



# Dennis Historical Society Newsletter

Volume 24 Number 9

November 2001

## Calendar of Events

### Thursday, November 8 Were Vikings in New England?

Illustrated talk by Neil Good, Viking researcher, will explore the possibilities and detail the research to determine if the Vikings were on our shores. Refreshments.

**West Dennis Graded  
School  
7:30 PM**

### Wednesday, November 14 Board Meeting

Interested members welcome to attend.

**7:00 PM**

**Josiah Dennis Manse**  
*Note change of meeting  
location*

### Sunday, December 9th DHS Christmas Open House

Celebrate Christmas at the Manse, a 1736 colonial saltbox house beautifully decorated for the season. Costumed docents will offer traditional refreshments.

**1-5 PM**

**Josiah Dennis Manse  
Museum**

### Wednesday, December 12 Board Meeting

Interested members welcome to attend.

**7:00 PM**

**Josiah Dennis Manse**

## MAILBOX IN THE CEMETERY

Burt Derick

One of the most beautiful and unique places on Cape Cod is the Sears Family Cemetery, located a few yards into Brewster at Bound Brook. The cemetery sits on one of the last pieces of the original Old Yarmouth-Eastham Road, laid out in 1665 and 1668, the modern counterpart of which is the Old Kings Highway. The stone walls in



this vicinity are, no doubt, the remnants of those erected by our ancestors as they carved that rude track from the wilderness in that ancient day. The small cemetery, with the large, mostly-slate gravestones aligned east-west in the ancient manner, amid old gnarled oaks and stately cedars, sits on a knoll overlooking a small pond, and in the distance can be seen the home of Henry & Susan Kelley, built in an antique style, the entire setting casting a visual image of how this place must have looked 300 years ago.

From this description, you can imagine this is one of my favorite places. When friends visit, and I give them the "grand tour", this stop (together with Scargo Hill, Stony Brook Mill, West Dennis Beach, etc.) is always on my tour.

You can imagine my great surprise when, on one such "tour" three summers ago, I found a new mailbox erected inside the gate of the Sears Cemetery. Puzzling over this circumstance, the only person that came to mind who could have done this was L. Ray Sears, head of the Sears Family Association. But I had to dismiss this since Ray lived in Oklahoma. Inside the mailbox was a small stack of papers, copies of a description and history of the cemetery, unsigned. I took a copy, and left in its stead a dollar, hoping somehow that the dollar might return to the source, but knowing full well in this day that it could just disappear into pockets unknown.

Some five or six weeks later, while doing a tour of duty in the DHS Library at the Josiah Dennis Manse Museum, a visitor strolled in. Phyllis Horton

*(Continued on page 2)*

## MAILBOX IN THE CEMETERY

introduced him - you guessed it - Ray Sears! Ray announced that he had recently returned to his roots and was now living in Osterville. I then mentioned the mailbox in the cemetery and asked if he was responsible. He was! And then he went on to explain that he had revisited the cemetery just recently and to his surprise found a dollar in the mailbox!

What can I say? How cynical I have become over the behavior of my fellow man, exemplified most recently by the horrors of September 11. How awful are the words of hate from supposed "citizens" toward those of us that may look and worship differently from others of us! Is it any wonder that my thoughts automatically went to the idea that my dollar was being "thrown away" when I put it in the mailbox, yet living in hope that it would not be? Cynicism, distrust, and hate toward one another is not justified in any context, and the Golden Rule must be our practice. That dollar was left in good faith and in gratitude, and it was accepted with gratitude, anonymously on both parts.

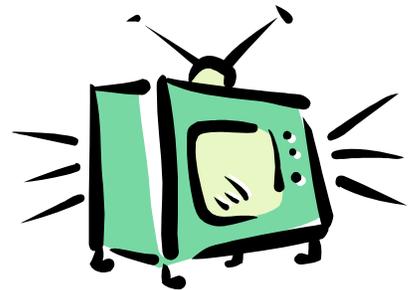
Richard Sears, one of the earliest settlers of East Dennis, left many descendants, of which the writer is only one. A number of genealogical works on this family have been published, the most recent being the *Sears Genealogical Catalogue* by Ray Sears. The Sears Family Association continues to work on the genealogy and history of the Sears Family.

Ray has since returned to Oklahoma, but the mailbox remains in the cemetery. If you visit there and obtain the sense of peace and joy I experience on each of my visits, and if the spirit moves you to want to donate a dollar or two, you should send it to the Sears Family Association, 2208 Amber Rd., Oklahoma City, OK 73170. While such a donation (NOT solicited by Ray Sears, by the way) has nothing to do with the preservation of the cemetery, which is under the control and care of the Town of Brewster, it will help to further the good works of the Association.

## Would You Like To Be a TV Producer?

With winter coming upon us and some spare time opening up for everyone, how would you like to do something new and exciting? The Dennis Historical Society has paid for a membership for three people at the Cape Cod Community Media Center (formerly C3TV) on White's Path, South Yarmouth. You will receive basic studio and production training. DHS Board member Brendan Joyce has signed up and is looking for two more DHS members to join him. Brendan has taken a previous course there and is very pleased with what he is already able to do. He is looking forward to learning more and would be happy to speak with all who are interested. His number is 508-385-6492.

