



# Dennis Historical Society

## Newsletter

### January 2020

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#### **THERE WILL BE NO BOARD MEETING IN JANUARY**

**The Next Board Meeting will be held on Tuesday, February 11th, 2:00 pm, Dennis Memorial Library  
1020 Old Bass River Road, Dennis Village  
Members Welcome!**

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

## *Secrets of the Gingerbread Library, Part Two*

*The following article, the second of two parts, was contributed by Anne Villalon Speyer, retired librarian of the South Dennis Free Public Library. Adapted from a talk she originally gave in 2015 at the Library and also at the Dennis Senior Center, Anne sent the article to the Dennis Historical Society for use in its newsletter.*

One of Ethel Hall's duties was to get the stove going—it took a half hour before the room warmed up—and in her words, the books patrons took off the shelves felt as if they had been “in an ice chest.” Not until 1958 was a furnace installed, eight years after the library finally got electricity, The Trustees ‘regretted’ having to replace the old wood stove, but one doubts Ethel Hall did, since she mentions no longer having to be “chilled to the bone.”

Another fun tidbit of library history is that with no shelf room for the children's books, they sat in stacks around Ethel Hall's desk. Picture little readers sitting on the floor, small hands eagerly sifting through to choose their precious books for the week. The library was splitting its seams long before an addition appeared in 1965, the first money for which, 500 dollars, was set aside at the 1960 Annual Meeting. A ‘handsome mahogany box’ was donated by Mr. Harold Phillips to collect the money for the construction. I came across it some years ago when I was cleaning the closets in the children's room. I didn't know its history at the time, but there was a spectral voice saying we had to keep it. Since a statute was discovered stipulating no town money could be used to renovate any building not owned by the town, the funds were raised by sales of washcloths, food sales, and a ‘ham and bean supper cooked and served by the good women of the village’ along with a letter writing campaign. The Liberty Hall Thrift Shop donated all their profit from the 1964 season. The addition included a lavatory in the basement, but for some odd reason, it took several more years to get water to run out of the faucets. Judging from the Annual Meeting notes, the contractor and the plumber never seemed to be able to get together. Though the whole addition, including the entry porch, cost under 6,000 dollars, it's important to remember that would be the equivalent of over 45,000 dollars today.

Gordon Robb, who had been, along with his wife, a member of the Association, donated both the plans for the addition and his supervision of the construction. French Canadian by birth, he and his wife Clara moved to South Dennis, down the street from the library, around 1940. He was also consultant at the restoration of Williamsburg, supervised the restoration of the South Dennis Congregational Church, was active in the Dennis Historical Society, and wrote a popular series on Cape houses for the Cape Cod Times in 1939.

#### **All kinds of interesting tidbits pop up in the Annual meeting notes and the Librarians' reports.**

From 1929 to 1941, no business was conducted because there was no quorum. It would seem that people didn't like meetings any more then than they do now. In a great turn of phrase, special contributions got a ‘rising vote of thanks’ not just an ordinary ‘vote of thanks.’ The library at this point was open on Fridays from 3-4, if weather and light permitted, which they often didn't.

In 1955, Ethel Hall writes that Harold Phillips made a cover for the trap door in the upstairs ceiling. What trap door? I never found one. Another library mystery. In 1956 the library opened for two afternoons in the summer, Tuesdays and Fridays, for the first time. It would be continued “as long as circulation was over 100 books a week.” It was. A book deposit box was built in 1957. At the same time, a new bookcase replaced a table in the middle of the room. “Everyone, including the librarians, was grateful for relief from hunting through piles of books on the table for the one a patron wanted.”

In 1959, there was a misguided notion to paint the floor. The paint was removed in 1967, and the happily restored original floorboards remained undisturbed for forty years until their soft pine was gouged by modern office chairs and had to be refinished and protected with plastic overlays. By 1961, the library was now open three days a week in the summer, Monday evenings and Wednesday and Friday afternoons. It was clear the little library needed to get bigger. 1965 saw the gift of 2 beautiful chandeliers designed and made by Shepard Dudley, a summer resident, and in 1966, the library acquired a typewriter. But it would be another 10 years before the librarians' reports, submitted then by Harle Carlson, would be typed. So, in 1967, Eloise Sherman was asked to inscribe, because of her 'graceful handwriting,' the names of those for whom memorial gifts had been given to the library. But she wasn't one to stagnate—later it would be her donation that paved the way for the library's first computer.

