



# Dennis Historical Society Newsletter

Volume 23 Number 4

May 2000

## Calendar of Events

**Saturday, May 20th  
1-4 PM  
"Sea Chanties & Tall  
Tales"**

The Josiah Dennis Manse celebrates Maritime Week with "The Old Cape Codger," Ben Thacher, who will spin some old time stories with sea chanties in the Maritime Room. Visit with Ben and view early Dennis maritime artifacts.

**Saturday, June 3rd  
Lady Slipper Walk**

Narrated walk over the Indian Lands Conservation Area to a premier stand of lady slipper orchids, led by botanist Shannon Goheen. Reservations requested, 508-394-0017.

**Sunday, June 11th  
12-4 PM**

**Interpretive Flower  
Show and Opening Tea**

For a touch of the historic, Jericho will host a flower show in which the arrangements will interpret the historic paintings and/or prints embellishing this historic 1801 Captain's house.

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## RLDS Church, 185 Sea Street, Dennisport

Pauline Wixon Derick & Burt Derick

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints was organized on April 6, 1830 in Palmyra, NY by Joseph Smith, the Prophet, who had a vision in which The Lord told him to re-establish His Church on earth. This was a time of great religious revival in America, but the road was rocky for the "Saints" as they traveled from state to state seeking converts.

Within a few years, Elders of the Church were traveling throughout New England. Joseph Smith himself visited Cape Cod in about 1836, and performed baptisms of converts in Hamblin's Brook in Yarmouth, with a number of natives then leaving to join the movement in the West. Among these was Freeman Nickerson of South Dennis. Another Elder, Clark Hallett, came from Ohio and engaged Rev. Davis Lothrop of the West Harwich Baptist Church in debate, the result of which was that additional converts were obtained from Lothrop's flock, and a branch of the church was organized in Dennisport.

When Joseph Smith was murdered in Carthage, IL in 1844, there was a great split in the leadership of the Church. By 1847, Freeman Nickerson had returned to get some of the Saints to follow him, and a few did go. Belief was so strong in the movement that wives departed from husbands, and husbands from wives, and entire families were split up. Among the people who left to join were Isaiah Eldredge, who drowned in the Ohio River, and his wife Sabra (Wixon) who continued the journey; Elnathan Eldredge and wife Ruth (Underwood) went, leaving a child who had been hidden away by her grandfather, Nathan Underwood; John Wixon mortgaged his house to his brother, left his wife and went west, where he married again. (He returned in 1863, ill, and was taken in by his first wife and nursed by her until his death). Freeman Nickerson never lived to reach Utah, but died in Winter Camp, MO, his family continuing to the West.

The Church was in disarray until 6 April 1863, when members of the original movement, who did not follow Brigham Young to Utah, reorganized the Church in Kirtland, OH, 6 April 1863. The Reorganization returned the Saints to the original teachings of Joseph Smith, and they were quite vocal in renouncing



185 Sea Street, Dennisport

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## RLDS Church, 185 Sea Street, Dennisport

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polygamy and other teachings of the Salt Lake Church to distance themselves from that group. The Reorganization made its way to the Dennisport Saints, and they elected to join the Reorganization on 27 November 1866, at a meeting held in the home of Hannah (Joy) Reumert. Members of the original Church, numbering over 20, who joined this Reorganization included Ebenezer Joy, James H. Eldredge, Nehemia Eldredge, Mrs. Hepsy Wixon and Mrs. Hannah Humphrey.

In 1870, the piece of land where the Church now stands was sold to the Saints for \$20 by Horace and Hannah Humphrey. Subscriptions were sought for the building of a meeting house, and members and non-members alike, numbering 62 individuals, raised \$444.60. With donated labor and the raised money to purchase lumber and other materials, the meeting house was built and the first meeting was held in the new Church 5 January 1871.

From 1872 to about 1900, regional conferences of the Saints were held periodically in Dennisport, with hundreds of people attending. Ocean Hall and Lillian Hall were often rented at these conferences in an attempt to accommodate the crowds, and the over-flow people would stand outside the open windows of Ocean Hall to hear the sermons. During this period, memberships numbered as much as 120 in the Dennisport Branch, and it was the center of village life at that time.

With the decline of the fishing business and industry, many of the Saints moved away to such places as Fall River and Brockton, seeking work. New branches of the Reorganized Church were formed in Brockton and Plymouth by the departing Dennisport Saints. The Dennisport Church continued, however, to be a center of village life, based on the Sunday School, the Helping Hand Society, Wednesday prayer meetings, and Sunday services. The leadership was never salaried, but, like the Apostles, went “without purse or scrip” to be cared for by the members, through tithes and offerings of cash and room and board, for visiting Elders.

