



Dennis Historical Society Newsletter

Volume 38. No 9

Send letters & stories to Dennis Historical Society, Box 607, S. Dennis 02660 or to pjhowes@verizon.net

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The next Board Meeting: is Tuesday, October 13 @ 2:00 P.M., West Dennis Graded School, School St. West Dennis.

In Memoriam

Harry E. Van Iderstine

7/13/30-9/3/15

Harry was a special friend of and major contributor to the Dennis Historical Society and the Josiah Dennis Manse. One of his earliest donations was in May 1981 for tablet in the honor of Esther Howes. In the past few years, Harry provided a major endowment that allowed the restoration and preservation of the Manse dress collection, construction of a storage vault in the basement and, most recently, acquisition of the Belle of the West painting. He will be truly missed by all that his life touched.

Pete Howes

Harry's Early Years

Harry was born in Dennis in 1930. He grew up during the Depression like everyone else. Poor, but with enough of life's necessities to keep going. Everyone around here was in the same boat. Most men had a job of some kind—and were grateful to have it. Every family had a garden for eating in the summer and canning for the winter. Many folks had chickens and someone in the neighborhood kept a cow or two where you could get milk for a few cents. No one went hungry but there were no frills. You could go down to the harbor and ask for a fish to feed your family which was freely given. Fishermen were a superstitious lot. They believed that what God had given to them they were bound to share with those in need.

Harry's father, Raymond, was the gardener for the Cape Playhouse grounds. In those years they were a "destination". Summer people of means arrived in chauffeur-driven autos and strolled about the gardens before the play enjoying the large variety of roses and other flowers which Raymond had nurtured into show pieces.

In the winter Ray had a long list of chores to get ready for the next season. In 1933 at age 31 he was under the Playhouse-owned house for starlets on Whig Street to light the gas hot water tank for the summer. There was no odor to gas back then. Ray lit a match and was blown half-way across the yard. He

lived three days at Cape Cod Hospital. Mildred was left alone with two small children to care for. No IRAs, disability or government care in those days.

A miraculous thing happened in Dennis Village. Everyone found a way to help Mildred and her family. Women who had done every single chore in their household suddenly couldn't get the ironing, mending or whatever, done and could she please help them out? The dimes, quarters and dollars added up. As Evelyn grew older she was hired as a mother's helper and in time Harry was hired to run errands. Mrs. Chaffee, who owned the Josiah Dennis Manse, asked Harry to get her mail at Goodspeed's Store (for 25 cents). When he arrived with the mail, "Oh, my, I forgot that I needed coffee, too. Would you mind going back? (For another quarter!)"

And so it went. Evelyn and Harry grew up, went through Ezra Baker and Yarmouth High School still doing village jobs.

When Harry graduated from John Simpkins High School in Yarmouth he had a job at Dan Walker's gas station. Eldon Davidson, son of store keeper and Dennis Selectman Earl Davidson, came home from college for the holidays. He heard that if Harry could get to Brooklyn, NY he had a job waiting for him at his uncle's brass foundry. Eldon pulled into the gas station and said, "I've heard that you're looking for a ride to New York. Well, it happens I'm going down to see my girlfriend tomorrow. I'd be glad to give you a ride." Of course, Harry jumped at the chance. So, the two set off for New York. Eldon dropped Harry off at his uncle's foundry and returned home.

The next day he went to see his girlfriend in Boston.

Harry never forgot his hometown, his school friends and those who had helped his family. He returned faithfully in summer to visit the old friends and he became a benefactor to Dennis Historical Society.

In my last letter to Harry I promised him that his story would last long after he and I were gone because it was in the DHS Archives—and so it is.

Phyllis Horton

New Shades in Jericho Barn

Solar shades have been installed in all 10 windows of the barn! *THANK YOU* to all who answered our appeal for funds to make this purchase possible. Your support of our efforts to preserve and revitalize the barn is so appreciated. These window coverings allow sunlight into the exhibit rooms, but protect our treasures from the harsh effects of ultra-violet rays. On your next visit you will notice a real change in atmosphere in the barn.

We cannot say it enough, *THANK YOU*. Your response has been so wonderful and generous that we will be able to buy two more (much needed) shades for the attic room in the house!

