

Dennis Historical Society Newsletter

Volume 27 Number 10

October 2004

Calendar of Events

Board meetings are open
to all interested members
of the DHS. Next meeting

Wednesday, Oct. 13
7:00 PM

1867 West Dennis School

Saturday, October 16
7:00 PM

**Dennis Historical Society
Annual Meeting**

Following a very short
business meeting

Joan Gatturna presents
historical tales of women
who sailed the Seven Seas

**"Petticoats at Sea:
The Captain's Wife Who
Wouldn't Stay Home"**

Guests are welcome.

Refreshments.

Carleton Hall, 1006 Old
Bass River Road,
Dennis Village

Saturday, October 30
Annie's Crannies

10:00 AM

Annie Walker will take us
on a tour of her barn, cran-
berry processing equip-
ment and bogs.

36 Scarsdale Road
(off Whig Street)
Dennis Village

School Days Are Here Again

Today our high school students are being routed around repairs and construction needed to update the Dennis-Yarmouth Regional High School to meet the new state standards. Were things always thus?

Mr. Hopkins was Superintendent of Schools in 1915. This was the year the two high schools in Dennis were merged to become the Dennis High School. Nancy Reid's History tells us "After that, high school students were transported by auto barge from the north side to the South Dennis schoolhouse, where Dennis High School was kept. The School Committee required that the second teacher at the High School find room and board on the north side of town so that he or she could ride the barge to and from school each day to keep order." p.564-5

From *The Enterprise*, a booklet that was published by Dennis High School students in June of 1916, we find the following letter:

My dear Mr. Hopkins:

I take great pleasure in informing you that the Dennis High school has been approved in Class B for the privilege of certification to state normal schools for 1916.

On the occasion of my visit, I noted the many improvements that have been made in the physical equipment of the building. The addition of a third teacher has made it possible to offer work which is of larger educational value and is evidently making a strong appeal to the interests of the pupils. The provision for a hot lunch is excellent.

The work of both teachers and pupils seems to me commendable and I desire to congratulate the school upon the improvements that have been made.

Very truly yours,

Clarence D. Kingsley.

Agent for high schools

In 1931 the 95 high school students from Dennis joined the Yarmouth students at the John Simpkins School in South Yarmouth. Dennis paid tuition to send them to the Yarmouth school. It wasn't until 1957 that the new Dennis-Yarmouth Regional High School opened its doors, with around 100 youths from Dennis in attendance.

One of the 1947 graduates from the Simpkins School went on to the University of Massachusetts in Amherst. Ruth Crowell's English I composition of October 17 rated a grade of A and a note from her professor about Dennis.

The Professor's Note: *An excellent theme. You are very clever in making this tiny town with (apparently) no economic significance appear to be one of the places in New England that people should know about and visit.*

East Dennis, Massachusetts

East Dennis, a tiny residential community on Cape Cod, has the atmosphere of dignity that befits its illustrious part in the growth of our country. It also has retained some of the beauty that nature gives to a land before man has a chance to destroy it.

The village is a small group of handsome, white homes centered about the large church and library. Twin creeks, Sesuit and Quivet, named for twin Indian chieftains who once reigned over the area, divide the village into two necks of flat land lying between a range of low, lightly wooded hills and the Cape Cod Bay. The mouth of Sesuit Creek forms a natural harbor where in fair weather there are usually four or five sailboats. Along the sides of the creeks are vast acres of salt marshland scattered with piles of ancient planks, the remains of great salt vats which provided Cape Cod with its first industry. These wastelands in the late spring are transformed into a brilliant rose-colored mass by the wild marsh mallows that spring up among the weeds and salt hay. Several species of wild ducks, geese, and herons build their nests there. At the edges of the marsh and inside the dunes along the shore are the expanses of swampland divided into perfect geometric figures by dykes and drainage ditches. These are the cranberry bogs, once a well-known and important source of income to the Cape Codder. Your imagination will have told you that East Dennis has changed very little in the past century or two.

Over three hundred years ago one of the early settlers left the Plymouth colony to explore Cape Cod and settled near the twin creeks. He brought his family to farm there and as more people were drawn to the spot, a tiny new settlement was born. As it grew and the hunting became poor, the people had to develop their own sources of livelihood. Shore whaling and fishing supplemented home farming. At the time of the Revolutionary War the salt works provided income for many. After the war, ships were needed for coastal trading. The natural harbor of East Dennis provided a perfect location for the Shiverick Shipyard which was built there in the early eighteenth century. As the shipyard expanded along with a world trade, schooners and clippers such as the *Ellen Sears* and the *Belle of the West* made world records in beauty and sailing speed which were never broken. The coming of the steam ship put the shipyard out of business and many turned to cranberry cultivation. Fishing has also had its place in the economic structure of the Cape both as a livelihood and as a lure for tourists. Today the tourist business, which so far has been kept from our immediate village, is the only important source of income. The homes of the sea captains and shipbuilders of many years ago make up our village of today.