The little Church on Sea Street remained much the same for 60 years. A small ell was added to the back of the building in the 1930s to accommodate a rest room and Sunday School room. It was at this time that the original 3 doors on the front were reduced to one. The interior was refurbished in the 1960s, with the addition of fixed pews and pulpit, through the efforts of the Thrift Shop (led by Marion Wixon) and the Helping Hand Society (essentially all the ladies of the Church). About this same time, the need for additional space for Sunday School and for dinners and meetings, resulted in the addition of the ell to the south, and the installation of kitchen facilities in the old ell.

The decline in year-round industry on Cape Cod in the last 30 years has resulted in a severe decline in membership at the Dennisport Branch. Many of the old Saints have passed on to meet their Maker, and their descendants have moved away to seek their livelihood in greener pastures. The Church is sustained by only a few members, and there is no local Elder in residence. Life events continue to be held in the building (marriages and funerals), the Thrift Shop still operates, and visiting Elders continue to nourish the remaining Saints.

The records of the little church in Dennisport, now in the possession of one of the authors (BND), offer an interesting insight into village life in the “down-along” area of Dennisport. Not only are life events recorded in meticulous detail, but village disputes are noted, the movements of villagers to other locations are recorded, and alleged transgressions are aired.

One interesting transgression recorded, early in the records, was the “sin” of fishing on the Sabbath. I (BND) can readily recall Elder George Armeson admonishing my grandfather, Nathaniel H. Wixon, to attend church services on Sundays. “Pa” Wixon, a commercial fisherman, would fish on Sunday to meet the Monday market, and Saturday was “the fisherman’s Sabbath.” After pestering “Pa” on this issue one day, Elder Armeson was told: “Young man, I see more of God on the ocean every Sunday than I will ever see in your Church.” The truth in these words is obvious to anyone who has ever made their living off the sea.

# Events at Jericho and the Manse

## *The 1801 Jericho Historical Center*

The Jericho Board and Friends of Jericho have a busy spring planned – beginning on May 23rd at 9:00 AM when we will gather to volunteer and look forward to Spring 2000.

On June 8th and 9th the third graders from Ezra Baker will spend the mornings touring the house and barn museum, playing Colonial games, learning of the cranberry industry here in Dennis, and in general, being advised as to how adults and children lived in the 1800s.

Our opening tea and interpretive flower show will be held on June 11th from 12:00 – 4:00 PM. Arrangers will be challenged to arrange their flowers to interpret a print, document or portrait. The tea will signal the opening of the Jericho Center, which will be open each Wednesday from 2:00 to 4:00 PM, and on Fridays from 10:00 AM to Noon through August 31st.

During Festival Days, Skills of the 1800s will be demonstrated on the grounds of Jericho, and on December 10th the Dennis Historical Society will hold their holiday celebration at Jericho from 1:00 to 5:00 PM.

The Jericho Board regrets the resignation of long-time member, Mrs. Mary Louise Tarbell, and welcomes Mrs. Joan Monteiro as our new member.



**Interpretive Flower Arrangement with Portrait of Captain Howes Baker**

*Kitty McNamara*



**Ben Thacher**

## *The 1736 Josiah Dennis Manse Museum*

Docent training, held on April 19th, was very well attended. Volunteers were present for the arrival of the pencil post tester bed, brought from Maine. After lunch, those who could stay helped to put the bed together, weaving the rope which supports the feather mattresses.

Third graders from Ezra Baker will visit the Manse during the 2nd and 3rd weeks in May. They will have the chance to do hands-on chores, such as making butter, carding wool, writing with a quill, and grinding corn.

On May 20th from 1:00 to 4:00 PM the Manse will celebrate Maritime Week with “The Old Cape Codger” pictured on the left. Ben Thacher will spin us some old time stories and entertain us with sea chanties .

On June 17th from 1:00 to 4:00 PM visitors to the Manse can “time travel” back to the 1700s, as costumed guides demonstrate life in that era, and on August 19th from 10:00 AM to 4:00 PM the Manse will hold a “Colonial Open House” featuring a Colonial Militia Encampment.

From June 20th through September 30th the Manse will be open each Tuesday from 10:00 AM to Noon, and each Thursday from 2:00 to 4:00 PM. Each Saturday in September the Manse will be open from 2:00 PM to 4:00 PM.

## **Dennis Historical Society**

P.O. Box 607

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## **THE WAY WE WERE**

This is a sketch of Nathaniel H. Wixon, drawn by Richard V. Ellery. The artist's daughter, Susan Kelley, remembers when her father enjoyed the stories told by the family of this wonderful man. "Thannie," also known as "Pa" Wixon, was a fisherman, and the artist felt a kindred spirit with those who worked the sea.

Richard V. Ellery's family came from the Gloucester and Salem area, where many of his ancestors were fishermen. He was known for his coastal paintings of fishermen, their boats and their way of life.

The finished portrait of Nathaniel H. Wixon is hanging in the Wixon Middle School. Nathaniel's daughter and grandson wrote the article featured on the first pages of this newsletter.

Doesn't it look like he's about to tell you a good fish story?