Dawn Dellner, on behalf of the entire Jericho Committee

The Rose Victorian

Open hours in October are Thursday – Saturday, 10a.m. to 4p.m. Newly arrived ornaments and other items in time for Christmas! All DHS members receive a 10% discount, kindly identify yourself when visiting the DHS gift shop. RV phone is: 508-394-1696, leave a message and a volunteer will return your call.

June Howes

Samuel Hartt Pook

Last month's newsletter described Samuel Hartt Pook as the designer of the Belle of the West. The following excerpts more clearly describe this famous maritime designer.

"The last of the great designers of sailing ships for the United States Navy was Samuel M. Pook, January 1, 1841 to August 15, 1866 (retired). He died December 2, 1878. ... He was the father of Samuel Hartt Pook, the famous designer of clipper-ships, who also became a constructor in the United States Navy. The elder Pook was not a believer in extreme deadrise and criticized the design of the *Albany*, Grice's design, very severely. He undoubtedly had much influence on the work of his son. The Pooks, father and son, were among the most talented of American naval architects. The elder Pook apparently received his early training as a shipwright in the Navy Yards and was employed in the yards as early as 1825. Constructor Pook did a great deal of responsible work during the Civil War.¹

"Samuel Hartt Pook ... first came to attention as the designer of some of the early New England

built clippers while in the employ of Samuel Hall of Boston. It is now impossible to list all the clippers Pook designed, but the most notable ones were *Ocean Telegraph* (1851), *Golden West and Defiance* both launched in 1852, *Red Jacket* (1853), *Herald of the Morning* (1853), *Belle of the West* (1853), and *Fearless* (1853). The surviving half-models show that Pook's designs were not radical... Pook's vessels seem to have been capable of a rather high sustained speed and some, such as *Red Jacket*, had records of high hourly speed. Also, his designs did not sacrifice cargo capacity unduly; he apparently never produced a very extreme clipper. Pook seems to have worked as a naval architect, not as a builder, though occasionally he was an employee of a yard. It is said that he found private professional practice so poorly paid that he finally followed his father's footsteps and became a United States naval constructor."²

Pete Howes

The Village Blacksmith

I doubt if he ever stood "under a spreading chestnut tree" but, nonetheless, Captain Browning Baker was one of the best loved and best known men in West Dennis in the middle 1800's. His was the simplicity and integrity that could "look the whole world in the face" throughout his 89 years. He lived for nearly all of those years in the farm homestead on the main road, the house recently occupied by Mrs. Adelbert Baker. Capt. Browning's grandson, the late Adelbert Baker, and Mrs. Baker took great pride and pleasure in improving the old home, keeping it in perfect condition and cherishing its memories and mementoes.

"The children coming home from school looked in at the open door" of his Smithy which stood close to the main road, north west of his home. They liked to watch "the sparks that fly," but even more they liked to be near him for he loved children and young people and sought to have them about him whenever possible. The forge was mecca for all small boys, his son and, later, his grandsons included, and he was never too busy to teach them the art of making nails and hooks etc., or to help them with some small repair job. He was an expert craftsman, taking great pride in good workmanship and putting to

¹ Chapelle, Howard I *"The History of American Sailing Ships*, W. W. Norton Co., Inc. NY, 1935, pp 129

² Chapelle, Howard I *"The Search For Speed Under Sail, 1700-1855"*, W. W. Norton Co., Inc. NY, 1967, pp 362, 363

shame any boy who tended to slight a given task. His reputation for making the best eel spears on the Cape brought customers to the Smithy from as far away as Wel'fleet, a considerable journey in those days.

Children were not his only visitors, however, and all too often in their opinion, they had to share his kindly attention with a neighborly gathering of returned sea captains and village wise-acres. Never stopping his work, Capt. Browning was still able to take in all that was said and to inject a salty comment now and then. He had stern rules of conduct for himself and never indulged in strong language or violent outbursts, but his moderately expressed ideas were listened to with respect. "Good arth!" was the expletive he used when he was especially wrought up. One day the talk on the long bench against the wall of the Smithy, ran on the project of building iron ships. Capt. Browning, hammering away on a horse shoe, listened for a while and then, in exasperation, tossed the shoe into the nearby hogshead of water with the remark, "There's the way your iron ship will float!"

