



Dennis Historical Society Newsletter

Volume 31 Number 8 Send letters & stories to Dennis Historical Society, Box 607, S. Dennis 02660 or to pmrhorton@aol.com September 2008

Calendar

*Wednesday, September 10
3:00 p.m.
DHS Board Meeting
At Jericho
All are welcome to attend!!!!*

*Saturday, September 27
1:00 p.m. - 4:00 p.m.*

Autumn at the Manse

*The Josiah Dennis
Manse will be open for the
public.*

*Sunday, September 28
1:00 p.m. - 3:00 p.m.*

Autumn Celebration at Jericho

*Please join us at Jericho for
our wonderful
celebration of the
harvest season of old.*

*Saturday, October 19
6:00 p.m.
Twilight
Cemetery
Visions!*

*Special guided tour of
the historic Dennis
Village Cemetery.
Benefit of the Josiah
Dennis Manse
Repair Fund.
Bring a flashlight and
your imaginations.
Maximum 30 hardy
souls! Prepaid **A spooky**
\$13 per person.*

Call 508-385-9308

Meet at the Dennis Village Green
Rain Date – Sunday,
October 26
Reservations required.

Sweet September

As I contemplate the September newsletter it is still August and I have a chronic case of “gustitis”. Summer seems overlong and I look forward to the Fall when things slow down some. September is Cape Cod’s reward for putting up with crowds of people, long lines for everything and making a left turn at peril to life and limb. We do need tourism. Much of our economy is based on it and has been since the 1800s. Still, it’s nice to get a little elbow room. September is also back-to-school-time. In our collections we have some lovely memoirs from years ago. This one was in the Capt. Prince S. Crowell Collection from Barbara Durst:

The Old School House

By Evelyn (Eva) Crowell, 1934

(Eva was the youngest daughter of Captain Prince Sears and Polly Dillingham Foster Crowell. She was born March 9, 1854. This story was written in 1934 when she was 80 years old. It is from her memory of the time she was 5, about 1859. She married Samuel L. Powers, Esq., from Newton, MA. Samuel taught school here as a young man and later became a State Representative.)

“My recollections of the little old school house date back to my fifth year. It was located just below the house of Capt. Milton Hedge on the opposite side of the road. (Hedge lived on Center Street at the corner of School in East Dennis.) The building consisted of one small room with a raised platform in front for the teacher’s desk, and at the opposite end of the room double desks for the pupils with two students at each desk and a seating capacity of about 24. A stove occupied the center of the room leaving a small space in front near the platform for classes in recitation.

It would seem that in so small a room a stove would give out sufficient heat but such was not the case as pupils in the back seats were forever asking permission to sit or stand near the stove to get warm.

The teacher was Miss Lydia Sears who taught previous to my entrance and from then on for five or six years until the new building was erected, near Worden Hall (1862). We were all very fond of her but never called her by any name save teacher. It was ‘teacher can I do this or teacher can I do that’.

I recollect one of the girl pupils coming to school with whooping cough. We were all most envious and could think of nothing more desirable than to whoop the way she did. So we all gathered around as close to her as possible. The result was what might be expected. One after another came down with the disease. In those days a cough was no excuse for staying away from school so we sat and whooped to our hearts delight.

There were rewards of merit given out for excellence in class work and good conduct consisting mostly of pictures on cardboard. The New England Primer was also given out for the same purpose and some of the terse sentences come to my mind such as "In Adam's fall we sinned all". "The eagle's flight is made by might", "My book and heart shall never part". Bad behavior was punished by slaps on the hand with a wooden ruler, kept in the teacher's desk and what close attention was given to school lessons when the desk was opened and the dreaded stick appeared. Another task for unruly pupils was the untying of knots in a string twisted up for that purpose into a bunch of hard knots. Not being an expert myself in the task of loosening knots I remember well sitting on the edge of the platform and knowing the idle boys and girls had their eyes on me in a furtive watch out. I would occasionally give a loud whoop (being then a whooping cough victim) which in some mysterious way saved me from embarrassment of being looked at.

During the Civil War the school made bags of pink and white calico filled with thread, buttons, needles and bandages for the soldiers. There was also a good deal of work on samplers putting in the letters of the alphabet.

It is a long road traveling back from 80 years to 5 but I have endeavored to tell only what is remembered without drawing on my imagination so that while the story is very simple it is I believe correct in outline."

Eva. C. Powers

Letters

The DHS newsletter receives quite a few letters, both E-mail and regular mail. Many of you write to add your own recollections to an article or to ask a question. Ann Finley Childs asked if the electrician mentioned in the May newsletter was her father, Charles Finley. It certainly was! Charlie was a fixture in Dennis Port for many years. He created strings of colored lights for the first outdoor Christmas tree in the village and was also commander of the Dennis Port/West Harwich VFW Post. The Post marched from West Harwich to the Veteran's Monument every Memorial Day.

Another letter was from new members Kevin and Linda Keegan who have recently moved to Dennis and have taken on the daunting task of restoring the 1810 Steven Homer House on Rte. 6A in East Dennis. That is a magnificent house with beautifully detailed woodwork inside. Several DHS members had the opportunity to visit the house before it was sold. We were all amazed at the workmanship of almost 200 years ago. Kevin is looking for any information that anyone can tell him about the house or anyone who has lived there. They are especially interested in paintings, photographs and in references to them in letters, documents, or historical works. They are also looking for Steven Homer or his wife Thankful Chapman's genealogy. DHS Librarian Burt Derick can supply the Homer and Chapman charts up to Steven and Thankful and maybe beyond, but if anyone else has more recent information Kevin would like to hear from you at Keven_N_Keegan @mcpsmd.org or 1.301.455.2116.

