



THANK A TEACHER

You've all seen the bumper sticker--"If you can read this, thank a teacher!" I'm sure all of us have in our hearts the memory of a favorite teacher, perhaps one from the early grades, who taught us to read, maybe one from later grades from whom we learned science or music appreciation. It is highly possible that, for those of us who grew up in Dennis, many of us remember most fondly the very same teacher. She is Susan P. McHenry, who recently celebrated her 100th birthday at Eagle Pond Nursing Home, where, it is said, her pacemaker is still having trouble keeping up with her. Mrs. McHenry taught me to read, and I share that privilege with approximately one thousand other Dennis children who had her for their first grade teacher during her forty-two years of teaching. Mrs. McHenry and her twin brother, Clarence, were born in Dennis Port on July 29th, 1892. They were the children of Martha (Ellis) and Captain Frederick Milton Chase and they lived on Telegraph Road. Captain Chase was a member of the Boston Marine Society and master of the coastwise schooner Anna, trading along the east coast of the United States. He was lost at sea in 1903 off the coast of North Carolina. Susan, or Susie as she was more often called, attended the school on Depot street, Dennis Port and the Dennis South High School being held in the West Dennis School at that time, but spent part of her third year of high school in Whitman, while her mother helped her sister who had a family of young children. At school she had learned bookkeeping, a relatively new course offered a practical education to those who did not intend to go to college. She was a bookkeeper for A.D. Makepeace, the well-known cranberry grower, at his store and cranberry business in Wareham. No doubt at that job she renewed acquaintances with Dennis Port neighbors, for many young people from the Cape went to Wareham at picking time and worked for Mr. Makepeace. Soon she found herself back in Dennis Port, and was asked one day to substitute at the Dennis Port Primary School. In those days one teacher had grade one through four and another the upper grades. Mrs. McHenry was appalled at the poor discipline she found there. In her own words:

"I would like to get ahold of those children and straighten them out. Those boys were scraping their feet and making spit balls and throwing them all over the room. I'd like to be there just about one week."

She mentioned her concern about lack of discipline to school committee member from Dennis Port, T. Frank Young, who served the town for many years in that capacity. His response, "Well, how would you like to go in there?" Susie allowed as how she would like to try, so for the school year 1920, and 42 years thereafter, Susan Chase, later Mrs. William J. McHenry, taught reading, writing, and arithmetic--and good manners--to Dennis school children. School Superintendent Alberto W. Small liked the results which she achieved so much that he encouraged her to attend summer sessions at the State Normal School in Hyannis for her certification. As the enrollment in Dennis Port increased, she was assigned to first and second grade only. When the Dennis Port School burned in 1929, she taught at Liberty Hall, while the new consolidated school was built. From then until her retirement in June 1962 she carried on her teaching duties, and made those children behave, you can bet. But it wasn't all discipline and bookwork. Susie was musical, played the piano and sang in what I remember as a very clear voice and enthusiastic manner. Do you all remember Mrs. Jones' automobile, fit for a queen? And who of us cannot hum the morning greeting, "We're all in our places with sun shiny faces?" She also had a phonograph machine, and often had the whole class marching around the room balancing books on our heads, to improve our posture: "Head erect, eyes ahead, like a soldier on parade." Reading was taught from those now spoofed-at primers, containing little tales of Dick and Jane and their talented dog, Spot. I don't know of anyone who Mrs. McHenry taught from these booklets who is any way handicapped from their bias. And that may be that it's the teacher that counts and not the method. On Susie McHenry's one hundredth birthday this summer she was asked how she thought her pupils remembered her. Her answer: that she was cross. I don't think of her that way at all, maybe some of the boys who spent much of their first grade experience sitting in the corner with face to the wall might have had that impression. But Phyllis Robbins Horton remembers her kindly. Phyllis missed much of the first grade, managing to have every contagious disease known to man, except the mumps, in that one year. Every afternoon that Phyllis missed school, Mrs. M. would knock at the back door, and leave some work for her to do, to keep her up with the class. No doubt there are many others who have good reason to know that underneath a brisk exterior beats a heart of gold. Susie had a little bulldog, which she walked every afternoon in the field where Edwards Avenue and Smalls Avenue are today. There were no houses there, and it was near to the McHenry's home, but Mrs. M. had used up all of her energy keeping her first grade in line. So she put a 50 foot piece of clothesline on the dog's collar and stood in the middle of the field while Danny unwound from his day of confinement, by running the full length of the rope in all directions.

