

Dennis Historical Society Annual Meeting 1979

Reports of our activities for the past year and the acceptance of new by-laws as presented for the By-law Committee by Mr. William E. Crowell, Jr., were some of the highlights of the business meeting of D.H.S. held on Sept. 10. In the absence of retiring president, Mr. Peirce, Gail Hart chaired the meeting. A report from the Nominating Committee consisting of Pauline Kennedy, Paula Bacon, and Lilla Smith was accepted and the slate elected as follows: President Gail Hart, 1st V.P. William E. Crowell, Jr., 2nd V.P. Pauline Derick, Treasurer Joshua Crowell, Recording Secretary Jean Johnson, Corresponding Secretary Jean McMurtry, Directors--3 yrs. Virginia Gifford and Pauline Kennedy, 2 yrs. Nancy Reid and Kirkwood Brown, 1 yr. Jean Dunham and Paula Bacon. According to our new by-laws, three additional directors will be appointed representing the Jericho and Manse Committees and the Dennis Historical Commission.

The adoption of our new By-Laws coincides with the statewide celebration of the adoption of the Massachusetts State Constitution, September 1979 through June 1980. Our state constitution is the oldest democratic constitution in use today and has served as a model for many others. More about this and the part Cape citizens played in its formation as the year goes on.

Heave Ho and Up She Rises

Sea chanties were like another hand on the rope. So the old salts described a unique form of folk music which was demonstrated for our entertainment following our Annual Business Meeting by able chanty leaders, Georgia Bagge and Don Bacon. Long-haul, short-haul and capstan chanties as well as the ballads of the sea were sung and some of us "old salts" joined in on the refrains. Georgia and Don became involved in chanting as part of the Ezra H. Baker school program and we hope they will add their talents to another program later in the year. Thanks to two of our own members for a most delightful presentation.

Roses to the Peirces

The Peirces were unable to be with us for the business meeting, but Gail Hart read a report from the retiring president which mentioned everybody but Mr. and Mrs. Byron Peirce. I'm sure that all executive board members will agree that they both deserve a large vote of thanks from us all for three years of untiring devotion to the reorganization and revitalization of D.H.S. Among other accomplishments are our new by-laws, the clarification of our position as a non-profit organization, acquiring our mailing permit and the establishment of monthly programs. Not the least benefit to come from their administration has been the good fellowship which has developed at Executive Board meetings, making for high morale and enthusiasm which has kept the ball rolling so smoothly for these critical years. So, roses to the Peirces, (and thanks for all those cookies, Helen!) and keep up the good work.

The Streets of Our Town

Aunt Julia Ann's Road in West Dennis has a name of historical significance and perhaps meaningful symbolism. Julia Ann Baker became the third wife of Capt. Levi Baker, Sr., while still a very young woman. We speak so often of the "Wooden Ships and Iron Men" of the nineteenth century, but what of the women of those days of maritime supremacy? Hard times were expected and accepted with a fortitude it would be hard for modern women, or men for that matter, to muster. Try to imagine young Julia Ann sitting by her kitchen fire, with her foot rocking the cradle of a future mariner while her small hands were busy knitting warm socks and caps. With her head she listened to the lessons of the older children, but her heart was no doubt filled with anxiety--for her husband at sea, not heard from for some weeks, for her children so vulnerable to disease which had no cure, for the safety of her house, the need for wood and food against the hard winter, and the many daily chores which she and the children must accomplish alone.

Julia Ann lived through the heart wrenching, though common, experience of losing some of her young children. At a young age she became a widow. With only the meager education afforded to females in those days, she continued to keep Levi's Chandlery, supplying the fishing fleet which left annually for the Grand Banks from the wharf at the end of the street which now bears her name. Alone, she raised her three surviving sons only to have one of them die of a fever contracted on a voyage to a southern port. With what mixed emotions must she have watched her son, Levi, also take to the sea. And what a feeling of relief must have flooded her heart when her third son chose to enter the publishing business rather than follow in the steps of his father.

