



Dennis Historical Society Newsletter

dennishs@cape.com

www.dennishistsoc.org

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Memories

Note from Phyllis. Here is the second of two Memories that I located while meandering through a file cabinet. The first of these appeared in the March Newsletter. This article presents the memories of West Dennis from Charles P. Buckley of Brockton. As I said before, the characters they wrote about are gone but the memories can stay with us forever.

West Dennis Memories

“What a world of memories you folks have stirred up with the last few issues of the Historical Society’s newsletter! Especially your notes on the restoration of the 1867 West Dennis Graded School. I never studied at that building as a school, of course, but as a tad, I stayed in West Dennis every summer and on most weekends in the Spring and Fall. As you point out in your November 2000 article during those years just before, during and after WWII the building became a meeting place for all sorts of community activities. I can still recall when Billy Ryder, Jeanne Hall and the undersigned, among others, besought permission from the Town fathers to start up those “record hops” which were a hit from the start. I grew past them too quickly to remember “Dan the Man” Serpico as D.J., but I’m happily surprised to hear that there are many still around who took part in those evenings.

The last newsletter spoke of the last person to inhabit Jericho as a private home. Since she was an elderly lady, living alone, you put me in mind of Addie Hall. Addie was an elderly gal who lived alone, as did the lady in Jericho. Her home was the next house towards Bass River on Route 28, past the two homes occupied by Alton Baker, his wife and children, with his father, Rob, right next door. The Baker homes took up a large tract at the southwesterly corner of Cove Road as it debouches into Route 28.

To this day I can see Addie Hall marching along Route 28 “uptown” to the center of West Dennis, which she did every day. As I said, she was too elderly to live alone – we all felt, but very independent. Indeed, my folks told me the last time she shingled her house that she had turned 81 years of age that year. My grandfather, Lyman Franklin Garfield, had known her all his life, having been born in his family’s home right across Route 28 from the beginning of Cove Road, so I am confident he knew her age.

The old Garfield homestead burned many years ago, when the family moved to Brockton and Boston. But just before I came along, Gramp bought the homestead land back from its then owner, together with all the land running down to Kelley’s Pond in the back. Gramp then bought the Soule farmstead in Brockton, where his first two wives had been raised, tore down the farmhouse and took the pieces down to West Dennis, where he put them together, a bit cursorily, as a summer cottage for his daughter and husband – my parents. Then he deeded over the house lot in West Dennis and the field behind it as far as Pond Street to them.

It’s all been subdivided now, but that field in back was where many baseball games were held, where my mother’s cousin, Harry “Streak” Garfield, as catcher, as well as many national luminaries in the baseball world, participated. Those were the days when baseball was a real presence on Cape Cod and I believe the pros used the Cape league for early training instead of annual trips to Florida for spring training. I can remember Harry showing me the old home plate, which was still in place until my brother, James, subdivided the field. Strange as it seems in this day of annually flooding cranberry bogs in winter, I can still taste the bitter wild cranberries that grew on that old ball field, showing that before the days of baseball someone tried to pick up a little gelt from cultivating and selling the berries that furnished such a windfall to Makepeace, Urann and their contemporaries in much later years. The level of this field was far too high to

permit flooding even with Kelley's Pond as a source of much brackish water nearby. This is perhaps why there was no bog in the area when I came along.

While I'm rambling along, Alton Baker was Cashier of the National Bank of Hyannis for many years, so there may well be some among our members today who knew him. In the years before my Gramp



returned to West Dennis, Alton's father, Rob (who could play a wicked guitar, incidentally) set up a shop across Route 28 (Main Street) from his home and adjoining the old Garfield homestead lot, in which to fashion windmills and other wooden landscaping features for the tourists who, even then, were stubbornly refusing to leave their money on the bridge and go home. Rob's business seemed quite busy to me as a tiny lad, but he sold it and retired to a happier life with his guitar and singing in the summer nights with his neighbors. The latter was a very prevalent form of amusement in those days, so that one could hear some tunesmiths from over a mile away, who could be

easily heard above the Spring peepers in May. That was popular even after Marconi came along with his radio, even though it could not survive television. I came across an odd little picture of Rob's shop in full operation a few days ago, had it enlarged and copied and enclose the result, as unsatisfactory as it is, for anyone who might be thereby reminded of that earlier time. Old pictures can be quite surprising and I would never put forth for public view the two pictures of her grandparents that hung in Mom's bedroom in West Dennis for years. I shall never forget what appeared to be scowls on their faces and their unforgiving visages. Obviously, the photographer, whose work must have formed the basis for these two pictures, since they were obviously not hand-painted portraits, had little training in presenting his subjects in their gentlest moods.

One other tale comes to mind with regard to West Dennis, which for some years boasted one of the finest beaches for swimming in the world. The sand was extraordinarily fine when I was young and the water depth, which evidences a series of sandbars running parallel to the coast, still affords more range of gentle water for the swimmer than almost anywhere else I have been lucky enough to visit. No surfing here, I must admit, but the waves at Nauset Beach and elsewhere carry with them the menace of a vicious undertow. None of such nonsense at West Dennis! I remember the countless times I was able to "stay in" for the entire day, when the weather was fair. What I did not know as I reveled in the joy of that wondrous beach was that the Town owned only about three hundred yards of ocean frontage abutting and extending from the western edge of the inn which had been built around the old West Dennis Lighthouse.

