



REFLECTING ON DENNIS FESTIVAL DAYS

D.H.S. members can rest assured that the historical aspects of Festival Days were not neglected. We estimate that 350-400 people visited our town's two historic centers that week. Some visitors went to both houses. Docents were kept busy on each of the four days the centers were open, and our thanks to all who acted as hosts and hostesses on these busy afternoons. In addition, about 35 people took the guided bicycle tour through Dennis village. Organized by Isabelle and Bill Flynn, the tour was also improved by comments from Sarah Kruger, the Cape Playhouse staff, Joshua Crowell, Pauline Derick, and Nancy Reid. And our evening program, featuring a video tape about the Cape Playhouse was very much enlivened by comments and stories told by Margaret Adams and Carolyn St. John. "And a good time was had by all!" Thanks, everybody for all of the effort.

WHAT DO YOU KNOW ABOUT THE TOWN OF DENNIS?

We are often asked where people can go to find out about the history of this town. Settled in 1639, as part of the town of Yarmouth, this town has a rich history, filled with interesting stories. Unfortunately, most of this history has not yet been published. We hope this deficiency will be corrected before we celebrate the Bicentennial of our incorporation as a separate town in 1793. In the meantime, D.H.S. has created two very fine slide presentations which tell something of our past, in a lively and interesting way. "Dennis" our first effort, tells of Indians, Vikings, and maritime activities, while "The Story of the Shiverick Shipyard" focuses on the Golden Age of Sail. Both of these slide shows will be presented at our meeting on September 20, at Carlton Hall. Each is approximately ½ hour in length. They have been shown to enthusiastic audiences all over the Cape and as far away as Plymouth and Taunton. We think every resident of this town should see them. Take advantage of this "double feature" and bring a friend.

SCHOOL DAYS

Honestly, the things that come in the mail these days! Why just recently I had a letter from a really strange person, inviting me to the 40th Reunion of some high school class or other. How they ever got my name I will never know. That same day I had the fun of orienting a new volunteer to the Old West Schoolhouse on the grounds of the Josiah Dennis Manse. I began the orientation by telling my new friend how we introduce the schoolhouse to the children who come on their June field trip. The one-room schoolhouse has no artificial lighting, no plumbing, and is heated by a small fireplace. We ask the children, "How is this school different from your school?" They usually don't start with lighting, plumbing and heating. They start with--"no TV monitor", "no gym or auditorium", "no library, music room or intercom". It is interesting to reflect on the changes in educational facilities in this town since the Old West Schoolhouse, and 13 other one-room schools, were built from 1770 to 1795. These one-room schools served our children until 1860, and they changed very little, if at all, in their life times. Then, in 1860 to 1865 the 14 district schools were replaced--amidst a great deal of controversy over the necessity for change. Five large graded schools were constructed, one in each village, at a cost of about \$6800.00 per school. They were bigger, and children attending them were assigned to specific grades, rather than progressing at their own speed, as formerly. Still, these new "commodious" school buildings (of which the West Dennis Community Building is the only survivor) were still without artificial light or indoor plumbing. The heating, indeed, was improved by the addition of a wood burning stove. Today's scholars would still notice the absence of gymnasiums, auditoriums, and cafeterias. These five new schools would serve our town's young scholars without modification for 70 years before our present Ezra H. Baker School was built--again over protest--in 1930. Here was a truly modern school for the youth of Dennis. Known as the Dennis Consolidated School, it featured central heating, blowers for ventilation, indoor plumbing, and electric lights. This was the school where I began my education. I must admit it differed remarkably from the school as it is now. In the 50-odd years of its existence this school has grown by additions which have tripled its size and kept its capacity nearly in step with the rapid growth this town has experienced. A large auditorium-gymnasium, a computer room, library, and art rooms are only some of the educational assets our youngsters now enjoy. Let's face it, educational facilities have changed much more drastically since 1930 or even 1940, than they had changed for 160 years previous to that time. But, back to the Old West Schoolhouse. I went out to relieve my new friend at the end of the day to see how things went with her. She was happy to report she had had a pleasant time, with several families with children visiting. "But", she admitted, "I was just a little set back when the children laughed at these school desks. Why, they're exactly like the ones we had when I was in school." I had to agree, but come to think of it, that was a few years ago. I got to thinking about that class reunion invitation--well, surely not forty years since graduation--maybe thirty something? Let's see. 1948-1988!! Well, I'll be darned!

