



Dennis Historical Society Newsletter

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THE WAR OF 1812

Since the end of the Revolutionary War the British military had been incensed by the fact that “those upstart Americans” had beaten them. Our problems at sea had been going on for a number of years. The British and French, who had been fighting each other in the Napoleonic Wars (1803-1850), had both been capturing American vessels. The British needed man power and were impressing our seamen and the French needed ships. 1,500 American ships were captured in the ten years before we declared war in 1812 and more than 16,000 of our sailors were impressed or imprisoned.

Coastal towns in New England were against another war with Britain. Their memory of blockades and ransom demands from the Revolution were still strong. The further away from the seacoast, the stronger the push for war. The British were inciting and arming the Indians west of the Allegheny Mountains and south of the Great Lakes to stop the westward movement by Americans and to recapture the United States from within.

General William Henry Harrison, Governor of the Indiana Territory, was victorious in defeating the Shawnee Indians led by Chief Tecumseh (1769-1813). Their surrender and the crushing victories of our naval forces over the British in the Great Lakes stopped English plans to retake the United States from the Midwest.

On June 17, 1812 the U. S. Senate voted to go to war with Britain and the next day it was passed by the House.

On August 19, 1812 the *U.S.S. Constitution* “Old Ironsides” encountered the British *Guerriere* off Nova Scotia. After 30 minutes of point-blank broadsides with its last mast shot away, the *Guerriere* surrendered. The *Constitution* returned to Boston with 250 British prisoners. This victory was a tremendous boost for the Americans who had entered the war with less than 20 ships against one of England’s 600 vessels.

200 years later “Old Ironsides” is permanently docked at the Charlestown Navy Yard and should be a destination for all Americans.

Captain Oliver Hazard Perry (1785-1858), a veteran of the Tripoli battles, was sent to the Great Lakes to assist in driving the British out. He arrived to find our side totally unprepared to fight anyone. Within months he had rallied the men, built vessels and prepared to engage the enemy. On September 10, 1813, the two navies met and a fierce battle ensued. Perry’s flagship *Lawrence* was sunk. He transferred to the new flagship *Niagras*. Once aboard he slashed through the British fleet and quickly forced its surrender at the Battle of Lake Erie.

Oliver had been admonished by his dying commander Captain James Lawrence, “Don’t Give Up The Ship” which became the slogan for the U. S. Navy.

In the years leading up to the war our mariners were hard pressed to keep informed of the various mandates issued by the United States Congress, Britain and France. Captain Isaiah Crowell (1779-1864) of Dennis managed to stay just a step ahead of them until he was captured while returning from a voyage to Portugal and detained at St. John, New Brunswick until an exchange could be made.

Henry Howes (1782-1812) of Dennis was imprisoned by the British before war was declared and later paroled. He died at sea February 8, 1812, age 30, aboard the Brig *Polly* of Boston during a terrible storm.

One of the great threats to Cape Cod mariners was the *Liverpool Packet*. She had been sold in 1811 at Halifax, Nova Scotia and became a packet ship working between Halifax and Liverpool. When war was declared she was armed and became a privateer. She avoided combat whenever possible depending on speed and stealth to attack single merchant ships.

Captain Joseph Barss captured four schooners in five days off the Cape and then eleven vessels in a week off Cape Cod Light. She was captured off Portsmouth, New Hampshire and became the American privateer *Young Tazer’s Ghost* for a short time, only to be recaptured by a British warship. At the end of the war her final tally was at least 100 vessels valued between \$262,500 to \$1,000,000.

Captain Uriah Sears (1791-1877) of East Dennis was captured and spent a year imprisoned at Gravesend, England.

Captains Seth Wheldon (1786-1877) of South Dennis and Enoch Hall, Jr. (1787-1819) of Dennis were also captured. Captain Wheldon enjoyed a long life. Captain Hall died at New Orleans at age 32

Captain Seth Crowell, Sr. (1779-1864) of East Dennis went to sea at age 18, worked hard and rose rapidly to captain by age 20. He was captured and confined at Dartmoor Prison, England until the end of the war. As a ranking officer he was asked to be responsible for the valuables of men in his building. He narrowly escaped death when the British guards opened fire on unruly prisoners in his compound. A door was ajar near him and he got behind it just as the bullets reached his location.