"He went on Sunday to the church" clad in a heavy grey shawl, fastened with a gold pin, and wearing a tall, black beaver hat. He was one of the staunchest supporters and hardest workers in the church. He was on the building committee when the first edifice was erected in 1835 and also when it was enlarged in 1848. He not only loved to hear "the village choir" but was its director and inspiration. He played the bass viol to accompany the singing and that was the only instrument played in the church until 1855 when a seraphine, a small reed organ, was purchased. Capt. Browning's love of music was second only to his love of young people and he was able to make a happy combination of his two interests by gathering a group of young people at his home whenever possible. Sometimes it could be called a choir rehearsal and sometimes just a plain Sing. Beaming with pleasure, bass viol between his knees and bow upraised, he always announced as the starting tune "Sometimes the winds do blow a dreadful hurricane."

The low white farm house that echoed to so much music and young laughter saw sadness, too, and many changes through the years. Capt. Browning had four wives and was heard to remark, when he had survived them all and was being cared for in his later years by his devoted daughter, that

they were the four best wives a man could possibly have. In the delirium that attended his last illness he turned from his forge back to the seafaring life of his early manhood and was deeply concerned because his Brig was "loaded and ready for a voyage" and he must "go at once and take command of her." No one who ever knew him could be in any doubt as to his ship's readiness for the last voyage nor his ability to command her as she "crossed the bar."

Cape Cod Remembrances, Ryder, Marion Crowell, pp 88, 89

The Exodus

"The ground trembled as thousands of cars filed up the Mid-Cape Highway Labor Day. For the majority the summer was just a memory of sand and sea. They left beer cans on beaches and front yards, humorless statistics at police stations and the Cape Cod Hospital, and money in many a motel, bank and business. Except for a dip in August due to cool weather, the Cape profited mightily. But the wear and tear was evident. Improvement of both the Cape and its image would be topics of local discussion from now until next Spring."

This article which appeared in the *Sept. 11, 1964* issue of The Dennis-Yarmouth Register was recently found in the attic of DHS's Rose Victorian. Some things never change!

June Howes



Here was October, here
Was ruddy October, the old harvester,
Wrapped like a beggared sachem in a coat
Of tattered tanager and partridge feathers,
Scattering jack-o-lanterns everywhere
To give the field-mice pumpkin-colored moons.
His red clay pipe had trailed across the land
Staining the trees with colors of the sumach:
East, West, South, North, the ceremonial fume
Blue and enchanted as the soul of air
Drifted its incense.
Incense of the wild,
Incense of the earth fulfilled, ready to sleep
The stupefied dark slumber of the bear
All winter, underneath a frozen star.



Stephen Vincent Benet

John Brown's Body



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OCTOBER DHS EVENTS

Dennis Historical Society Annual Meeting and Luncheon

Saturday, October 17, 2015 at 11:30 a.m.

Luncheon Will Be Served At 12:00 Sharp!



We Return To The Historic
Liberty Hall
Main St. & Upper County Rd.,
South Dennis

Following a *very brief* Annual Meeting,
Our Special Guest Speaker Duncan Oliver
Will Present

"The Separation of Yarmouth and Dennis"

MENU

First Course

Red Cottage Clam Chowder
Mixed Greens Salad
with Bleu Cheese Vinaigrette

Entrees

Stuffed Chicken Breast with Cranberry
Stuffing
~ or ~
Butternut Squash Ravioli

House Made Dessert

Petitfours
Bread Pudding

Coffee/Tea/Iced Tea

Luncheon Presented By:
Daniel J. Rosenbach
Chef/Owner
Red Cottage Restaurant, LLC



Golden Days at Jericho

Saturday, October 10 1-4 pm

Demonstrations and more:

- quilting
- decorative painting
- chair caning
- spinning
- cranberry treats
- salt works exhibit
- cornhusk craft
- visiting sheep



Celebrate Fall

1801 Jericho Historic Center
Corner of Old Main Street & Trotting Park Road
Where South and West Dennis Meet
508-398-6736



Reservations & Payment Due by October 10
Jinny Devine 508-385-4441