In 1969, the Annual Meetings moved from Totten/Liberty Hall to the library building. Alfred Kelley caned the two rockers since occupied by various stuffed bears in the children's room. Mr. Kelley served as president of the Association for 14 years, then as its Treasurer for another 9. His wife, Gladys, served as Vice President for 48 years. Their daughter Janice also was an Association member and energetic library volunteer for many years--- just one example of a library loved by multiple generations of many a family.

In 1970, a dehumidifier was suggested but it was decided instead to leave piles of charcoal around the basement instead. New downstairs lighting was proposed, but the electrician kept not showing up. Some things don't change. In 1972, the library belatedly got a telephone, but more than one Association member thought it would mar the historical atmosphere. By 1975, the outside world was encroaching. A new lock was put on the downstairs door because someone had tried to break in. What they expected to find---gold, drugs, state-of-the-art technology--- is hard to imagine. Would that I thought someone wanted something to read. Around 1976, another addition was discussed, but underlined in the meeting notes were the words "change not always progress. Must preserve the library's charm and visual impact.' That comment would be repeated in one form or another at many meetings to follow.

In 1982, the highlights of a Dennis Historical Society sponsored tour of the library were the mantle, the woodstove, and the bean pot cellar. Reference questions by telephone were increasing--- one interesting one was from someone who wanted a map of Guam-- he was a glass engraver and had an order for a glass with Guam on it. The number of interlibrary loan requests was growing, too. it was an unwieldy process to fill them before CLAMS, with lots of back-and-forth pleas between librarians and in what is now called snail mail, but even this small library reports consistent success getting patrons what they wanted. There was more and more talk across the Cape about automated library systems. In 1984, Harle Carlson attended a meeting on shared computer resources in Cape libraries, but at that point, it seemed 'not yet applicable to this small library.'

By 1985, when Harle resigned as director, the price of books had risen 72% in the 10 years she had been librarian. In 1976 the library had been able to buy 602 books for the same price that bought only 320 in 1985. 1987 brought much consternation over a 'sow bug' infestation. Ben Hudson, local landscaper, was called in to remove vegetation from the basement wall. Almost 30 years later, in one of those small- town full circles, his daughter was hired to take over the care of the grounds. Between 1988 and 1990, a page was torn out of the Annual Meeting Ledger. Makes one wonder why. Still another library mystery. By 1989, the first manifestation of the present children's room had been completed. Kids liked—and still do-- having their own space where they could even make a little noise without the library deities frowning. By 1994, only Truro and Dennis have not joined CLAMS. Dennis residents were unhappy at being charged to use libraries in neighboring towns.

In 1998, the library's first computer was installed. Not yet connected to the internet, it was nonetheless popular. Meeting notes speculated what Captain Matthews, whose portrait hangs over the public access computers, might think about all that modern folderol. As Dennis moved toward joining CLAMS, bureaucracy heated up. Pauline Marr, who became librarian in 1986, in her 1998 report thanked the Board members for their gracious good humor regarding "the myriad directives with which we now have to cope." In December 2004, built by then across -the -street neighbor Ken Baker, a tinier replica of the tiny library was displayed at the Dennis Village Stroll and raffled off at the library right before Christmas. It was won by the owner of the former Rose Victorian gift shop and for 13 years, graced the back of that property, ultimately dubbed 'The Teeny, Tiny Library.' Lots of people wanted to win it—more than one woman fantasized about putting a comfortable chair and a lamp inside and then escaping from husband and housework. Artists wanted to make it into a studio. Writers wanted it for peace and inspiration. Gardeners eyed it as a nifty potting shed. One guy wanted to take it to Lake Winnepesaukee in the winter, cut a hole in the floor and use it as a fishing house. Others wanted to win it as a playhouse for their grandchildren. And a goodly number of patrons who love the library just wanted to be able to wake up in the morning and look at it. It raised over 7000 dollars for the library. When it

returned to the library in 2017 and was raffled off again, it contributed another few thousand dollars toward books and movies. This time, a neighbor and long-time patron won it, so it won't ever be far away from its progenitor.