Is there anyone out there who thinks of Mrs. McHenry when you spot that bumper sticker? Make her day. Drop her a little note to say you remember her. You can bet she remembers you! I bet she'd get a real kick out of one of these campy "Dick and Jane" cards. Address Mrs. McHenry at Eagle Pond Nursing Home, Love Lane, South Dennis, MA 02660. And thanks, Mrs. McHenry, for teaching me and a thousand more Dennis children to read.

ANNUAL MEETING

The DHS Annual Meeting and election of officers will be held at the Jacob Sears Memorial Library at 2:30 P.M. on Sunday, Sept. 13. After a brief business meeting we will have an illustrated talk by Capt. Admont Clark, USCCR, author of Lighthouses of Cape Cod--Martha's Vineyard--Nantucket. Refreshments will be served.

CALENDAR

Sept. 13 2:30 P.M. Annual Meeting and Election of Officers. Jacob Sears Memorial Library. See related article. All are welcome.

MR. THACHER AND HIS MODERATOR

Mr. C. benjamin Thacher, whose poems have graces these pages before, has graciously allowed us to include the following poem, a follow-up to last month's "Moderator Stories". Please understand, Ben has no particular moderator in mind!

THE MODERATOR

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| 1. I am the Moderator,
I stand for moderation.
Preventing foes
From swapping blows,
In every altercation.
From any form of bias,
I show complete immunity,
Presenting those
With cons and pros
An equal opportunity.
(Admitting, on occasion,
When things get off the track,
I might speed one part up a bit,
Or hold another back). | 2. With tact and guile and patience
I'm amply endowed,
I stand apart
When wrangles start,
Discreet, aloof and proud.
With briskly tapping hammer,
I stop wild verbal duels,
And gently cite
The way that's right,
By parliamentary rules.
(Admitting, on occasion,
When things get off the track,
I may speed one part up a bit,
Or hold another back). |
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THANKS, LYNNE

Our well-attended program for Dennis Festival Days was a very interesting look back at World War II through the eyes of Cape Cod children. "War stories" abounded after the show as many people spoke of their own special recollections. We hope Lynne will come back again with another of her programs.

IN HONOR OF OUR VETERANS

During Festival days this year, a ceremony of historical interest was held at Liberty Hall, South Dennis. An Honor Roll with the names of the men and women from that village who served in the Armed Forces in World War II was placed on the north exterior wall of the building and dedicated. Much of the research for the Honor Roll and the program which was presented to those attending was done by Helen Thacher (Crowell) Angell, and the community is grateful for that effort. It is the fervent wish of all, that the task of compiling lists of citizens who served their country in time of war will come to end with the last conflict in the Persian Gulf. May we never see war again. At the same time, it is the responsibility of good citizens to acknowledge those from our midst who have already served the nation, some of whom have lost their lives or their health. Mrs. Angell has provided her village with about as complete a list as can be made. In the process of writing this town's history, I have spent some time trying to compile lists of veterans of all the wars in which our citizens have been engaged, but it will not be complete enough to include in our history. Instead, I am using the career of one or two representative people which I can document for each conflict, as a token tribute to all who served. I have done this because I am very much aware that many who served, perhaps some who died, have gone unrecorded. I hope that some of you will take example from Helen Angell, and volunteer to assist DHS to gather as complete a list as we can of those from this town who have served this country in time of war. If you will send us any information which you know about yourself, relatives, or friends, it will help us in this formidable job. If you wish to do some research or just have information for our files, please drop a line to D.H.S. at Box 607, South Dennis, 02639

Dennis Historical Society
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South Dennis, MA 02660

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