



Dennis Historical Society Newsletter October 2019

Volume 42, No10

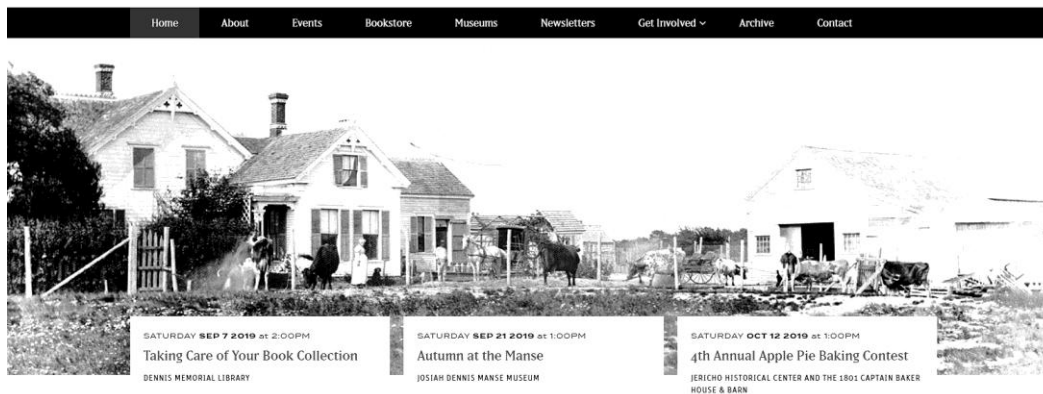
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**The Next Board Meeting, Tuesday, October 8th, 2:00 pm, DHS Library in the
West Dennis Free Public Library, 260 Main Street, West Dennis
Members Welcome!**

Please send information & stories for the newsletter to Dave Talbott at the DHS Website email address: info@dennishistoricalsociety.org



Dennis Historical Society



The Dennis Historical Society's New Website

Although it's been up and running since the end of August, many DHS members may have yet to experience our new website and to explore and enjoy all of its updated features. Whatever browser you use, type **dennis historical society** into the search box.

When the page opens, either click on Dennis Historical Society, or Dennis Historical Society: Home. Once you click, you will find yourself on the new Home Page. Immediately, you will see all the choices available there, or reachable with one click on the menu bar at the top and bottom of the page. The Home Page allows you, at a glance, or at a click, to see what is on the DHS calendar of upcoming Events; shop at the Bookstore; become a Member or renew your membership, and access the Digital Archive. You will also be able learn About us; make a Donation; Contact us, or Volunteer.

One of the most exciting additions is the Newsletters tab. Now, every issue of the DHS Newsletter, except the current year, dating back to the original January 1978 first addition is available to read and enjoy. This newsletter archive is a true treasure trove of Dennis history.

The Museums tab shows you the three museums which are owned by the Town of Dennis. These museums are operated by Town appointed committees which are responsible for planning, staffing and executing a year's worth of programs about Dennis history. With only a few exceptions, the furnishings and artifacts in the museums belong to your Society. The collaboration between the Town and DHS is truly a win-win relationship! In addition to the Museums and the DHS Library, are Markers and Historic sites. Each is located on a map which pinpoints its location.

One of the best features of the website is that it was designed so that it can be updated by DHS itself without having to pay a webmaster to do it. A DHS member can now: update the Events Calendar each January, and as new event posters are generated by our publicity director, update the calendar by adding them; add the issues of the Newsletter from the previous year each January; update the Officers and Board Members each January based on October's Annual Meeting elections; make additions and subtractions in the Bookstore when needed; add to the historic markers and monuments and the maps which pin-point their location; post the Annual Appeal Letter each December when it is written and update the response form; update membership forms when needed; use the DHS email to inform our

membership of upcoming events, communicate with the Board, and answer the many emails which are sent to our website.

