



### CALL TO THE ANNUAL MEETING

Members of the Dennis Historical Society are hereby notified that the Annual Meeting and election of officers will be held on Tuesday, September 19, 7:30 P.M., at the Dennis Senior Center. Following the business meeting, which historically is brief, we will be treated to pictures and narrative presented by Bainbridge Crist of the Historical Society of Old Yarmouth. His talk is entitled "Yarmouth's Historical Heritage" and we know you will enjoy it. Please come.

### AND YOUR DUES ARE NOW DUE

Membership chairman Isabelle Flynn is busy getting dues notices out and we hope all you fine folks are busy getting the dues back to her. Perhaps this is a good time to thank Isabelle for her good works on our behalf. Not only does she serve as membership chairman but she and Bill are also responsible for folding, addressing, sorting, and mailing our monthly newsletter; no small task, believe me. Let's hear a loud cheer for our Member of the Month Isabelle Flynn. Now sit down and write out that check for your dues!

### YARMOUTH'S HISTORICAL HERITAGE

Some people who are not among our membership might wonder why the program to be presented at the annual meeting of the Dennis Historical Society is about Yarmouth. But of course you and I know that Dennis and Yarmouth are sister towns, founded as one town 350 years ago. I like to try to imagine what this area looked like when the first Europeans arrived. Remove all those ugly poles and wires and replace them in your imagination with tall straight white pine trees. Roll up all that tar and let the underbrush take over again, leaving only a few meandering footpaths, worn to a deep trench by the feet of the natives who have already lived here for centuries. Here and there we will see a clump of homes, fashioned from saplings and woven mats, the permanent winter homes of the Indians. One great area of the town is cleared. From the north banks of Scargo Lake to the bay is the great field where the NobsCUSSETS grow corn, beans, pumpkins, and squash. There were perhaps 500 Indians living in our two towns in 1639. They were gathered into small villages at Mattacheese, Hockanom, NobsCUSSETT, Sesuit, and Quivet. Apparently there were also a few Indians who lived at the South Sea, as Nantucket Sound was called, but the names of their villages are not known to me. Mashantampain was the chieftan of the clan that lived in what is now Dennis. It was he who bargained with the English on the land settlement. The Indians had divided the Cape into territories where the individual clans or tribes hunted, fished and farmed. They did not understand land ownership. Although defenders of our ancestors insist that the colonists paid for all the land in Plymouth Colony, there is little doubt that the Indians fared very poorly in these land deals. Each of the founding families, as they arrived, was granted a homestead and whatever other land they needed for farming and cutting wood. Little by little land for hunting was fenced in, leaving the Indian little free land for roaming. The colonists built their simple homes some distance along fresh water streams, and they appear to have been some distance apart. That leads us to conclude that the natives were not considered too great a threat. But note that each household was required to keep a gun and ammunition. In examining what little history has recorded about the NobsCUSSETT Indians, they appear to have been friendly and helpful to the people who were systematically robbing them of their birthright. They taught the English their farming techniques that made our fragile soil more productive. They worked cooperatively with the first families in shore whaling, which proved to be a boon to the area. In the early 1700's the Howes family still employed a crew of Indians in whaling. Gradually over the first 100 years the English settlement grew and the native population declined. The two parts of Old Yarmouth had amicable relations with each other, but the distance to travel to Yarmouth Port to church led the men of the eastern half to ask for permission to establish a second parish. The town continued as two parishes from 1721 to 1793, when it was voted to become two separate towns, only one vote being cast in the negative. And we have lived in peace happily ever after. So you see, Yarmouth's historical heritage is ours as well. Come and hear our good friend Bainbridge Crist tell us about some of the past we have shared, and how our sister town has developed since we parted.

### A CERTAIN TIME, A SPECIAL PLACE

A special calendar for 1990 is available from D.H.S. It combines sensitive drawings of many special places in this delightful town with short historic notes about each. David Powers is the artist and we thank him for selecting D.H.S. as the sponsor of this fine calendar. Do you have someone on your gift list who shares your belief that Dennis is special? If so, come to our next meeting prepared to take one or more of these calendars home. They cost \$3.75 and will be on sale at all D.H.S. functions until Christmas.

## CALENDAR

Sept. 12 7:30 Board meets with Sarah  
Sept. 19 7:30 Senior Center ANNUAL MEETING AND ELECTION OF OFFICERS  
Program: "Yarmouth's Historical Heritage" Bainbridge Crist  
Sept. 23 The planet Neptune discovered in 1846  
Coming in November: Cranberry farmer Link Thacher will present a video on November 1st

### "THE POOR ALWAYS YE HAVE WITH YOU"

#### Part III The Almshouse

Almshouse, poorhouse, workhouse--all are words which describe a home for paupers. Alms is a word not commonly used today. It comes from Old English, deriving from a Greek word meaning "pity". Modern society shuns words like "pauper" and "alms" and prefers such euphemisms as "underprivileged" and "subsidy"--and rightly so. Today our government subsidizes families under financial stress rather than placing them in a publicly established home. Different words, different solutions to a problem that just won't go away. An almshouse was first proposed for our town in 1770, but the idea was defeated. Again, in 1798, Dennis and Yarmouth discussed building a joint almshouse for citizens of either town. Again the idea was defeated. Finally, in 1837, Dennis town meeting voted to build a poorhouse. The site chosen was in the exact center of the town, a little east of Old Bass River Road, where Asack Drive and Tookusa Road are today. It was a large building and, in it's years of usefulness, it accomodated anywhere from one to a dozen people, mostly elderly. A keeper was appointed annually and he lived in the house, receiving room and board for himself and his spouse and an annual salary which in the 1900's was \$300. There was a large garden and a flock of chickens. Residents sometimes worked on income-producing tasks such as preparing oakum from old rope to be used as caulking. Life in the almshouse wasn't much different from the lifestyle anywhere in town, except perhaps somewhat livlier. Lacking a town office, selectmen used the living room of the almshouse for such things as hearings and the annual auctioning of fishing rights. The school committee met there and had the annual "examination of teachers" there. (One has to wonder what that examination entailed!) Life at the poor house was so far from being unpleasant that when a gentleman who lived near Kelley's Bay had a fire in his home, he asked for and received permission to board there while it was being rebuilt. In the 20th century, society began maturing in sensitivity to the plight of the underprivileged. Many felt that consigning the poor to the almshouse was unkind and demeaning. Nearly every year in the early part of the century a petitioned article appeared on the annual warrant to tear down the almshouse. Each year the matter was tabled, probably because it was cheaper to support the poor in the poorhouse than in their own homes. But the reformers persisted. In 1921 the town meeting did vote to abolish the use of the following words--poor, pauper, and almshouse--and substitute wards and town home. The Board of Selectmen, which had previously also acted as the Overseers of the Poor, became instead the Board of Public Welfare and the demise of the almshouse, hereafter called the town home, became imminent--perhaps the dawn of a kinder, gentler society. In 1927 the Dennis almshouse was sold at auction and the care of the poor in the almshouse ended. Soon thereafter the welfare of the disadvantaged became the duty of the Commonwealth and the Federal government, and although the poor are with us yet, their welfare is no longer the responsibility of local government. Still Dennis citizens retain an interest in our fellow residents who struggle and enthusiastically support the many private agencies which give alms and compassion with dignity to those in need.

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