

DENNIS HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER  
SEPTEMBER 1979

ANNUAL MEETING

Members are reminded that the annual meeting is scheduled for Monday, September 10, 1979 at V.I.C. Hall, Depot Street in Dennisport, at 7:30 P.M. Reports of committees and elections of officers are on the agenda, as well as a report by the By-Laws Committee which will present a new set of revised By-Laws for your approval. It behooves every member to be present and participate in this important business meeting.

Dues for the year are due and payable on or before this meeting. The following schedule is recommended by the Executive Board: Individual members--\$3.00, Family membership--\$5.00, Life Membership--\$100.00. Please mail your dues to Mrs. Elinor Slade, Membership Chairman, Box 607, South Dennis, MA 02660, if you are unable to be present at the annual meeting.

BLOW THE MAN DOWN

Following the Annual Meeting, some members of the Society will present a short entertainment illustrating musically the history and uses of sea Chanties, a unique form of folk music which has an important relationship to our area. These talented people are some of those who presented sea chanties to our school children at their spring field trips. You will be surprised to find that chanties served several important purposes in the life of a sea going vessel--and we hope that you will be entertained as well as enlightened.

SCHOOL DAYS

As the children of Dennis return to the schools bearing the names of two of the town's partriarchs, it might be well to recall that public education has not always been conducted in such fine buildings nor with such extensive equipment as we now find in our Dennis Public Schools. Early efforts at public education are recorded in the late 1600's when John Thacher and John Miller were instructed by the Town Meeting to see to the hiring of a suitable Schoolmaster. Plymouth Colony helped by taxing outside fishermen who fished in Cape Cod Bay and setting aside the amounts received for education here on the Cape.

The first schools had no permanent homes. They were so-called "Squadron Schools". A Schoolmaster hired for a given time by the town would teach the three R's in someone's home in a neighborhood of the town for about three months. He would then move to another neighborhood for an equal length of time and continue his appointed rounds until all neighborhoods had had a turn. Then, if his strength allowed, he would begin again. Few schoolmasters lasted for more than one circuit. No wonder that the spelling in our early town books is less than consistent (although the handwriting is beautiful).

As the population increased, neighborhood school buildings were constructed. Our 1770 Schoolhouse at the Manse is an example of this step in the development of our school system. There were more than one of these schools in different areas of each village. At one time in the mid-1800's, there were 13 school districts in the town. In the 1860's large two-story schools were built in each of the five villages, an example of which is the West Dennis Community Building on School St., West Dennis. Then came the famous town meeting, held in the Dennis Playhouse in 1929 when the recommendation to build one consolidated school was to be acted upon. There are some grand tales of how the halt, the lame, and the blind were gathered up and transported to that meeting to sway the day in favor of the school (all perfectly legal, of course)--but that's another story. And so are those of Nathaniel H. Wixon and Ezra Howes Baker, for whom our present schools are named. For now, let's just wish our children a successful year at school while we try to decide what courses we will sign up for from the great variety made available to us at our modern and spacious schools.

QUIVETT AND SESUIT NECKS TOURED SEPTEMBER 9th

Bicyclists are urged to congregate at Cold Storage Beach at two o'clock, Sunday, September 9th, to tour Quivett and Sesuit Necks, an area of the town particularly full of historic interest. Here was the first English settlement in Dennis, the biggest and earliest salt works on the Cape, a stone Baroque church covered with clapboards where one of the earliest feminists preached, and the famous Shiverick Ship Yard. Today the two necks with old route 6A connecting them retain the best of old Cape Cod charm. For more information call 394-5739.

HOUSE DATING COMMITTEE

The Dennis Historical Commission is preparing to nominate the South Dennis Historic District to the National Register of Historic Places. In order to do this, the survey of the village done in 1969 by members of the D.H.S. must be updated and expanded. This is a big task and individual home owners and the House Dating Committee of D.H.S. are being asked to help. If you are willing to date your own house, or any building in the district that has not been documented, please volunteer by calling Mr. Edmund Nickerson 398-3174, or drop a note with your phone number to Box 607, South Dennis, MA 02660. Remember that all houses in the town 100 years old or older are now entitled to receive an official D.H.S. date marker when properly documented.