As the total population is quite small, East Dennis has remained almost completely uncommercialized. It has one tiny general store and an equally tiny telephone and post office building. It cannot boast of any recreational facilities other than boating and the dance floor, that is seldom used, in one part of the library. For amusement as well as for shopping one goes to the nearest town about twelve miles away. The village does not even have a school and its few children go across Cape by bus every day for their education. Most of the villagers are retired businessmen who were born on Cape Cod and are returning to their old

homes to spend the remainder of their lives.

As a part of the town of Dennis, which consists of five villages, we have the old New England form of government under a town clerk and a board of selectmen. An annual town meeting is held on the first Tuesday of March. Very seldom is it necessary to call another meeting during the year. The police force is nearly non-existent and only one old officer is kept in our village to direct what traffic there may be at the post office and to help out whenever he can. Very little disturbs the peacefulness of East Dennis, Massachusetts.

Note: In 1947 the population of the entire town was 2,015. No one had never heard of the term "trophy house". Those four or five sailboats in Sesuit Harbor would certainly be lost among today's launches and yachts. Oh, and Ruth, I think the tourists have found your peaceful East Dennis.

Trash or Treasure?

This is a heads-up to all you yard salers and bargain hunters, and a reminder that DHS is looking for history even when it may seem like clutter. A few weeks ago Dot Kierstead of Dennis brought me (because of the name Crowell) a small red-leather diary from 1880 which she had found at a yard sale in South Dennis. It had belonged to E. M. Crowell of West Dennis. In it she kept her household accounts of expenses and money owed as well as money earned. There were added comments to some of the days recording important events. For instance she wrote: Saturday, January 10, 1880

1 lb Crackers	.12
Bread	.10
1/2 Lb pickles	.06
8 1/2 Lbs Lard Mrs. N.	.12
"De Wolf" left Boston for Balt.	

Tuesday, January 13, 1880

Bread & Cookies	.20
Schr. U. B. Fisk left Boston for Balt.	

Tuesday, March 23

Fixing E's Boots	.10
Spent the day at Mercy's	
The "DeWolf" arrived at Boston from Phila.	
Capt. Came home tonight.	

Through the days we can follow this young wife as she cares for her son Elnathan and pays the bills and does the shopping. On May 3 she writes, *Paid for grave stone for Elnathan's little sister, \$3.00 and Sodding Grave, \$.25* Every few weeks Elnathan has to have his boots repaired and seems to be outgrowing all his clothes. Then on Tuesday, July 13, *Elnathan taken sick this morning. Telegraph Ada. She and Arthur come this evening.* And on Thursday the 15th, *Elnathan died this P.M. ten minutes of one o'clock.*

This diary has been copied by hand and will be kept in our library of transcribed documents. Thank you, Dot, for the loan. Lura

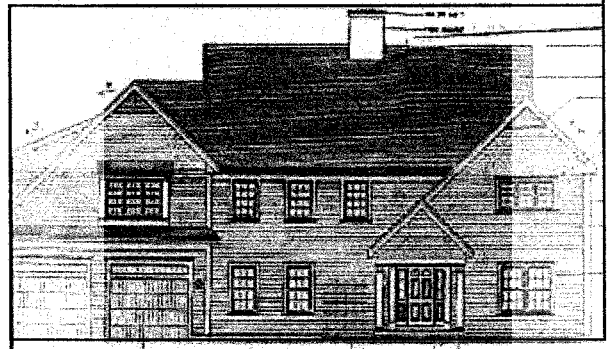
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Back to THE WAY WE WERE

Once upon a time in East Dennis there was a quiet dirt lane which wound its way from the paved road to three cottages overlooking the Bay. Then a developer bought a lot on this lane, took down the trees, and brought in truckloads of fill to make sure the new house he was building there sat high enough to catch the water view. The front of the house boasted a two-car garage, a wide portico, and a plethora of dormers and windows of all sizes. In the rear of the house (the part with the water view) there were three stories of decks with sliding glass doors. As neighbors watched the progress of this "spec house", the quiet lane became busy with trucks hauling, carpenters hammering, bulldozers and cranes moving huge rocks to hold up the banks, and carloads of prospective buyers viewing. Until one day when everything stopped. The windows and doors were suddenly being removed. The cranes returned with more trucks and loaders—this time to knock the house down and take it all away! Today if you should walk down this quiet lane, nothing remains of the house but the clearing and the possibility of a meadow on the knoll. Now you can see again the osprey's nest, the trees, some rooftops and the Bay.



Sketch of the house which once was and is no more.