



OUR SHIVERICK STORY WELL RECEIVED

Twice in one day, Bill Scofield and Josh Crowell set up and showed our newest audio-visual program, 'The Story of the Shiverick Shipyard'. And twice, the audience response was one of approval. I think we are in the forefront in this field, at least here on the Cape. It was an idea that Paula and Don Bacon started, and I said it couldn't be done! Four years later, here I am happily munching on my words, and getting the material together which will tell of the many maritime industries in which this town has been engaged throughout its history, for yet another slide and sound production. It really couldn't be done, were it not for the patient photographic work of Bill Scofield and the creative sound track which Ben Thacher produces for us. I have the fun part - I get to dig out the interesting stories from our past which make our history alive and entertaining. 'The Shiverick Story' has been requested by several groups around town, and Bill and Josh are working out a schedule. So if you have not as yet seen it, perhaps your church or organization program chairman would like to be on that schedule. Call either of our 'D.H.S. A-V crew' to set a date.

A LITTLE COLOR IN THE TOWN'S MOSAIC

You no doubt have noticed that I very often write about the adventures of the town's seafaring population, and that is as it should be. A very high percentage of this town's inhabitants were gainfully employed in occupations which were connected in one way or another with the sea. It was serious, heartbreaking business and the character of the ordinary Dennis citizen reflected this. However, not all of the local residents fit into the stereotype of the Master Mariner and his very proper lady. This town had its share of "characters", whose outlook on life was somewhat lighter, and perhaps they enlivened the rather stodgy lives of the maritime aristocracy. These so-called "characters" were people who, as my dad used to say, were "no better than they ought to be", but certainly no worse either. They took life just a little less seriously, and let that subtle Cape Cod sense of humor bubble a little closer to the surface. One such person lived sometime in Harwich and sometime in Dennis Port. She was called "Chew-Tabacca Sarah". You might say she was a lady of the evening, except that she had some habits which were not exactly ladylike. One was the untidy habit which earned her her nickname. Also, although she had no husband, she did have a number of children. Soon following the birth of each new addition to her "single parent" family, Sarah would present herself at the home of the town clerk and register her infant, using the name of its natural father. Kiss and tell! My, My! Decidedly unladylike. Since she had to be both father and mother to her offspring, she dressed as a man and did any kind of work to help support her children. Despite her rather unorthodox lifestyle, which in the late 1800's was novel to say the least, Sarah was a good mother and saw to it that her children attended school and prepared themselves for whatever type of life they should choose. She was just one of many who hauled the rope to a different chanty, and added a bit of color to the tapestry of life in Dennis. Sometime soon I will tell you of some transient men who wove a thread of pink into that fabric, with some of their doin's down to Punkhorn!

THE DENNIS FIRE DEPARTMENT

"It is a strange fact that in most Cape Cod towns there is no fire engine, and often only a poor apology for a hook and ladder truck with its many hand buckets hanging down. Here is enough water hard by to save a dozen buildings. But the Cape farmers will argue that 'It ain't no use having a fire engine, we don't have a fire very often' and that ends all discussion on the subject."

This quotation is from an article entitled 'A Drive Down the Cape' printed in the New York Tribune of September, 1890. It is a true reflection upon the fire fighting capacity of the Cape's towns in that period. Provincetown seems to have been the first town to have an organized fire department. As early as 1885, they offered help to the people of South Dennis when a woods fire threatened Main Street. The first public support of fire fighting equipment appears in the Dennis town report of 1929, when the town voted money to improve the equipment which the fire association had acquired. This equipment was stored at the old town house, in South Dennis, and also in the village of Dennis, and in that year the town appropriated \$2,500 for remodeling and improving these engines and appointed a committee to make this equipment "effective and efficient". In 1930, \$1,000 was appropriated to install fire sirens and, at last, in 1931, the town accepted Chapter 48 of the General Laws of Massachusetts, which provided for the establishment of a municipal fire department, and Richard S. Hall was appointed our first fire chief. The appropriation for his department was \$1,000 (which he overspent by \$90.28!) and the number of alarms which the department, made up totally of "call" firemen, responded to was 68. It seems that a fire department was certainly needed. In comparison, the fire department of today consists of 22 full-time and 22 "call" firemen who in 1985 responded to over a thousand calls, and had appropriations in the neighborhood of \$750,000. My, how times have changed. Hear more about the history of fire fighting at our November meeting at the Senior Center on November 19 at 7:30 P.M.

CALENDAR

November 18 7:30 P.M. Board meets at Phyllis'.
November 19 7:30 P.M. DENNIS SENIOR CENTER. Note change of meeting place (AGAIN!)
Mr. Morris of New England Fire and History Museum, with
slides and lecture.
December 7 2-4 P.M. Old Sound Museum, East Dennis. "Entertainment, Old Style".

AMONG OUR NEW MEMBERS.....

Mary Whittemore, Katherine M. Craven, Mr. and Mrs. Paul F. Prue, Mr. and Mrs. George D. Meservy, Jr., Jayne Cash, Pearle T. Quayle, Mr. and Mrs. Neal E. Cole, Naomi Costa, Judge Harrison S. Howes, Gerta and Barbara Mann, Marguerite E. Ells, and Joy Wingett. (More next month.)

Welcome one and all. It would be nice if all of us "old members" would welcome them in person at our next meeting, November 19 at the Senior Center.

THE CAPTAIN'S FLAG

The Dennis Historical Commission is presently wrestling with the problem of the care of no less than three antique American flags. I'm chairman of that commission, and it has been my task to research each flag's history and document, if I can, its relationship to this town's history. Two of the flags, although very interesting, do not seem to pertain to our history at all. But one, which I call the Captain's flag, is our own, and a very important artifact of our past. The Special Town Meeting of December 9th will consider an article calling for an appropriation from the town budget to preserve and display this large, thirteen-star flag. It was given to us by the descendants of Captain Bernard O'Neil. I am at present trying to fit the pieces together which will give us a story of this mariner's career. He was a "forinner", that is he was not born in Dennis, but he appeared here in 1851, and lived here until his death in 1889. He had a talented and interesting family: The boys, mariners like himself; the girls, musicians, active in the church and in the life of the village of West Dennis. By next issue, I am hoping to have replies to many inquiries I have made regarding the vessels which he commanded and the history of his family. But you know how newsletters sometimes are not produced and delivered in a timely manner. So I am mentioning the Captain's flag in this edition in the hope that you will help us to preserve and display this memento of our town's maritime past. As American vessels entered foreign ports, the Captain ordered the American flag to be raised. These were very large flags, designed to readily identify the nationality of the vessel, and I am sure that fifty years ago many an attic in Cape Cod towns held such a treasure. My father's did, but he felt it was in such poor condition that it should be destroyed. If only I had known then what I know now! At any rate, Captain O'Neil's family has given the town one of these banners, 15 x 10 feet in size, hand sewn, with 13 stars set into the blue field, so they are seen from either side. It no doubt dates from the Civil War era. Smithsonian Institute will help us date it more accurately. Peabody Museum is helping to research the vessels from which it was flown. And the family of Captain O'Neil has been most helpful in providing us with clues. With your help, the Captain's flag will be displayed prominently on the wall of the Wixon School auditorium, as it once was displayed from the masts and spars of his vessels as they entered foreign ports in years gone by. More about the flag later, but please vote to preserve it.

Dennis Historical Society
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