



Dennis Historical Society Newsletter

Volume 26 Number 10

October 2003

**Look for DHS at
the Arts, Culture
& Heritage
Weekend
October 4-5, 2003**

DHS BOARD MEETS
Wednesday, Oct. 8
7 PM at W. Dennis
School House
Interested members are
welcome.

**"HAUNTED HOUSES
OF CAPE COD"**
Wednesday, October 29
7:30 PM

Local author, **Jack
Sheedy**, will tell us where
the skeletons are hidden as
he relates scary tales from
our surroundings.

CARLETON HALL
1006 Old Bass River Road
Refreshments will be
served.

SUNDAY, DEC. 14
DHS CHRISTMAS
OPEN HOUSE AT THE
MANSE
12:00-4:00 PM

VISIONS OF
CHRISTMAS AT
JERICHO
2:00-5:00 PM

How a Priceless Antique Left the Howes Family

by Marjorie S. Wheeler

My Great Aunt Abby may have been a wonderful schoolteacher, but as an antiques dealer, she left a lot to be desired. In 1925 after the death of her father (my great grandfather Henry Francis Howes—1840-1925), Aunt Abby's actions provided a sad tale in the chronicles of my branch of the Howes family. The famous "Prince (or Prence) Court Cupboard," which is literally priceless today, was part of my great grandfather's estate. Upon his death Aunt Abby, being the executrix of his will, decided to sell the cupboard. Perhaps she was experiencing financial difficulties or maybe the cupboard was just too large, but whatever the reason, she made the decision to sell.



Great Aunt Abby Howes

She was well acquainted with the artist and antique furniture collector, Wallace Nutting, because she was hired by him during the summers as a colorist for his photographs of colonial interiors and pastoral landscapes which were immensely popular in the early part of the 1900s. He offered to buy the cupboard from her for a few thousand dollars in 1925. Later that year he sold it to J. P. Morgan, Jr. for many times that amount. A bit disgruntled about what she perceived as being cheated by Mr. Nutting, Aunt Abby sued him for further payment. She lost the suit in court and the Howes family lost the chest forever.

Fortunately, J. P. Morgan, Jr. donated his extensive early colonial furniture collection (including the Prince-Howes Court Cupboard) to the Wadsworth Atheneum in Hartford, Connecticut where it can be enjoyed by all. And anyone interested in that antique bargain-hunting collector, Wallace Nutting, can enjoy a special exhibit of his work at the Wadsworth Atheneum until October 19, 2003. Meanwhile, I think I'll check on the value of my great-grandmother's blanket chest....

A WINDY TALE

Thanks to Betty Dean Holmes

In September 1938 on Cape Cod, we had substantial winds from a hurricane. We did not have the weather forecasts that supply us with storm warnings today so that low lying areas could be safely evacuated. In fact we had no way to know a hurricane was coming up the coast. In nearby Rhode Island a 30 foot storm surge coming up Narragansett Bay put downtown Providence under 14 feet of water. It was a storm in which 600 lives were lost. All over the Cape there was widespread destruction with houses, trees and boats blown into the streets and onto front lawns.

That fall day after lunch eleven year old Priscilla Dean had gone over to Merla Gannon's house on nearby Upper County Road in Dennis Port to play with her friends Gertrude and Jeanette Gannon. In late afternoon when it was time to go home for supper (a distance of less than two blocks) Priscilla came out the door into a wind blowing so hard it astonished her. She clearly remembers that she had to lean way over facing into the wind to proceed, forcing one step at a time, to cross the street into the little alley between Mabel's Mixing Bowl and Charlie Smith's Hardware Store. Her clothes were plastered tightly against her body by the wind and her braids streamed straight out behind her. The wind even untied the ribbons on her pigtails. Priscilla squinted her eyes tightly, almost shut, to keep the blowing sand out of her eyes and held her hands over her cheeks as the sand stung her face. In between the buildings she had some protection from the wind, but once through the alley she had to fight her way, pushing with all her strength into the wind, up the sidewalk to the kitchen door of our house on Main Street. What a relief to reach the safety of our kitchen and shut the door behind her!

That same afternoon our Dad, Louis E. Dean, who sold radios and installed antennas to improve radio reception, was working up on a roof installing an aerial antenna. He kept right on working as the wind began to blow, determined to finish the job. The wind kept getting stronger and stronger and finally blew so hard it undid all the buttons of the fly on his trousers. (This was before men's pants had zippers.) At that point Dad decided it was time to get off the roof and go home.

Moral? If the wind blows, keep one ear tuned to the radio and get off the roof early, or you may be undone!