Music Classes 6/22/2008

"I watched the Three Tenors on PBS tonight and as usual, it reminded me of our fourth grade music classes. The tenors sang "Ceilito Lindo", "Come Back to Sorrento", and "O Sole Mio". I first heard these songs in our fourth grade music class at the Dennis Consolidated School way back in 1939 or so, when the music teacher taught us to sing all the notes in the music book before we were allowed to attempt to sing the words. I did not want to bother at all with the do-re-mi...I wanted to get right to singing the words. Do you remember? I do not remember the teacher's name, but that fourth grade music stayed in my memory for seventy years! Amazing.

This lovely June day I was reminded of "What is so rare as a day in June? Then, if ever, come perfect days." We must have learned that in fifth or sixth grade. We got a pretty good elementary education, didn't we?

Love, Betty Dean Holmes

(*The Music Teacher was Lois J. Snow. Dennis shared her, part time, with Yarmouth and Brewster. 1939 was the last time I find her name in the school report and there was no music teacher listed after that.)

Betty also responded to the July 4th article. She remembered having sparklers, lady fingers, one-inch salutes, bottle rockets and torpedoes, plus caps for the cap pistols. She and her sisters, Sally and Priscilla, unbraided the strings of fireworks to set them off one by one and make them last lots longer.

Streets of Our Town

There are two streets named "Hall Street" in our town. The one in North Dennis is named in honor of the family of that name, which was established in old Nobscussett in 1651 by the arrival of Old John Hall and his many sons. But the Hall Street in Dennis Port, which runs from Main Street to Division, at Willow in West Harwich, was so named because it led to a large social hall. Neighborhood halls were important to the social and educational life of the villages in the nineteenth century. While this hall at the end of Hall Street is actually in West Harwich, being on the east side of Division Street, it nevertheless served as the social center for both villages for many years. Built by carpenter Bartlett White in 1865 at a cost of \$7,000, in 1878 it was sold by its private builders to the trustees of Mount Horeb Lodge of Masons and of the Ocean Hall Co. This impressive structure, which was called for many years Ocean Hall, has three stories. The first floor originally served as public rooms, the second as the Masonic Chamber and the third as a dining room. Temperance groups were among those presenting lectures in the public part of the hall.

In 1879 the West Harwich and Dennis Port Lyceum met there for talks on such subjects as the admission of Chinese immigrants to the U.S. (this particular lecture attracted 250 people!) I have found a report of an evening in 1884 during which the Harwich Band played for the skating rink at Ocean Hall, "a large crowd attending". Old timers today can remember when the Hall was used to show "moving pictures". Today it is the home of the Harwich Junior Theater. May I just say that what the Cape Playhouse is to summer theater in general, the Harwich Junior Theater is to children's theater. If you should have the opportunity to go with a child you love to one of their productions, I guarantee you will spend a most delightful evening. As you leave the theater, and walk away toward your car, you will join the company of thousands, who over the course of 143 years, after a pleasant evening, have left Ocean Hall to stroll home along Hall Street, one of the Streets of Our Town.

Nancy Thacher Reid

To Tickle Your Funny Bone

One Sunday, the pastor noticed little Alex standing in the foyer of the church staring up at a large plaque covered with names and small American flags mounted on either side. The seven-year-old had been standing there for some time staring at the plaque when the pastor approached him. Little Alex asked him what the plaque was. The pastor answered that it was a memorial to all the young men and women who died in the service. Soberly they stood there when little Alex asked with a barely audible voice and trembling with fear, "Which service, the 9 o'clock or the 11?"

The Way We Were

From the Register, September 17, 1921

The reading by Mr. Joseph C. Lincoln for which Mrs. L. C. Keith of West Dennis opened her lovely and spacious residence, was attended by about 200 people who expressed great delight with the entertainment. The affair was a benefit for the West Dennis Library.

Dennis Historical Society
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Mark Your Calendar and make Your Reservation

Dennis Historical Society Annual Meeting and Luncheon; Saturday, November 1, 12:00 p.m. at the SeaView Restaurant, Dennis Port. Special Guest will be Author Ben Thacher.

The following article is reprinted from the newsletter of the Old South Dennis Village Association, January 2008 with thanks to Joan Nickerson.

WHOSE BOY BE YOU?

“A Parcel of Recollections of Cape Cod Yesterdays

by

Ben Thacher, an old Cape Codger”

As a member of the Old South Dennis Village Association, do you want to know what life and growing up in South Dennis 80 years ago was really like? Get yourself a copy of this recently-published book and settle down to some wonderful winter reading with its descriptions of events and people, humor, tales and folksy poems. As a raconteur, Ben takes us from Depression days when life was quiet and carefree from a young boy's point of view, through the building and tourist boom following World War II when everything changed dramatically. In his personal life he ranges from exploits along with fishing and clamming with his Dad on Bass River to trying to sell candy and gum to the WW II soldiers in the mid-Cape woods while they were on secret (!) practice maneuvers. The kids all knew what was going on, but no one seemed to mind. Then there are tales of being a magician, but read that and so much more for yourself; you'll love it! This book is available in the local, independent bookstores.

RESERVATIONS AND INFORMATION ---508-385-9308