

ANNUAL MEETING

Members of the Dennis Historical Society are called to the annual meeting and elections of officers to be held on Monday, September 13, at 7:30 at V. I. C. Hall on Depot Street, Dennisport. Two new directors are slated to be elected as well as a vice-president. Reports will be read, and a short but very interesting program will follow the business meeting. We look for a large group to be present, for this has been an active year and the directors and officers are anxious to report to as large a group of members as possible. Please plan to be there.

CAPE COD IS CRANBERRIES. . . .

And our speaker for the meeting on September 13 is a Cape Codder and a cranberry grower. He was born and brought up in South Dennis, but by some error in judgement, built his home in Harwich where he now lives. R. Lincoln Thacher, better known as "Link," has worked in the cranberry business all of his adult life; and will explain the cultivation of this unique crop, illustrated with slides and exhibits, in a brief--but sure to be interesting--program following the business meeting. Link is well known as an auctioneer as well as a cranberry grower, and his talk is sure to be fun as well as informative.

AN INTERESTING CROSSROADS

I passed by the Dennis Senior Citizen's Center recently and admired once more the building itself, as well as the effort which it took to see it completed. The leaders and friends of this town's senior group should be justifiably proud of this excellent building. As I rode along Route 134, I reflected on the great change at that once almost deserted intersection crossed by Setucket Road, and that reminded me of a story and a name that I used to hear frequently in reference to this corner. It's a story with as many versions as a cow barn has flies, but I'll tell it as I remember it. It seems that the good temperance people of the Commonwealth persuaded the legislators of Massachusetts to pass a prohibition on the sale of liquor many years before the better known Federal Volstead Act. The Yarmouth Register of May 18, 1855 proclaims, "The dry law goes into effect on the twentieth. The Cape is well prepared!" One man's unique preparation gave a local, colorful name to this intersection. Route 134 was originally known as the Mail Road. Over it thundered the stage coach, which met, at first, the packets on the North side, and carried mail and passengers to the South village. After 1865, it met the train at the South Dennis Depot and carried passengers and goods to the North side. No matter which way the stage was headed, for the stories do differ, all agree that as the driver approached this particular intersection, he would rein in his horses. A mysterious hand, containing an envelope, would be thrust from behind the screen of bushes. The driver would accept the envelope and replace it with a sizable package. Without exchanging a word, the driver would then proceed on his route. The contents of the envelope? Money! And the mysterious package? A week's supply of rum! Interestingly, I have never heard mention of the name of the man who owned that arm, but the name of the intersection where Setucket Road crosses Route 134 has always been, for my generation and several before me, Rum Crossing.

OLD STURBRIDGE. . . .AND OLD DENNIS, CIRCA 1840

We will see an audio-visual presentation of Old Sturbridge Village, one of the best of this country's living museums, depicting a period of the young Nation's development when self-sufficiency was beginning to diminish and manufacturing was becoming part of every man's life, at our meeting on October 5th. Following the presentation, some of our local history students will contrast and compare life here in Dennis in 1840. You will find some interesting similarities and differences. Circle the date and plan to attend.

ONE MAN'S TRASH IS ANOTHER MAN'S TREASURE

Perhaps you can help us with our school field trips in the spring by donating some items which may seem of little use to you, but which we need in the program. One such item is wing and tail feathers, suitable for making quill pens. Any large bird, such as seagulls, ducks, turkeys, etc. will do. (I'm told that swan feathers can only be used for quills for the queen!) We also break quahaug shells into pieces of wampum, and need to replenish our shell supply. And, if you are tired of airing your bicentennial costume, our hosts and hostess can use them to wear when serving as guides. Please call Nancy Reid, 398-8842, or bring any of these items to a D. H. S. Meeting.

CALENDAR

- August 29-September 5 Check you Dennis Festival Days Flyer
September 13 Annual Meeting and Election of Officers, 7:30 p.m., V. I. C. Hall, Depot Street, Dennisport; followed by a program on Cape Cod cranberries by R. Lincoln Thacher.
- October 5 Old Sturbridge Village . . .And Old Dennis . .1840--Carleton Hall, 7:30 p.m.
- October Train ride from South Dennis to Buzzards Bay and return. Watch for details!
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- Also of interest to our members:
October 13-15 Bus tour to Deerfield, \$138. Call Paula Bacon, 394-5739.
November 29 Bus trip to Capriland, Herb Garden, Coventry, Connecticut

THE OLD STONE PIER

A recent letter to the editor of the Yarmouth Register points out a rock hazard just east of the mouth of Bass River, which presents a danger to the many small boats which daily pass and repass the usually quiet waters just off West Dennis Beach. We would agree that it is a hazard, for although it is marked on the Coast Guard charts, no buoy alerts the mariner to its presance. This is not the visible rockpile, known as the Breakwater, quite a distance out from the Lighthouse Inn, but a pile of rocks closer to the mouth of the river, below the surface of the water. It is probably, as the letter writer suggests, the remnants of an island pier. Simeon Deyo, in his History of Barnstable County, states that it was built by Sylvanus Crowell before 1800. I have not yet found any verification of this statement, but perhaps someday I will. In 1834, the General Court gave Job Chase and others permission to build an island pier, no greater than 200 x 100 feet on the south shore of the town of Dennis "at such place as shall be convenient." But, as the map drawn by B. Matthews in 1834 locates our rock pile hazard at West Dennis and refers to it as "the Old Bass River Pier," I presume that this was not Captain Chase's pier. In earlier days, the mouth of Bass River presented a very different picture than it does today. The Island Pier, situated at what was then the eastern end of Dog Fish Bar, was on the edge of a deep hole. Very large vessels could safely tie up and be loaded and unloaded by lighters, which carried cargo to and from the shore, or into the river. In time of storm, a hundred sail could be counted, taking refuge in the relative safety of the West Dennis Port. Today, it would seem, even small vessels are at hazard in these waters, due to the presence of an unmarked remnant of what was once a safe harbor. If you are boating in this area, do consult charts for the location of this dangerous rock pile.

WOMEN WHO WENT TO SEA

My husband and I are about to be grandparents. What an exciting prospect! When I gave birth to our children, my husband could see his only "under glass" at specified hours. Our sons and their wives are doing things differently, with LaMaze classes and birthing rooms. You might say that they are getting back to the old ways, but with certain refinements. For example, when Captain Dennis and Harriet (Sears) Nickerson were newlyweds in 1876, they went to sea together for a voyage around the world. While at sea, two children were born, within the confines of the small cabin, where Captain Nickerson was the only one to assist Hattie in the delivery and care of their sons. The first was named Claude Seaborn, but he died in the China Sea, less than one year after his birth. The second, named Walter Seaborn, was born just two weeks before they arrived back in New York, after a voyage of three years and a day. Hattie decided to remain at home thereafter, and gave birth to two more children in the relative comfort of her father's home in Searsville. After ten years of marriage, she was left a widow when the Bark Julia A. Brown, which her husband commanded, broke up in a January storm off Monomoy, leaving her with her seaborn son and two daughters. Small wonder that the portraits of sailing vessels, where so much of their lives took place, were lovingly preserved by sea-faring families.

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