In 2009, I designed a website. Since the library is especially photogenic, one of the original website pages was called 'Images' and featured depictions of the library in oil paintings, watercolors, photographs, cards, on tiles, quilts, even on a whale. And there was the time I looked out the window to see the whole front yard filled by the easels of an Eastham art class. One of our many overseas visitors who photographed us later wrote a letter telling us he had built a model of the library for his grandson in Germany.

In 2015, my then assistant and now successor, Veronica, got the gingerbread library on Facebook. In a note written by Eloise Sherman in 1988, she with the 'graceful handwriting' and later the donor of money for a first computer, she says 'I'll bet our library will leap ahead in the next few years.' Well, three decades later, as it was celebrating a 100<sup>th</sup> birthday, the library was still leaping. In the letter written to South Dennis residents in 1962, Clarence Bayles, president of the Association from 1941 – 1974—33 years—mentions that circulation in 1951, 1,474, had increased to 5,691 by 1961. By June of 2018, that figure had grown to over 22,000.

A 1993 *Dennis Journal* article written about the library by local historian Jack Sheedy describes a building imbued with 'an air touched by the ages.' In my 16 years working at the library, over 13 of those as director, I kept expecting to see Alice in Wonderland, in white dress with blue sash, walk in and ask for *Pride and Prejudice*. It didn't happen on my watch, but, given the magic of the South Dennis Library, just about anything is possible.

**Thank you Anne for contributing this fascinating article! The South Dennis Free Public Library is such an important part of the history of the Town of Dennis. It is wonderful to have its own history recorded!**

## *A Very Significant Acquisition!*



On November 21, 2019, the day of the auction at *Eldred's*, board members Phyllis Horton and Dawn Dellner secured their paddle and waited patiently for number 394. When the bidding started Phyllis raised the paddle and kept going with each rise in increments. Auctioneer Josh Eldred kept the steady pace, and finally when it appeared to stop, the hammer fell, and he said the magic word, **SOLD**. The painting was ours. Josh took a minute to acknowledge the sale and politely asked Phyllis if the painting would be on display at the Maritime Museum at the West Dennis Graded School. Phyllis nodded and there was a brief applause. This beautiful piece of maritime history had come home to Dennis.

We hope all DHS members will make an effort to see this fine painting. Now you all know how it came to be ours.

Account provided by Board Member Mary Kuhrtz

### *From Eldred's Brochure*

Description Lot #394

**WILLIAM PIERCE STUBBS**

**Maine/Massachusetts, 1842-1909**

Schooner Colin C. Baker. Signed lower left Stubbs".

*The schooner's papers were donated to the Sturgis Library in Barnstable, Massachusetts. According to the library, the schooner's "home port was Boston and she sailed under the command of Captain Browning K. Baker, Jr. of West Dennis, who was born in 1839 and died in 1920. Captain Baker was part owner and sole commander of the vessel for the entirety of her sailing days, from 1873 to 1917, except for a period in the late 1890s when she was commanded by Captain Rodger S. Hawes, also of Dennis.*

Oil on canvas, 22" x 36". Framed 30" x 44".

**This acquisition was made possible, in part, by the Curator's Discretionary Fund in the DHS Annual Appeal.**

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*"Home of Mrs. Seth Crowell"*



*"Home of Mrs. Louiza Clark"*

Two more picture from the glass plate negatives donated to the DHS by Henry Kelley. Like last month, although these pictures were labeled as quoted, there is absolutely no information about them. Each, undoubtedly has a story to tell. If any readers can share some family history or knowledge about of these pictures, please email me. It would be so terrific to know the *who, what, when, where and why*...thank you!

*Coming up in February, great information on the glass plate of "Mrs. H. Chapman at house" provided by Scott Walker!*

*Wishing everyone a Happy, Healthy 2020!*