



Dennis Historical Society Newsletter

Volume 24 Number 8

October 2001

Calendar of Events

Sunday, October 14 Annual Meeting 1:00 PM followed by A Walk On Crowe's Pasture

Walk on historic Crowe's Pasture with Dennis Conservation Officer Brian Malone. He will tell about the pasture land restored as part of the statewide "biodiversity initiative" program. Park at Quivet Neck Cemetery.

2:00 PM

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

Sunday, December 9th DHS Christmas Open House

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

1-5 PM Josiah Dennis Manse Museum

ANNUAL MEETING NOTICE

Ray Urquhart, President

The annual meeting of the Dennis Historical Society, originally scheduled for September 16th, will be held at the East Dennis Public Library, also called the Jacob Sears Library, on Sunday, October 14th at 1:00 PM. The Society's business meeting will be followed by a historic Crowes Pasture walk led by Dennis Conservation officer, Brian Malone.

Members of the Society will elect six officers and four Executive Board directors at the October meeting. Executive Board officers include the president, vice president, treasurer, assistant treasurer, recording secretary and corresponding secretary and nine directors. Two directors will be elected for a full three year term. Two others to be elected at the annual meeting will be replacing directors who have resigned. One director will serve for one year, the other for two years remaining.

The Executive Board has approved two proposed amendments to the Society by-laws.

Article IV Executive Board – Officers and Directors

Add a new #5 as follows:

“Any officer or director who, without just cause, misses three consecutive Executive Board meetings shall be removed from the Board by a majority vote of the remaining members of the Executive Board after being duly notified by the President that this vote will take place.”

Article IV Officers

Delete from Article IV B.2 the following sentence:

“The President shall serve for no more than two consecutive terms.”

(Article IV B.2 now reads: “All officers shall be elected for one year terms. The President shall serve for no more than two consecutive terms.” If the proposed by-law amendment is approved, the President will not be limited to two consecutive terms, and will, like other officers, be eligible for election annually.)

The narrated slide show scheduled to be presented at the annual meeting by Phyllis Horton, who is also an Executive Board member, is expected to be included in a future Society program schedule.

MEMORIES OF WORLD WAR II

There are so few signs left now of the wartime way of life of over half a century ago... Perhaps an indentation across a sand dune, worn down by years of young Coast Guard feet and their accompanying Dobermans. Maybe a sheet of plywood in the garage, inexplicably cut the size of a window with a view of the bay. Sometimes in the back of a seldom-used drawer, an odd seal or medal, long forgotten. Even unidentified snapshots of young folk proudly dressed in fancy uniforms that no longer fit any known person and are not currently in use by any known service. There are at least two - or maybe three generations born in the intervening time who have no knowledge of these things, or why they were deemed necessary.

The United States was plunged headlong into a state of emergency on December 7, 1941. Within weeks the young men between ages 17-1/2 and 26 disappeared into training camps all across the country. Enemy submarines were detected too near our shores and 'blimps' armed with depth charges appeared out of nowhere and made frequent flights over our coasts. Hurried meetings were called in every village and a responsible person was appointed to be "Air-raid Warden" for each street. Our Dad was one, and each evening shortly after sundown he made his rounds in his hardhat and armband, straining to detect a window or door where the heavy black cloth covering or plywood allowed a crack of light to show. The guilty homeowner would be informed of his error, and as Dad was a very large man with a commanding manner acquired from years at sea, the offending slip-up was usually corrected immediately.

Dad was informed of a delinquency of his own about that time. He had erected a high antenna in the backyard with which he could intercept messages from ships at sea and often follow the ships he himself had served on. Unknown to him, even short-wave receivers could be detected by the advanced equipment aboard the U-boats and Dad was ordered to take down his beloved antenna. His feelings about that were such that he'd have called off the war right then if possible!

We had living in East Dennis a well-known British actress who was about to marry an American producer and had built a home with a view of the shore from the upper storey. Do you remember Gertrude Lawrence of "The King and I" fame? Her fiancée, Richard Aldrich, was living in Dennis near the playhouse at the time, and it had been their habit to signal each other with lanterns across the water as a way of saying "Goodnight". The Navy, FBI, and numerous local authorities soon put a stop to that. Gertrude Lawrence more than atoned for any slight infractions with her efforts at "Bundles for Britain" which had the local women knitting socks, crocheting afghans, and holding special fund-raisers etc., for both the bombed-out English home owners and our overseas servicemen.

As more submarines flowed into Cape Cod Bay, and one was even sunk a mile into the Canal, the Coast Guard commandeered large homes at intervals along the shore, manned them with young Coast Guard volunteers and a kennel-full of Dobermans trained to go for the throat of anything warm and breathing, and proceeded to patrol our shores in 4-hour shifts. Even residents who owned their beaches were required to have police passes to go there, and no one could go to a beach except during very limited times during the week. The usual shell-fishing was out anyway as the tar build-up from the sunken ships and submarines was often several inches thick and effectively smothered any possible sea life. There was a system of signaling the local residents if one or more of the dogs broke loose, which happened occasionally. First our volunteer fire department would blow the sirens long and loud. Then the church bells would start ringing. The clamor continued until the dogs were either caught or destroyed. An East Dennis resident, Boots Baker, was raising lambs at that time and one day he went out to find all his lambs dead with their throats torn. We took the sirens and bells very seriously after that!

