

DENNIS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

October Newsletter

Dennis and the Sea

There is no doubt that the character of the Town of Dennis has been shaped in large part by the sea. For it is the salt ocean surrounding us that has nourished us and provided us with industry since 1639. Fortunes have been made by sea farers, fishermen, ship builders, and salt-makers for generations. But as the sea gives, so does the sea take away. Our cemeteries have countless marble monuments standing over empty graves, on which are carved the mournful words "Lost at Sea."

October 3 and 4 marks the anniversary of the Great Gale of 1841, one of the greatest sea disasters ever to befall the mariners of Cape Cod. The fishing fleet was caught out on the Banks by a tremendous storm, probably a hurricane, and most of the boats simply disappeared into the ocean, with all hands. The families waiting at home were without a clue as to the fate of their loved ones until the Schooner Bride out of Dennis washed ashore off Race Point with the bodies of five of its crewmen in the cabin.

In all--twenty men were lost from Dennis, twelve of them Howes'. Yarmouth lost ten men, and Truro seven vessels carrying to their watery graves 57 of the town's men and boys. A greater sea tragedy has never occurred on the Cape before or since.

Annual Meeting Report

At the annual meeting held at West Dennis Community Building on September 11, the following officers were elected:

President	Byron H. Peirce
First Vice President	Gail A. Hart
Second Vice President	William E. Crowell, Jr.
Corresponding Secretary	Jean McMurtry
Recording Secretary	Pauline Derick
Treasurer	Joshua Crowell
Executive Committee:	
For 3 years	Kirkwood B. Brown Nancy Reid (Newsletter coordinator)
For 2 years	Paula Bacon Marge Hardy (Education coordinator)
For 1 year	Pauline Kennedy

Reports were heard from the Treasurer and Secretary and two recommendations from the board were approved. The first was that by-law study be made and a report submitted to the members. The second was that a representative from each of the town's official historical committees or commissions be invited to send a member to serve as an ex-officio member of the Dennis Historical Society Board.

Following the meeting, a very entertaining program was given by Mr. Ferd Baxter of Dedham and West Dennis. Mr. Baxter has collected old pictures of the town and has made slides from them. He has also taken new photographs of the same sites, to show the contrast from then to now. It was fun to try to recognize the various scenes and many of those who attended were surprised to be able to say "I remember that!" We thank Mr. Baxter for showing us his interesting pictures.

House Tour Successful

The House Tour in West Dennis sponsored by Dennis Historical Society was a great success. We are grateful to those who opened their homes, to the West Dennis Garden Club for the lovely flowers, to Ocean Spray for the donation of cranberry juice and to all the people who helped make the day so nice. Over sixty people were directly involved in making the tour run smoothly.

Questionnaire

A few questionnaires have been returned. We would like to have some more. The board is interested in planning a program that will satisfy the members, so please let us know what you would like us to be doing and in what areas you can help.

Do You Have Cape Cod ROOTS?

If so, you will be interested in a meeting planned for Wednesday, November 8, at 7:30 PM at the Jericho House. A panel consisting of Pauline Derick, Gertrude James and Louise Kelley will discuss the genealogical resources available on the Cape for researching your family line. All are welcome.

Fall Bike Tours

Sunshine, good speakers, and an enthusiastic group, not to speak of a very historic and scenic area, made the East Dennis bike tour successful. A very big thank you goes to the speakers who related the history of the area to their friends, neighbors, and fellow bikers. David Dumas spoke on the saltworks; Nancy Sears, the Cold Storage Plants; Lawrence Nyberg, the old meeting house--straw words; Dean Sears, the history of the Sears family; Harriet Lynn, the library; Sally Cobb, the church; Paul McGuire, the architecture of the Homer estate; Ira Dubin, the lamp blackening factory and general commerce; Charles Flinkstrom, conservation; and Joel Crowell spoke on the Shiverick Ship Yard which was a good finale for a history packed tour.

The next tour we hope to see even more people pedaling. Or some might like to ride along in their cars as was done on the first trip. October 14th at 10:00 is the date for the tour which will start at Carleton Hall and end at Chapin Beach. In case of rain the trip will be postponed to October 15th at 2:00. Some features of this tour will be the history of Black Ball Hill, the Josiah Dennis Manse, Little Taunton, Cultured Clam Corporation, and Chapin Beach.

The third tour of the Scargo Lake area and the theater is still in the offing.

Costumes Needed

A group of children under the direction of Mrs. Jean Viekman and Mr. Alan Cavanaugh are planning an audio-visual production about Dennis one hundred years ago. They have need of costumes and would appreciate the loan or gift of any that would be appropriate to that period. Call Marge Hardy at the Wixon School any week day morning if you can help.

The Street of Our Town

A commonly used street in our town is the one leading to our beautiful Dennis Town Dump--Do you know the name of this street? It is called Theophilus F. Smith Road--and anyone who has lived in Dennis for thirty years or more knows why. Theophilus F. Smith was for many years the keeper of the town dump--not our modern, efficient, scenic disposal area, but the old dump which used to be just off Rt. 134 above the Police Station. Theoph was a genuine character, the like of which may never be seen again. He was a gentle, friendly man. The way he rode a bicycle was nothing short of a miracle for he peddled so slowly, it was hard to see why the bicycle didn't topple over. He knew everyone by name and was happy to make conversation as he peddled oh, so slowly, to open the dump for the day--and his conversation was as unique as his bicycle skill--for every sentence, however short was full of what we kids called "swear words"--not these fancy "four letter words" used so much in sophisticated novels today, but honest-to-goodness cussing. Now, Theoph didn't cuss out of anger or to be rude. It was just his manner of speaking. I don't believe he ever insulted anyone, nor did he have any enemies. He was a good man, who did a good job. I'm sure we could collect a whole volume of stories about Theoph Smith (and not a bad idea, for genuine characters are fast disappearing from the Cape Cod scene). I wish Theoph could see our magnificent All-American disposal-recycling area. Through the string of expletives, I'm sure you would hear him say "*?+X* = that's some fine dump!"

CALENDAR

- October 14 Guided Bike Tour in Dennis. Starting time: 10 AM, Carleton Hall.
Rain Date: Oct. 15, 2 PM. For information call 394-5739, Paula Bacon.
October 21 Bay State Historical League meeting, Duxbury.
November 8 Tracing Your Cape Cod Ancestors. Jericho House, 7:30 PM.
Coming in December--Christmas tea.

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