CALENDAR

- August 26-September 2 DENNIS FESTIVAL DAYS  
September 4-5-6 D.H.S. Days at New England Fire & History Museum, Rt. 6A, Brewster. Present your membership card to receive a discount. For information call 398-8842.  
September 9 Bicycle Tour, Quivett Neck. Meet at Cold Storage Beach, 2 P.M.  
September 10 ANNUAL MEETING. V.I.C. Hall, Depot Street, Dennisport, 7:30 P.M. Entertainment following--"Sea Chanties"  
September 15 Quarterly meeting, Bay State Historical League, West Parish Church, West Barnstable  
October 17 "Windmills, Especially of Cape Cod" James Owen of Eastham, V.I.C. Hall, Dennisport, 7:30 P.M.  
Coming Group Tour to Drummer Boy Museum in Brewster. Please sign up at the Annual Meeting or call 398-8842. Transportation can be arranged.

THE STREETS OF OUR TOWN

We might have had School Street as the featured street of our town for September. The town of Dennis has a School Street in East Dennis, one in West Dennis and a Schoolhouse Lane, also in West Dennis. No longer is there a school on any of those streets. But instead I would like to tell you about another street, the significance of whose name is lost, but whose history is interesting. I speak of Depot Street in Dennisport. The street begins at Nantucket Sound, where once, in the mid and late 1800's wharfs, fish flakes, ships chandleries, and sail makers kept the scene a busy panorama of sea shore living. It makes a more or less straight line north into Harwich. The word depot signifies a train station, and today not even railroad tracks exist to indicate how Depot Street received its name. But when the shore area was the center of commercial activity, there was a very important railroad depot here at the Harwich end of Depot Street. On December 6, 1865 the Cape Cod Central Railroad was opened to public travel from Yarmouth to Orleans. The Cape Cod Branch Railroad had been opened as far as Hyannis since 1854, and by 1873 it would extend as far as Provincetown. Later the Cape railroads merged with the Old Colony Line and still later became part of the New York-New Haven and Hartford. The path of the tracks can still be seen near where Depot Street crosses Great Western Road. But the busy scene can only be left to the imagination.

From the wharfs of Dennisport came salt manufactured at the salt works, canned sea clams, salted and dried fish, fresh fish packed in ice, and fittings for ships, to go by rail to Boston. Some items imported by coastwise schooners were also transported north by rail, before the Cape Cod Canal made shipping by water convenient. When the demand for manufactured salt and dried fish diminished, the depot became the lifeline for the budding industry which now exists in Dennisport--tourism. At first, families displaced from the Port took to returning for a summer visit. Soon they brought friends. Small cottages and signs "Tourists Accommodated" replaced fish flakes and salt works. Still Depot Street remained an important thoroughfare.

Today no train runs to the North Harwich Station, and Depot Street no longer leads from busy wharf to busy depot. It leads from a thriving tourist area to a quiet wooded area (known as North Harwich Beach years ago, I wonder why?). But the name remains to remind us of days gone by when Depot Street was one of the most commercially important Streets of our Town.

THE TERRIBLE CRY OF FIRE!

To people who lived in our town years ago the cry of fire held far greater terror than it holds for us today. The New England Fire and History Museum in Brewster has invited members of the D.H.S. to visit the Museum on September 4-5-6 to see the excellent collection of early fire fighting equipment as well as other exhibits of art and dioramas. Members will be admitted on these days for \$1.50 instead of the usual admission of \$2.50. Take advantage of the opportunity to see their fine historic collection at any time on these days, from 10 A.M. to 3 P.M. Take along your membership card and present it to receive your discount.

Dennis Historical Society  
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Postal Permit No. 2 South Dennis Mass. 02660
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