, 1779 gave the State of Massachusetts 2/3rds of the proceeds from the auction and 1/3rd to the representatives of the Provincetown/Truro men. The Cape Cod men appealed that decision. They did not feel that a 1/3rd share came near compensating for their losses to the crew of the Somerset. A second Maritime Court held in Ipswich on June 19, 1779 changed the award giving  $\frac{1}{2}$  to the state and the other  $\frac{1}{2}$  was divided among the 202 salvors according to their individual losses.....Ever-willing, hard working volunteer Susan Kelley was omitted from the cleaning crew at the Manse. Susan's domain is the back chamber where she does our spinning and weaving <u>and</u> cleaning. Thanks, Susan!....Sincere thank yous to Arthur Laughton of Dennis-Yarmouth Regional High School Audio-Visual Dept. for transferring a second set of our post cards onto slides.....and also thanks to Charter Member Eleanor Baker Hall for finding the February 1978 and June 1990 menus that were missing. We still need June 1978, June 1979, June 1980, February 1983, and June 1984 to complete our collection. Maybe they'll turn up in your spring cleaning.....The Cape Cod Tech students have installed the white picket fence at Jericho and it looks great! The new donors are Mr. and Mrs. George Wilson and Marion Low. Thanks!

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