*** CALENDAR ***

- Oct. 4-5 Anniversary of the Great Gale of 1841. Twenty mariners from Dennis lost.
- Oct. 9 Group tour of Drummer Boy Museum, 1 P.M., call 398-8842 for details.
- Oct. 17 Open meeting--Mr. James Owen, "Windmills especially of Cape Cod", West Dennis Community Building (note change of meeting place), 7:30 PM
- Oct. 18 Executive Board meeting, home of President Gail Hart, 7:30 PM
- Nov. 7 Open Meeting--Mr. John Schofield, "Antiques", bring an antique with you to Carleton Hall, Dennis, 7:30 PM
- Coming in November--Group tour of Old Sound Museum

Fire Museum Tour

Those of you who failed to take advantage of the special days for D.H.S. members at the New England Fire and History Museum missed a great opportunity. We'll remind you about it in the spring when they reopen. Thanks to Mr. and Mrs. Morris for the opportunity and a special word of thanks to guide, Mr. Gordon Berrien, who made the museum come alive. See you in the Spring!

Windmills of Cape Cod

So much is being said and written about alternate energy these days, windmills may be said to be of contemporary as well as historic interest. Mr. James Owen will speak to the society about gristmills driven by wind which were an everyday sight and a vital necessity to the earliest settlers on the Cape. The staple grain was corn. To grind enough corn for a family's annual use without a grist mill was an impossible task. The miller was so important to the community that he was often exempt from military duty. He was a highly respected citizen and his mill was often a meeting place for the rural families who spent a good deal of their time in solitary labor on their farm. Mr. Owen is an artist and a teacher. He is also a local historian, member of the Barnstable County militia and a miller, who demonstrates the art of grinding corn at the old Eastham mill during the summer. He has pictures of Cape Cod and other mills, one of which is a mystery. Dennisporters are especially urged to attend this meeting to see if they can help identify the site of an old mill identified only as "in Dennisport". Note change of meeting place to West Dennis Community Building, School St., West Dennis, 7:30 P.M., October 17.

Bike Tour of South Dennis

A holiday tour of South Dennis is planned. Ten o'clock, Monday, October 8th, is the time, and Ezra Baker School lower parking lot is the place for the start of this tour. Included in this will be a tour of the interior of Jericho House and Barn and also the South Dennis Congregational Church with its oldest working organ in the country and the huge Blashfield mural of the angels. Behind the church, the grave of an unmarried Chinese woman will be pointed out with the story of how Capt. Baker and other local mariners plied the seven seas and how many of them reached the Chinese shores to bring back treasures and even an amah. Then there will be a stop at the columned home of Capt. Whelden with the story of how the young Captain succumbed to a terminal case of fever from a trip to Cuba. Next stop will be a view of the cove to point out the clam rafts and hear a brief talk on shellfish farming. The tour will pause where the local schoolhouse once stood and where Ed Crowell, County Commissioner, now lives at Salt Meadow Farm. Then the story of the tiny charming gingerbread library (built c. 1858) will be told. The tour will continue to High Bank Road where Ed Nickerson will talk about the prolific Nickersons who settled this area. The last stop will be at High Bank Bridge which was once an oyster house, fish flake and a saltworks and where still stands the old toll house. Refreshments will be served as a finale. For more information call 394-5739.

Antique Program Scheduled

Mr. John Schofield has been interested in antiques since he was 11 years old. His father and Robert C. Eldred, Sr. formed the company where Mr. Schofield now works in East Dennis. He grew up looking at and learning about antiques and he is coming to the Dennis Historical Society to share this interest and experience with us on November 7th. Mr. Schofield has invited us to bring a small antique to the meeting and he will talk about the things we bring.

John says if he has a special area of interest, it would be in turn-of-the-century items, especially Oriental. However, as with all of the experts at Eldred's, his knowledge of antiques is generalized and he is sure to tell you something you didn't know about one of your family heirlooms. So pick a treasure and come to the DHS meeting Wednesday, November 7, 7:30 P.M., at Carleton Hall in Dennis.

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