So how did this new website happen? Was it that the stars and planets aligned, synchronicity, or just plain old good fortune? Whatever the reason, or the answer, the 12th of May 2018, turned out to be very fortuitous for the Dennis Historical Society. On that day, Kevin Keegan acting in his capacity as Publicity Director, sent out his first email to all the DHS members for whom the Society had an email address. Kevin's email said, in part —*we want to thank you for your membership and invite you to visit our website (dennishistoricalsociety.org) to find out more about the history of the town you love ... and to search our historical digital archive.*

On May 17th, an email came into DHS from a member who had done what Kevin had suggested and visited the website. In part, this communiqué said: *I'm wondering if DHS is interested in refreshing it? I'd be happy to work on the project. Here is what I think could be gained: Easier to use on phones and tablets; easier for users to find information; easier for DHS staff to add and update information. Please let me know if this is something you'd like to explore!*

The DHS member is Brian Cook. It was my good fortune to work with Brian on the new website. It was a collaboration which allowed Brian's brilliance and expertise to bounce off someone with no website experience to pursue a *for dummies* approach which would allow the DHS website to be maintained *in house* in the future. The project was designed, developed and redesigned over a two year period. I might add with great patience on Brian's part. Not only is the website more user friendly, it is more secure, and is more usable on a variety of devices. As the project neared completion, I asked Brian to tell me a bit about himself so that I could pass it on to the membership.

Brian lives in Washington, DC with his wife and two young sons. He works as a Product Manager for the Alliance for a Healthier Generation, a non-profit organization devoted to improving children's' health. He has more than 15 years experience working with digital technologies in the private sector and with non-profits, including the Human Rights Campaign and South Asian American Digital Archive. In 2015, he edited and published *Memories of the Past*, the memoir of Joshua Eldredge Howes, his great-great-great-grandfather, through the Dennis Historical Society. It is available in the online Bookstore, and is also for sale in the three museums. Said Brian, "I worked a bit with Burt Derick to publish the memoir, and I would like to take the opportunity to contribute something to the organization he so loved." Thanks to Brian, the proceeds from the sale of the book go to the DHS!

Brian Cook has given an incredible gift of his time and knowhow to the Dennis Historical Society! His gift will serve it for years to come. Not only will it present the Society to the world in the form of a modern, user friendly up to date website, it will save money by making it possible to update and maintain it ourselves. In addition to all he has done, Brian has also funded the hosting of the website for the next five years! *Thank you Brian from a Grateful Society!*

Secrets of the Gingerbread Library

The following article, the first of two parts, was contributed by the retired librarian, Anne Villalon Speyer of the South Dennis Free Public Library. From a talk originally given in 2015 at the SFPD Library and the Dennis Senior Center by Anne, it was sent to the Dennis Historical Society for use in its newsletter. Thank you Anne!



(Pen and ink by Howard Bonington)

The tiny building that would someday become a library began as a mystery. The building is shown on an 1858 map of South Dennis. But nobody is exactly sure how it got here. It may have been built here, on land that Dennis's first Portuguese resident, John Rose, purchased from Alphaeus Baker. From what he later leaves in his will, he was likely a sailor at some time so one story is that his captain built it for him. Or it may have been brought from Wellfleet/Truro area—or from South Yarmouth--where, as in Oak Bluffs today, there were cottages like this one, often as part of Methodist campgrounds. Lots of buildings were moved around the Cape, over land and sea, in those days. Construction was sturdy. There are wonderful stories of pots of soup left cooking over a stove fire during a move so there would be food when a house arrived at its new location. My own theory is that, like Wizard of Oz, it just drifted down out of the sky, though I've never bothered to share that with the Dennis Historical Society. After John Rose, later residents were Benjamin Nickerson, a cobbler, and then two sisters, Emily and Lizzie Smalle. Emily is cited more than once as an 'ardent

poetess', writing for town holidays and occasions, though none of her poetry has surfaced. She and her sister somehow managed to hold prayer meetings in their small living space. There's a funny story about Emily—she gave a discarded sunbonnet to a neighbor, but after its new owner made it beautiful again, Emily wanted it back.

Whenever I looked at the steep staircase to the two dormer rooms upstairs, all I could think of was someone hearing a noise in the middle of the night and having to negotiate those murderous stairs, candle in hand, to investigate. Or to empty a bedpan...Lizzie outlived her sister, dying in 1918, when native son Captain Jonathan Matthews presented it to the village of South Dennis to use as a library, replacing a small library operation in the old post office building on Main St, later razed. In 1926, he left it to the town outright in his will. Local residents got together two years later to purchase the building and incorporate the South Dennis Free Public Library Association. The first librarian was Bessie Matthews, Jonathan's sister, who had also been librarian at the old post office building.

