



DENNIS MASTER MARINERS

We haven't had a story about one of our sea captains for some time. Captain Laban Howes (1818-1900) may not be as well-known as Captains Thomas Prince or Carleton Howes, but his career covers the gamut of every maritime activity in which Dennis men were engaged, except whaling.

Born on June 11, 1818, he was one of the six children of Captain Zenas and Mercy (Sears) Howes. Laban went to sea for the first time with his brother, Zenas, Jr., at the age of nine, as cook aboard the fishing schooner Two Brothers and continued to make voyages as cook until 1832. Then, at the age of 14, he sailed before the mast as crew on the brig Garnet with his father as captain. This was his first of dozens of voyages across the Atlantic Ocean, and took him to Rotterdam and Wales before returning to Boston. During his career as a sailor, he was part of the crew of every class of ocean-going sailing vessel, from schooner to ship. In 1836, at age 18, he signed on as second mate of the ship Harold, Captain Christopher Hall of East Dennis, master. Within a year's time, he was promoted to first mate and served under Captain Christopher's brother Franklin, and also Captain Nathan Crowell and Captain Levi Howes, all of his home town of Dennis.

Despite high recommendations from his superior officers, because of his age, he was not given a ship of his own until 1841. In that year, he was made master of the ship Aurelius, (386 tons burthen), which was owned by Captain Christopher Hall and other men of Dennis. He proved his worth and thenceforth was master of no fewer than 14 vessels, sailing under the flags of the most prestigious merchants of Boston and New York.

In 1851, he made his first passage around Cape Horn in the ship Sarah H. Snow (462 tons) and in 1854 was in command of the ship Fleetwing (900 ton). The largest vessel which he commanded was the ship Electric Spark, which measured 1304 tons. Captain Laban sailed her around Cape Horn from Boston to San Francisco on her maiden voyage in 1855 with a commendable passage of only 106 days.

During his long career from 1827 until his retirement in 1889, he experienced ship wrecks, survived hurricanes and fevers, and a disastrous fire, as well as the anxiety of avoiding the Southern privateers during the Civil War. And still he retained his zest and pleasure in being at sea.

Captain Laban was remarkable not only for the number and variety of vessels on which he served. He also experienced travel on all of the forms of transportation which were available in the fast-moving decades of his lifetime. He traveled from Boston to Cape Cod on the tiny packet sloop Flight and was nearly shipwrecked near Plymouth when the sloop encountered a great gale. He went by steamship from San Francisco to Panama, again barely avoiding disaster when the steamship went aground. He rode on horseback ninety miles back to Santa Barbara after the steamship disaster, took another steamship to Panama and crossed the isthmus on the back of a mule. He went overland from San Francisco to New York via stagecoach on the Wells Fargo line. Later, he also went overland by railroad from New York to San Francisco. And when he retired to Dennis in 1889, he was regularly seen riding about the village on his faithful horse, Annie Weston, greeting one and all with a contented smile.

Well-acquainted with all of the major seaports of the world, from Boston to the Pacific, Captain Laban acquired an education which many of us might envy. Yet his formal education after the age of nine was limited to two winter terms in the district school in his neighborhood in the little town of Dennis. He was remembered by his neighbors and his daughter, Cora, wife of Captain Calvin C. Howes, as a gentle, thoughtful man, who never reflected to family or friends the formality or the power he had held for so many years as the master of sailing vessels.

"WHAT WILL THEY THINK OF NEXT?" DEPARTMENT

"Mr. C.C. Weysser became the happy possessor of a fine phonograph over the summer, and being a man of ideas, he secured musical selections from some of our summer favorites so that now, when the autumn breezes blow, and later when old Boreas howls, and we find ourselves sighing for voices gone, we have but to step into Mr. Weysser's shop and listen to tenor solos by Mr. Sheridan, or imagine ourselves at a symphony concert as we enjoy violin selections by Mr. Chatterly and G.A. Baker. Verily, what the up-to-date Cape Codder cannot think of is not worth considering."

(From West Dennis column of Yarmouth Register, Oct 3, 1903.)

CALENDAR

Oct. 5 11-2 P.M. Jericho House. Brunch for this summer's volunteers
Oct. 8 7:30 P.M. Board will meet at the Old Paddock House
Oct. 19 2 P.M. Jericho House. Dedication of the Memorial Garden
by the West Dennis Garden Club

ONLY A FEW SHOPPING DAYS UNTIL CHRISTMAS!

Is there someone on your list who is interested in Dennis and her history? If so, we can make your shopping easy. The following are available from DHS for the prices listed. Your next newsletter will give times when the Manse and Jericho will be opened for Christmas shopping.

Dennis Cape Cod (N Reid) \$52.45. The Story of Two Old Houses \$2.50.
Cape Cod Remembrances \$10. (soft), \$15. (hard)
Scuttle Watch (M.C.Ryder) \$10. History of Levi Crowell \$15.
They Built Clipper Ships \$8. Lighthouses of Cape Cod (A. Clark) \$29.95.
Dennis Now and Then \$6. Dennis Journal (Sheedy) \$6.25.
A Few Memories and Digressions \$15. Prence-Howes Court Cupboard \$2.50.
Vital Records of Dennis in 3 Vol. \$100. Dennis Cemetery Inscriptions \$40.
Historical and Genealogical Atlas and Guide to Cape Cod \$16.
Cup Plates (with town seal) \$25. Saltworks silk screened tile \$6.
1858 Map of Dennis village and East Dennis (shows home locations) \$8.
Howes or Sears Family Tree \$25. Shiverick note paper \$3.50.
Shiverick ship tiles (brown or Blue) \$6.50 each, set of 8 \$50.
Also at Jericho only: The White Spire (E. Perry) \$10. (West Dennis)
At the Manse only: Manse handmade soap \$1.50 1872 Teacher's Rules \$1.

REPORT OF THE 1997 ANNUAL MEETING

After hearing the annual reports, the nominating committee, Henry Kelley II, Lilla Smith and Al Reylik, presented the following slate of officers: Pres.-Kitty Macnamara: Vice-Pres.- Nancy T. Reid: Sec'ty-Beth Deck: Treas.-Joan Martin: Cor. Sec'ty-Tom Moran
Board of Directors: Three years, Ray Urquhart and Richard Howes: for one year, Seth Crowell. Sarah Kruger, Nancy Sears and Al Reylik will continue their terms on the Board. Ray Urquhart will serve as Program Chairperson.

Refreshments were provided by Board Members. All enjoyed the entertaining and informative program on Cape Cod Architecture presented by Jim Coogan.

A RESEARCH PROJECT

There are several aspects of the town's history which I feel are still very much in need of research. One of these is the intriguing tale of the involvement of Cape Codders, especially Dennis citizens, in the Underground Railroad, organized by abolitionists in 1838 to assist southern slaves to escape to freedom in Canada. I referred to this activity in our History, but only in vague terms. The effort was illegal, and therefore the usual sources of information, such as the local newspapers, carry only inferences, so vague as not to be easily interpreted today. I would like to pursue this subject, but I need your help. If you live in or know of a house which has a hidden room or evidence of a tunnel in the cellar, if you know of a family tradition regarding involvement in this clandestine enterprise, or if you have letters, dairies or account books which make any reference to it, will you let me know? Address: Nancy Thatcher Reid, P.O. Box 547, South Dennis 02660.

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