ANNUAL MEETING REPORT

Christine's Restaurant resounded with the wonderful music of the Mid Cape Chorus after the fastest business meeting on record, where the By-law revisions were accepted and the torch was passed to our new President Virginia Devine. Ginny then presented Ray with our special thanks for four wonderful years as president by making him a Honorary Lifetime Member and announced that the DHS would be planting an elm tree at the West Dennis Graded School to help us all remember his dedicated work on the restoration of the building. If you missed the fine luncheon and the foot-tapping program that followed, you missed a really nice time—not at all your typical business luncheon!

Phyllis Horton put together the first ever written annual report which was handed out to those members in attendance. She listed the names of all our members and printed reports from the Treasurer and the Acquisitions Committee as well as the Recording Secretary's highlights from the past year's accomplishments. But best of all was President Ray's message to all of us:

....When we accept membership in the Dennis Historical Society, we also assume a responsibility to participate now and ever more in the preservation of our rich heritage. So many have contributed over time to the town's historic treasures. And for these efforts, we today are thankful. Still, so many more must come forward. Preservation is a willing challenge we cannot turn aside.

Raymond M. Urquhart

REMEMBERING RENNIE

*Ruth Crowell Jahnke
Rockport, Texas
August 6, 2003*

In the early '30s many citizens of countries whose politics they could no longer understand or condone sought a better, safer life for their families in this country. A comparatively privileged Italian family in their middle years arrived in Boston about this time. The husband was a respected doctor in his old country, but for one reason or another, never practiced again here. His wife was a beautiful and intelligent musician who obtained a teaching position at a college in Boston and was able to augment whatever resources the family could bring with them. After a few years in Boston, the family moved to Dennis bringing with them their young son. They might have dreamed of returning to their home in Italy once sanity returned to Europe and to that end, spoke only Italian in their home so their son would be familiar with their native language.

Instead of a return to sanity, a Fascist dictator formed a pact with a violent German dictator and World War II interrupted many lives permanently. The young son, Gian D. Renato, was enrolled in Dennis Consolidated School despite the fact he spoke little English and had little previous interaction with other children. Rennie felt himself different from other children in his class, probably with good reason, as his classmates had not yet learned to be tolerant of those different from themselves. As a result, Rennie much preferred the solitude of the woods and bays to the social structure of the classroom and was often truant. He was a handsome, dark-eyed boy with a lot of native intelligence and could fend for himself very well indeed out in the open. He realized how he was disappointing his parents but felt powerless to do anything about it.

His first savings were invested in an old boat which he fixed up for a commercial fishing venture. After several near mishaps, he succeeded in making the boat seaworthy and even began to support himself as a fisherman. This began his lifelong attachment to the sea, and in the time-honored Cape Cod way, he received his Master's papers and became "Captain Bottero."

It was in those early years that I really got to know Rennie and his family. I was back home recovering from an illness and attending the local secretarial school. There were two others near our age and we somehow found each other and formed a support group. Our hunting and fishing expeditions sometimes provided dinner which was usually cooked by Rennie at the Bottero's home or at my mother's. It was at this time that I became acquainted with Dr. and Mrs. Bottero. Sometimes the hunting wasn't too successful. Don't ever try boiled seagull stew—NOT GOOD!

Eventually we all got our lives together and went our separate ways. Although we lost touch, our retirement years brought us back to Dennis where Rennie had built a home. After his father died, he took his mother to live with him until she passed away in her 90s. When he heard we were visiting he invited us to his house for a real Italian dinner, and once again we shared some of the good memories. He and his mother made us feel very welcome. He was proud of his children and his grandchildren, displaying their pictures and telling us about them. And he could still cook!

Rennie had all of the visible scars of a seaman's life, hands gnarled with arthritis and stiff limbs, but he seemed unable to tear himself away from the sea. In his later years we heard he had upgraded his Captain's qualifications to include ships of larger tonnage. His last job was on a yacht in Florida.

Now Rennie is no longer with us. Wherever he is, I hope he knows how much we appreciated his innate hospitality and those wonderful dinners! When we're in Dennis we drive down to Dr. Bottero's Road in New Boston near the beach and remember how a proud Italian family escaped from a world of politics beyond their control. But mostly we remember Rennie!

Dennis Historical Society

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The Way We Were

This summer was a busy one at the Manse and we have to thank the many volunteers who did a terrific job as a docent or a junior docent. We are grateful for the hours they spent helping visitors learn about life in the 1700s. In addition to the Manse Committee members, we would like to recognize these other volunteers.

Docents:

Chrissy Thacher
Mary Bond
Sheila Duker
Barbara Durst
Elaine Lomenzo
Betty Tully
Betsey Mason
Mary Aseltine
June Howes
Karin Wennberg
Alice Burton
Mary Hogan
Jim Coogan

Junior Docents:

Emily Smith
Amelia Di Prete
Abigail Hynes-Houston
Melissa Hoelt
Carley Blake

Photo shows Abigail
Hynes-Houston, Age 11
Children's Room, July 2003