The Society would like to produce some programs showcasing the wonderful DHS collections and some of our other programs. It should be very interesting and will add a whole new dimension to your life. Just imagine at future gatherings when someone asks "What are you doing with yourself these days?" and you can answer, "Producing TV shows!"



### FIRST AID FOR DHS COLLECTIONS

For a number of years there has been an ongoing problem with the collection of artifacts at the 1736 Josiah Dennis Manse Museum and at the 1801 Jericho Historical Center. The house committees have done an excellent job of keeping the collections clean and cared for. The one thing they could not control was the humidity which, as everyone on Cape Cod knows, is a big problem. A dehumidifier was used for several years at the manse with minimal success. The biggest problem was with the DHS Library. The books were mildewing at a rapid pace.

Air conditioning for the buildings has been discussed for several years by the DHS Board as the only solution, but they were cautious because of the cost. Finally this year Phyllis Horton and Joan Martin told the Board the time had come, regardless of the cost, to do something because we were in danger of losing some items from mildew damage. The two houses are town property, but all of the collection belongs to the Historical Society. So, the board “bit the bullet” so to speak and spent the money to protect the artifacts. Both museums are now climate controlled and, with some careful restoration work, the artifacts will be in good condition again.

For \$6,751.00 the collections are now protected, but it put a dent in the Society’s treasury. After some discussion it was decided to ask you, the members, if you could help in some way to defray part of the cost through donations. Your contributions will be gratefully received and duly reported in future newsletter issues. We will send you an acknowledgement. Please note if you would like to make a donation in memory or honor of someone. Please send your tax-deductible to the Dennis Historical Society, P.O. Box 607, South Dennis, MA 02660 along with the following slip:

✂

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I would like to make my donation in \_\_\_\_\_ honor of or in \_\_\_\_\_ or in memory of:

\_\_\_\_\_

### Letters:

We love to get your letters, and from time to time hope to share some of them with our readers. See why we like them so much?

Irma North writes –

*“Just wanted to say thanks to all the officers and ‘planners.’ You are all great at keeping us informed of the past & present happenings in Dennis.”*

A June 30 letter from Charles P. Buckley---

*“To The One Who Does The Work:*

*....A couple of weeks ago, we had a small gathering of that old gang of mine from many moons ago back in West Dennis. Some now live in South Yarmouth, East Dennis and even one in South Dennis, but no one is left in the Auld Town. Some always came from off-Cape and one has even taken up residence in Sandwich. But it was amazing to realize that, except for one gal who couldn’t make it this year, every one of the old mob that we could still locate showed up at the Dan’l Webster – which we picked as most central for all who were still around*

*and coming. I bet that one hold-out will join with us next year. So the old Cape has not lost its old tug at the heartstrings. Please make sure the Newsletters keep coming!*

And from David Cook of Carthage, IL

Sept. 7, 2001 –

*“Dear Historical Society,*

*Please inscribe me as a life time member....*

*I always enjoy getting and reading your*

*Newsletter—I especially enjoy the stories about Dennis people in the good old (& hard) days.*

*Keep up the good work!*

*This is important in keeping me connected and in touch with where my Howes grandmother was born & raised (Dennisport 1860’s to 70’s). And where I sold Dainty Maid Ice Cream a hundred years later, in the 1960’s: Yarmouth, Dennisport, Harwich & Chatham. Wish I could be there with you from time to time.*

*Thank you for all your fine work.....”*

**Dennis Historical Society**

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**THE WAY WE WERE**

*From the "Rays of Light," a publication of the East Dennis Grammar School, edited by S.H. Chapman and L.H. Shiverick.*

East Dennis May 13<sup>th</sup> 1863

Dear Friend,

Often have I purposed to write but from time to time delayed until perhaps you have almost forgotten there exists such a person; but I trust not. My thoughts tell me it cannot be for absence has not always conquered love, although it is a maxim. There is so much I want to say to you that I can hardly have patience with my pen. How have you been since last I saw you: and how passes the time: are you yet attending school? Don't you often sigh when you think that our happy school girl days are almost ended? And do you know I am beginning to think of doing something for a living? Now tell me should you rather be a Dressmaker Milliner School-teacher, or follow the train that has gone to Walpole. I could not tell you which I should rather be. I hardly think I shall follow any of these employments. Is your brother in the army yet? I received a letter a short time ago from my cousin who is in the same regiment saying that he should be at home in a few weeks on a furlough then should go back and stop about 4 months when his time would expire. He says he does not see much prospect of the war coming to a close at present. When are you coming to make me that visit you promised me. I have been looking for you this last week. But you have not made your appearance hope you will be ere long. It is not very stirring times down in our vicinity. There is nothing going on of any account except the Sewing Society which now meets once in two weeks. How is it in your place? It is now nearly nine o'clock and as I have written all the news that will prove interesting to you. I will close Write soon in answer to this.

Truly your sincere friend Anna  
B. O. Sears