The noble goal established in Article II of the original bylaws was "to encourage a taste for wholesome reading and promote the intellectual and moral growth of the community." Another interesting piece of the bylaws, Article XIII, stated that 'anyone wishing to beautify or adorn the property of the association may so do by first getting the consent of the executive board.' Townsfolk clearly wanted to take care of this architectural gem.

The first librarian for the Association was Mabel Sears, who served from 1928-1941. The second, Ethel Hall, in whose memory the library's present outside reading area was established, then served as librarian until 1975, for an impressive 34 years, after she could no longer teach once she was married. And she continued as secretary of the Association for another 15 years, almost 50 years of service altogether. In an article written about her retirement, she commented that the children who came to the Hansel and Gretel library assumed she lived there. In fact, many donations were sent to the library in care just of Mrs. Hall, South Dennis. No more than that was needed to find her.

The original building was only 15 X 20 feet. Labeling its architecture is as whimsical a process as the building itself---it's been called 'jigsaw style,' 'Victorian Gothic,' or gingerbread Gothic." It had a bean-pot cellar, round, with a circular earthen shelf, and the only heat was from a cast-iron pot-bellied stove, later stored in the attic. Up there, too, is what used to be the Smalle sisters' closet, papered with the 'Gospel News,' a religious journal popular in the early part of the twentieth century. **Anne's article will be concluded in a future newsletter.**

A final note: A couple of months ago, DHS was contacted by a woman who had a painting she no longer wanted and sent a picture of it. She knew the name of the artist and that it was in Dennis. Sorry it's black and white here. The painting is in color. Knowing that she is a lifelong resident, I sent the picture to Carole Bell. Soon after, I received an email back identifying the house as 61 Nobscusset Road, now owned by Jan and Ray Ward. This is what Carole wrote.



When I was younger, we called it the Bossi house because Quentin and Lillian Bossi lived there. House was built in 1825. My father related this story. Frank Ellsworth Howes owned the house, and he wore a necktie with a crisp white shirt and chauffeured for elderly women. He took them to 'tea' and shopping. Gas was delivered 50 gallons at a time. (You can see the gas storage unit and faucet clearly in the picture). So one day when Frank was about his business, youngsters Margaret Walker (later Meg Maher) and Eleanor Nickerson (later Roy) were playing and opened the faucet. Out poured the gas all over the ground and the milk cow drank it, and well as you may have guessed, neither the cow, the girls, nor Frank were very happy. He slaughtered the milk cow. Arnold Bossi's wife, Maggie told me that Quentin and Lillian Bossi were Arnold's parents and Tommi who was married to David Sears ended up with the

Unknown After All!
house because she was related, but she wasn't sure what the exact connection was. Boy has that house been fixed up!

Ray and Jan ended up with the picture, but they don't think it is their house. Having been to and studied the house, I also agree that the picture is not 61 Nobscusset Road. Now Carole has her doubts too! Her story is so interesting, however, I am leaving it as she sent it! And so readers, we have another unknown house mystery after all. The painting was done by summer resident Gordon Hoxie who lived on Scarsdale Road. The owner of the painting had been told it was at the "corner of Nobscusset and 6A." If you recognize, or have any information about this house, please email me at: info@dennishistoricalsociety.org.

Dennis Historical Society
P.O. Box 607
South Dennis, MA 02660-0607

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Dennis
Historical
Society's

FOURTH
ANNUAL
APPLE
PIE
CONTEST

Saturday, October 12, 1-4pm
1801 Captain Theophilus Baker House
90 Old Main Street, West Dennis

OCTOBER 8 DEADLINE TO REGISTER:
contact Dawn Dellner at 508.237.6954
or at dawn.dellner@gmail.com



Dennis Historical Society

Annual Meeting and Luncheon

Saturday, October 26, 2019 at 11:30 a.m.



Encore Bar & Bistro
35 Hope Lane
Dennis, MA
Luncheon will be served at 12:00

Following a *very brief* Annual Meeting.
Our Special Guest Speaker will be
Michele Pecoraro
Plymouth 400 Executive Director
*"Plymouth 400, the Making of a
21st Century Commemoration"*

MENU
Upon Arrival
Cheese & Crackers, Vegetables and Crudité
First Course
Garden Salad or Clam Chowder
Entrees
Baked Stuffed Shrimp
or
Chicken Marsala
or
Grilled Vegetable Lasagna
Dessert
Bread Pudding with a Rum Glaze,
served with Coffee and Tea

Members will be receiving a mailing on this event shortly.