In later years he became a director and President of the First National Bank of Yarmouth, was elected Senator to the General Court of Massachusetts and spent nine years on the Board of Barnstable County Commissioners.

Captain Seth Hall (1789-1876) of Dennis and crew of the ship *Atlanta* were chased and captured by the British ship *Endymion* south of Nantucket. They were taken on board the *Endymion* who went looking for a ship to take them to England. Finding none they were set ashore at uninhabited Block Island, RI. A passing ship saw their signals, picked them up and carried them to Newport, RI.

Captain Hall and crew had no money so they set out on foot towards home. In Fairhaven they met a Captain Gibbs who took them to his home and fed them well. Captain Hall remembered in later years it was “a meal fit for a Prince”. Captain Gibbs took them as far as Falmouth, then it was back to walking. At Sandwich they were forced to beg for food that they found hard to come by. Food supplies everywhere were in short supply because of the war. After months away they returned home and were content to stay there.

For three years there were almost daily sightings of British ships in Cape Cod Bay. The *Spencer*, *Nymphe* and *Nimrod* sent frequent boarding parties on shore under a flag of truce to re-provision the blockading ships with food and water and to extract “contributions” from the towns to prevent the British from firing cannons at the saltworks.

In 1814 Brewster received a demand for \$4,000 from Captain Raggett of the *Spencer* or their saltworks would be blown up. Brewster sent word to Dennis and others for help in paying the ransom but they all refused being afraid they would be next on the list. Eastham had paid \$1200 to keep them away. Orleans and Falmouth were bombarded and Barnstable was threatened. There is no record that Dennis was ever forced to protect their saltworks

Captain Henry Hall (1761-1850) of Dennis chose to haul his ship out for the duration. Ships that were dry-docked wore “Madison’s Nightcaps”—canvas covers to keep the masts and sails out of the weather

Captain Hall decided to clean up his property while he was ashore. He cleared out a stand of trees between the beach and his cranberry “yard”. This caused sand to blow over half of his bog during the winter. He thought his vines were ruined but the following year they were bigger and better than the other half.

The next year Captain Hall sanded the entire bog with good results. That is how the cultivated cranberry came into being and was one of the few good things that came out of the War of 1812.

The south side of Dennis also had British blockades to deal with. On July 8, 1814 Captain Charles Gallett of the *H.B.M.S. Nymphe* brought his tender into Bass River and demanded a ransom of \$1,000 from the fishermen of Dennis and Yarmouth. He threatened to burn every vessel in, or that belonged to, Bass River. The impoverished fishermen did not have the money. “Uncle” Abner Crowell reasoned that since the British thought they were rather simple country folk he would go out to the *Nymphe* pleading ignorance and poverty and see if the ransom could be abated. He played the part well. They had a good laugh at his expense and they bought his act. Uncle Abner rowed back to shore with an agreement that any fishing vessel carrying a permit signed by him could fish unmolested.

In September 1814 Francis Scott Key of Baltimore, MD sailed out to the British fleet that was blockading the harbor to ask for the release of a friend who had been captured. Both were held until the battle ended. At daybreak on September 14, 1814 Francis Key saw Old Glory flying above Baltimore’s Fort McHenry. Inspired by the fort’s all-night stand under terrible bombardment he wrote the words to our national anthem, “The Star Spangled Banner”.

In February 1815 news reached Washington, DC of the signing of the Treaty of Ghent on December 24, 1814, ending the war between England and the United States.

The final episode happened in New Orleans on January 8, 1815, after the treaty was signed, with the most devastating battle of the war.

This 200th Anniversary of that war should make us pause to thank our forefathers for their hard-fought success in keeping us free from tyranny.

Phyllis Horton

THE LEGENDS OF PRINCESS SCARGO

(Past articles are included for our new local and out of state members unfamiliar with our local history. Ed.)