The Coast Guard station in our beach area was the old "Bleak House" on Seaside Ave. in Dennis, and it was under the command of one Tony Tarvers of Provincetown, whom Dad knew well enough to have him and one or two of his officers over for Sunday dinner occasionally. My brother and I would never think of eavesdropping during one of these occasions, of course, but somehow we learned the patrol schedules well enough to sneak down to the beach quite often. At times we'd get to talking with a Coast Guardsman, and I'll never forget one - the first time I ever remember hearing a Hoboken, NJ, accent and I admit to being quite impressed. Until he pointed to Seth and asked, "Dat youse kid brudder?"

An Army installation, Camp Edwards, grew mightily during these times and incorporated an air field and even a facility for POWs. My close friend and the only other girl near my age in East Dennis during my high

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MEMORIES OF WORLD WAR II

school years was Trudy Sears, who lived ‘up the hill’ from my home on Sesuit Neck. Trudy and I often met after school and weekends in good weather to ride our bikes. One favorite place to take homework was Scargo Hill, and one day as we were headed up Main Street, we passed an unusual group of men doing street repairs. What was unusual was that most of them were chained to each other with leg irons, had a big POW painted on their shirts, and were supervised by uniformed men carrying unholstered guns. What shocked us most was that the POWs were so young, some looked to be even younger than we were (age 14 or 15), and looked scared to death, really triggering our sympathies. We heard later that the Nazi regime was indeed drafting boys over the age of 12 for active service toward the end of the war.

As everyone old enough to have reached the age of reason was encouraged to perform some patriotic service, I signed up to take classes in aircraft identification, together with my Aunt Jack, (B. Evelyn Crowell). I’ve never really understood why we had to identify Japanese aircraft along with German and Italian planes. I figured if the Japanese got this far, identifying them wouldn’t do much good as we’d all be dead anyway. We both passed our final exams and were duly given our schedule of hours to work at the aircraft spotting tower on Mrs. Clay’s property on Sea St., East Dennis. We’d call in, on a special line, every plane, blimp, ‘copter or anything airborne, and fortunately, never had to press the infamous Red Button for enemy aircraft. My “Kid Brudder” often accompanied me on my shift and he surely had good eyesight! Seth and Lu pointed out to me that my name still is on the list of aircraft spotters posted at the library in Jacob Sears Memorial Hall, East Dennis, and it must be more than 50 years since I’ve lived here, though I come ‘home’ as often as possible.

One of the most disliked aspects of wartime was the rationing of everything from shoes to sugar to gasoline and many things between. That A-card for gas didn’t allow one to go pleasure driving, and you were lucky to be able to get grocery shopping every week if you lived as far away from a good-sized market as we did. Quite often, the trucks carrying meat to the Cape found it not worth their while to cross the bridges, and like many others, the end of the war came while we still had many stamps for meat that was unavailable. Fishing was not possible with the restrictions on boats and beaches. People reacted in many ways. In our family, Mother raised chickens, which grew into a lucrative sideline for her as she often sold dressed chickens to friends and co-workers of Dad’s in Hyannis. Eventually the day came when Dad and Uncle Mark, his brother who lived across the fields on our side of the street, decided it was time for some good red meat. Together they built a penned enclosure at the base of a sandpit between their homes and toward the creek that ran behind our homes. Then they bought a couple of the most belligerent piglets known to man. Although they’d sunk posts 6 to 8 feet deep before putting up the fencing, those pigs could knock them out in hours! Then our whole families were enlisted to help round them up and re-pen them. Those ugly monsters would head for the brush that grew along the creek. By the time we were mud from head to toe and torn by thorns, we might manage to corner one. The little monster then would, like as not, turn and charge us. Although we were never hurt by one, I admit I was terrified of them and couldn’t wait until they grew large enough to butcher. I’ve always hated the idea of butchering – of anything except those pigs!

People who lived inland never experienced the war as we who lived on the coast did. Time and again I’ve started to tell a story of my high school days during the war to friends in the upper Midwest and had those friends stare at me in disbelief. Now that those days are only a memory, it really was one of those experiences you wouldn’t miss, but you surely would not wish it on your grandchildren!

Ruth Crowell Jahnke

A note about our guest author: Ruth and her husband, Lloyd Jahnke, timed their most recent visit to correspond with our scheduled annual meeting in September. The tragic events on September 11th elicited memories of another war, and how it affected the people living in Dennis. Ruth and Lloyd were traveling from Texas when they heard the news.

Dennis Historical Society

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THE WAY WE WERE

As we put together this newsletter, we spotted this photo on the bookcase in the Manse Library. It seemed appropriate to include it this month, as we remember our country's heroes, past and present.