After my mother's death in 1955, the Town had two selectmen whose names I no longer recall. I think it was Eldredge, but they were father and son and served just before Kirkwood Brown, I believe. In any event, they came to call on my brother and I to see if we would join with the family of Charles Henry Davis, of South Yarmouth (or Bass River, as those hairleggers across the river have adopted as a more 'tony' name for their community) in deeding the beach down to the river to the Town. It was then explained to us, who had not yet acquired a handle on Mom's affairs, that Gramp, who I believe already owned the property called Wrinkle Point, had teamed up with Charles Henry, who he must have known from childhood, to buy up much of the land enclosing the Wrinkle Point property, including a mile or so of beach frontage, which these canny selectmen wanted to secure for the Town before the prices for such land went out of sight. Knowing how much Gramp had loved his old home, my brother and I were suckers for this proposal, being led to understand that West Dennis (nearly South Dennis, if Burt Derick is to be believed) acquired that glorious beach I had enjoyed for so many years without knowing that my grandfather and his friend had helped keep it free from development. As I recall, nothing was proposed to be paid by the Town for what seems now to have been an unbelievable windfall, but I well remember James and I agreeing that Gramp would have been very pleased that the Town was to be in control of that stretch of sand.

Many times in the years that have intervened, I have speculated about how those selectmen were congratulated for their little coup. They certainly used their political skill to convince a couple of softhearted, if not softheaded young guys that an opportunity existed to benefit the Town that had sheltered their forbears. I've often wondered if they were suitably praised by other public spirited citizens. I'll bet Dean Sears would remember, since he was still Register of Deeds when all this took place. Yet I never asked him before he left us. One other dangling thread among so many in my life, but I still smile when walking along that beach – so crowded now, with the sand so coarsened by the 1938 hurricane* and a few succeeding storms.

But oldsters do ramble and you did invite some memories at the end of your lovely history of that old school. Hope I haven't buried you with pages, which you and Nancy Reid have called forth. Keep up the good work with your fascinating newsletter. It may only ring bells among those of us glad to hear them, but I can assure you we are most grateful.

Sincerely, Charles P. Buckley”

*The 1944 hurricane was the storm that changed the character of West Dennis Beach. In 1938 we in Dennis escaped the fury of that terrible hurricane. Buzzard's Bay and Falmouth were the eastern boundaries for real damage....

PRH

1736 Josiah Dennis Manse Repair & Preservation

What's happening to the Manse? The second phase of the three-phase repair and preservation work is well underway. Phase II, the actual repairs, will await Town Meeting (fall) approval. Here's where we are ---

The CPA funded Phase II Program will result in firm bids for the actual repair effort. Newport Collaborative Architects, Inc. is our contractor, and doing an excellent job. The plan is for the Town to obtain firm bids by late spring to fit into their planning cycle.

Let's start with the white pipes sticking up that monitor the ground water level and disturbed dirt along the driveway. Seems that the septic tank between the Manse and the Schoolhouse is now illegal - too close to the wetlands, so a new system is required. As regulations specify how deep the septic tank must be with respect to the water table, this sets the new height of the Manse – as water must flow down hill! That's OK, because the Manse had to be raised as it has sunken a couple of feet and is now below the road level, and the sidewalls are in the dirt – not a good thing. Next, to meet the code for people with disabilities, a new bathroom will be added to the rear of the building, off of the “library”, and a new ramp added, blended with the landscape and parking near the driveway, with the handicapped entrance through the Maritime Room.

What other exterior changes will you see? New windows are planned (with period ‘wavy’ glass, same number of panes per window) and internal storms (no more aluminum storm windows!). Under our State Preservation Restriction that sets the rules for repairs, everything that is planned has been approved. Also gone will be the cracked shingles, replaced by red & white cedar shingles where appropriate.

The first tasks will repair the rotted sills and the ends of the supporting posts that have failed sufficiently that the building rests on the walls – leading to the bulges that you see. The chimney will be reinforced, repaired and braced. After structural repairs to both the original (yep-still in the attic!) and “new” roof, the building will be moved aside to allow a full cellar to be installed. And of the other planned repairs - more later.

Pete Howes

New Members

We are very pleased to welcome the following folks into the Dennis Historical Society:

Mr. & Mrs. Louis Buscone	Mr. & Mrs. Thomas McCullough	Mr. & Mrs. Paul O'Reilly
Mrs. Shirley Gifford	Mr. & Mrs. Raymond McGrath	Mr. & Mrs. Reid Oslin
Mr. & Mrs. Robert Hunter	Mr. Ronald J. Michael	Mr. & Mrs. Michael Sheehan
Mr. & Mrs. Craig Knowlton	Mr. & Mrs. Joseph O'Clair	Mr. & Mrs. Lew Taylor

Dennis Historical Society
P.O. Box 607
South Dennis, MA 02660-0607

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Organization
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South Dennis,

Mark Your Calendars – Upcoming DHS Programs

Maritime Days Open House

Phyllis Horton's
Dennis Lifesavers



When:

Saturday, May 16
1:00 – 4:00 PM

Where:

1736 Josiah Dennis
Manse Museum

77 Nobscusset Road
Dennis Village



Refreshment



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Quivet Neck Walkabout

With Historic Interpreter
Brendan Joyce

Saturday ~ June 13 ~ 10:30 a.m.

- Where was the straw hat factory?
- Find the Irish Cottage!
- -- and much more as you learn the history and lore of the Quivet Neck area
- Wear comfortable shoes & hat
- Walk will last approximately 1 1/2 hrs.

Meet at Jacob Sears Library

23 Center St., East Dennis

Rain Date Sunday, June 15th, same

Sponsored by Dennis Historical Society
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