CALENDAR

- Sep. 12 7:30 P.M. Board meets with Sarah
Sep. 20 7:30 P.M. Carleton Hall, Annual business meeting
8:00 P.M. Program--"Dennis" and "The Story of the Shiverick Shipyard"
Each approximately ½ hour in length. Lively slide shows which give an interesting history of our town. All are welcome. No admission charge.
Oct. A Fall walk on Chapin Beach with Dennis Natural Resources Officer George Mc Donald. Watch for date in October newsletter.

FROM HERE TO HAWLEY

Once upon a time, in a simple home on the edge of Sesuet meadow, there was born a little boy named Rufus Sears. He was the sixth child and first son of Capt. Nathaniel Sears and his wife Phebe. How joyfully he must have been welcomed by his five older sisters and proud parents. He was christened in the old East Parish church by the Rev. Nathan Stone who had christened his sisters. It would seem that Rufus would live a contented life in the quiet Cape Cod village now called East Dennis. Probably he would follow his father to sea, and marry a girl from his neighborhood. But fate decreed otherwise. When he was but one and one half years old his father was lost at sea. Widow Sears must struggle to keep her family together, educating and providing for them as best she could. Perhaps she was unable to afford to send Rufus to school at the new district schoolhouse, but she did make sure he learned to read. It is very likely that his reading primer was the Bible, a book with which he continued to read and study throughout his life. In due time, Widow Sears became the wife of Gorham Baker, and Rufus' sisters found husbands and set up their own homes. They married farmers at a time when farming was becoming less and less profitable on the Cape due to the depletion of top soil. And so it was that in 1781 a large group of young Cape families packed up all their belongings and emigrated to Western Massachusetts. Rufus' sister, Phebe, who had married Deacon Joseph Bangs, were among those emigrants, and Rufus, age 11, made the long journey to Hawley with them. It was a sad parting for these young pioneers. They were headed for a rugged wilderness and they knew that it was unlikely they would ever see home and family again. Tradition says they were accompanied to the town boundary by most of the residents of the two north side villages, and there were bidden a very sad good-by. However, the children of Phebe Sears Baker made the trip without any serious problems and soon were settled on their own homesteads raising sheep for wool and mutton. Rufus lived with the Bangs family, working around the farm to earn his keep--and learning farm ways. As his early education had bent him when he was but a twig, so as a young man did the tree incline. He continued to be an avid student of the Bible, a staunch supporter of the Hawley Orthodox Church, which his brother-in-law served as Deacon. As he reached maturity his thoughts returned to the little seaside village where he had been born. He longed to see once more the mother at whose knee he had been taught. So, carrying his possessions on his back, he set off for East Dennis. It is not recorded how many days he walked, but walk he did--every step of the 216 miles from Hawley to Quivet Neck on Cape Cod. There he enjoyed a happy reunion with his beloved mother, her husband and his young step-brother. He spent the winter "at home"--hearing the sermons of Rev. Stone, and becoming reacquainted with the sounds of the sea and his sea-faring relatives. But after 10 years of living away Rufus was now more of a farmer than a mariner. He found no interest in following his father in a career at sea. So, as winter waned, Rufus prepared to leave his ancestral home, to return to his adopted homeland in Western Massachusetts. As he left Dennis, the farmer-fishermen of Cape Cod were getting ready to plant before going a-fishing. When he arrived in Hawley snow was still on the ground. This was to be the only journey home that Rufus Sears would make. In Hawley, he married a distant cousin, named Priscilla Sears. Like him, she had been made an orphan by the sea, and, also like him, had travelled with family members to find a new, perhaps safer, life in the farmlands of Western Massachusetts. Rufus became a Deacon of the church, a farmer widely known as a pious, highly respected citizen of his adopted town. And in the autumn and winter of his life, until the day he died in 1856, I suspect that he delighted in retelling the story of his long walk--home to East Dennis, then home to Hawley--way back in 1791.

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