I have been asked to tell the story of Princess Scargo. Nothing could please me more, for this beautiful lake is one of the loveliest inland waters of the Cape and the story adds to its charm. Bear in mind that there are as many versions of the formation of the lake as there are children who grew up hearing it from their parents and grandparents. Two different stories appear in the book, *The Narrow Land*, by Elizabeth Reynaud. A nice telling is in Jeremiah Digges' *Cape Cod Pilot*. There is also a children's version which can be obtained at the local libraries, and a long, quaint poem which appeared in the Cape Cod Magazine, January 1922, on file at the Sturgis Library, also tells the tale. Here is my favorite version. I'd enjoy hearing yours.

Once upon a time there was born to the wise and great Chief Sagam of the Nobscussets, a tiny and beautiful daughter whom he named Princess Scargo. Her mother, who was much beloved by Sagam, unfortunately died shortly after the princess' birth. The grieving chieftain decreed that in all of her life the little Princess should never suffer the grief and agony he felt and the tribe was instructed to keep all knowledge of death from his daughter. Under the shelter of the loving tribesmen, the Princess grew to be a beautiful young woman. She was especially admired by a particular handsome brave, who one day presented her with a gift. He was going on a long journey of several months and his gift was a handsomely carved pumpkin shell in which swam five fish. He promised to return to her and claim her as his bride in the time of the flaming of the trees. Princess Scargo tended her little fish carefully, but as the weeks passed by, they became too big for their pumpkin shell home. Princess Scargo undertook to dig a small pond for their home, but while she worked, one of the fish died. The Princess was terribly distraught, and she appealed to her father for help. Chief Sagam ordered his squaws to dig a large lake for his daughter's fish. His strongest brave shot arrows North to South, East to West, to mark its boundaries. All summer the squaws dug. They heaped the dirt from their digging on the south side of the hole. By the time of the fall rain, the lake was finished. The rain filled it with water, and Princess Scargo's remaining fish were freed to swim in the clear water where their descendants swim even today.

There is another Wampanoag legend which ascribes the formation of the Lake to the Giant God Maushop. (I will tell you some of the Maushop legends some day.) The geologists would probably say it was a kettle hole pond of glacial origin. But as you stand at the top of Scargo Hill Tower, you can easily see that the squaws have shaped the lake exactly like a fish, and if you listen quietly, you can hear the grumbling of Chief Sagam's squaws as they dig throughout the hot summer months.

Dear little Princess Scargo, I hope that your handsome brave did return before the snow fell, and that after many moons, you sat contently on the beach which bears your name and watched your children grow tall and as straight as the arrows that flew to mark the bounds of the lovely lake by which they played.

Nancy Thacher Reid, August 1979

Butter-milk Biscuit.

Dissolve a couple of tea-spoonsful of saleratus¹ in a tea-cup of sour milk - mix it with a pint of butter-milk, and a couple of tea-spoonsful of salt. Stir in flour until stiff enough to mould up. Mould it up into small cakes, and bake them immediately.

From: The Kitchen Directory and American Housewife 1844
Transcribed by Burt Derick

¹ A leavening agent consisting of potassium or sodium bicarbonate

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~ ~ ~ September & October Coming Attractions ~ ~ ~

Dennis Historical Society & our Town of Dennis Museums are part of the Capewide:
Fifth Annual Fall for the Arts Festival, September 29 - October 28.

**September 29, Saturday, 1 – 4 PM ~ ~ “*Autumn at the Manse.*”

** October 7, Sunday, Noon – 3 PM ~ ~ *Both the Jericho Historical Center and the West Dennis Graded School House Museum* will be open.

** October 13 at 7 PM and October 14 at 2 PM ~ ~ “*More Tales From Our Past,*” a live stage presentation by your friends at Dennis Historical Society & The Historical Society of Old Yarmouth. In 2010 we had to turn folks away –SO- buy now, Members: \$12. all others \$15. To make your reservations call Nancy at: 508-385-3528.

DHS has only 50 tickets for each performance.

**October 20 at 11:30 ~ ~ *DHS Annual Meeting & Luncheon*. More information to follow. Call: 508-385-9308 to reserve early. PLEASE, plan *now* as seating at the Summer Stock Restaurant is limited ... but the food is not!