



Dennis Historical Society

Newsletter

April 2022

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The Next Board Meeting will be held on Tuesday, April 12th, 2:00 pm at the 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

“Murder, She Wrote”

Hi,
I was going through my late grandmother's things and found a 4 page typewritten signed document by Elliot Wixon describing the events leading up to the shooting of Winfred Cahoon in March, 1915. I Googled the names and dates and found a newsletter dated April 1994 from the Dennis Historical Society mentioning the incident. If you would like, I will send it to you for your archives.

Sincerely,
Lyn Wheeler

On January 20, 2022, the email above was sent to DHS. After responding to Lyn with an enthusiastic “yes!”, I immediately went to the Newsletters tab on our website and clicked on the *April 1994* issue. There, in an article written by then editor Nancy Thatcher Reid entitled *More on Crime in Dennis*, was the following –

In 1915, temperance was a solid fact in our village of West Dennis; however, there were a few back-sliders. On March 24, 1915 Elliott Wixon, 28, lured Winfred Cahoon, 24, and Frank Chase into the swamp with the promise of liquor he had hidden there. Upon reaching the swamp Wixon produced a rope and ordered Chase to tie Cahoon to a tree. He then pulled out a pistol and announced his intention of shooting both Cahoon and Chase. Cahoon sprang at Wixon hoping to disarm him, but Wixon fired and the bullet entered Cahoon's temple, killing him instantly. With that, Chase started running for home with Wixon in hot pursuit. Chase reached home and locked the door. Apparently, that action made Wixon aware of the enormity of his deed. He then went to Cahoon's home, told the father what he had done, offered to lead him to his son's body, and turned the pistol over to him and said, "Shoot me now if you wish." It opportunely happened that Deputy Sheriff Richard S. Gage was passing through West Dennis at that time. He placed Wixon under arrest and locked him up at Barnstable County Jail for the night. Wixon was taken before Judge Walter Welsh (grandfather of the present Judge Robert Welsh) at Second District Court in Harwich Center where he was remanded to the Grand Jury sitting in April. He pled not guilty and the case was continued to the October sitting where he then pleaded guilty in the second degree. He was sentenced to "the term of his natural life at hard labor, one day thereof at solitary confinement, and the residue of said term at hard labor". He was paroled in 1944 and his sentence terminated in 1957. Where liquor enters into this story is this—even though there had been bad blood between these men for a considerable length of time the promise of a drink was enough to overcome Cahoon and Chase's dislike of Wixon—and led to that tragedy.

Here is the way the story was released in the *Hyannis Patriot*, March 22, 1915. The article was obtained online at - <https://www.sturgislibrary.org/research/notable-collections/newspaper-indexes/...what-an-incredible-resource!>

MURDER AT WEST DENNIS

Elliot Wixon on Thursday afternoon shot and killed Willred A. Cahoon, in a swamp in West Dennis.

Wixon is 21, and Cahoon was a year younger. The shooting was witnessed by Frank Chase. All three live in West Dennis.

Deputy Sheriff Richard Gage arrested Wixon and took him to Barnstable jail. He submitted to arrest without protest.

To District Police Officer E. S. Bradford Wixon made the following statement:

"Cahoon was always picking on me," he said, according to the officer. "He had cuffed me and plagued me

since I was a boy. He would never let up. I wanted to get even with him, that's why I did it."

Wixon, Officer Bradford said, told him that he had obtained a revolver and about 40 feet of line, which he carried in his clothing. He met Cahoon and Frank Chase, a friend of both, on the street late Thursday afternoon, told them he had hidden some liquor in Cedar Swamp, and agreed to share it with them if they would accompany him.

Arriving at the swamp, Wixon took out the rope and told Chase to bind Cahoon to a tree, "for the fun of it."

Chase refused, and when Wixon drew his revolver he ran away. Cahoon started to follow. Wixon said he fired at Cahoon, shooting him in the temple. He fired again, according to the story given out by Officer Bradford, then replaced the two empty shells in his revolver with loaded ones, and returned to the town.

Meeting young Cahoon's father, Wixon greeted him with the statement, "I have shot Win. Here's the revolver, I'm going to give myself up."

He was placed under arrest shortly afterward, and Officer Bradford went to the swamp, where he found Cahoon's body.

Medical Examiner Charles W. Milliken of Barnstable held an autopsy.

Wixon was arraigned on a charge of murder Friday. He pleaded not guilty and the case was continued for one week.

George A. Baker, who has been engaged as counsel for Wixon expressed the opinion that the young man was not entirely responsible for his act.

Cahoon, the victim, was unmarried and has a father, mother and three brothers, all of whom are prostrated with grief. He was the son of Mr. and Mrs. Geo. Cahoon.

Amazingly, what follows is the transcribed copy of Elliot E. Wixon's type written and signed statement sent to us by Lyn Wheeler. It is **his version** of the events which occurred on March 18, 1915. Ed. Note – The date of the incident in

the article which appears in the April 1994 DHS Newsletter is incorrect, as is Wixon's age. He was 21. The name Cahoon was spelled "Cahoun" in Wixon's account, but all the newspaper accounts say "Cahoon."

The facts about the case as I remember them.

March 18, 1915, at about 3 P.M., I went up the street with my brother's wife and baby and saw L. Phillips and asked him if I could take his gun again. He said, "Yes, I will go and get it for you". I said, "I may not go to Hyannis to-night". But he said, "never mind" and I got my wheel and went for it. When he came back, I went up to Joe Baxter's store for some shells. Mr. Baxter could not go out, because he had a bad cold, but his wife said she would go and get them for me. So I helped her into the store (she was very lame) and we found the shells alright. She said that they cost a little over a cent apiece and gave me nineteen of them. Then I got my wheel and went over to South Yarmouth to the wire factory where I had been laid off, thinking they might need me again, but they did not. So I called my youngest brother out and we had a little talk. Then I came back to West Dennis and stopped in at the pool-room and Winfred Cahoun and Frank Chase started to tease me, by asking how I could leave my brother's wife for so long to come to the pool-room. (Cahoun always did this when he had been drinking). This greatly hurt me, especially when they kept at me until I came out and went home, thinking I would go down to the cove and put my boat into the water ready for eeling later on. I put my boots on and took Aunt Phoebe's clothes line with me in case I might have need of some rope.

Going down to the cove, I passed the pool-room and stopped to watch some boys playing marbles; then I stepped into the poolroom, thinking I would have plenty of time to put my boat in the water before supper. Winfred Cahoun and Frank Chase were still there and began to tease me again about my brother's wife and a lady friend of mine. After a while, I got good and sore and asked them if they wanted a drink and they both yelled, "sure". I said, "If you had not been drinking so much today you would not talk as you do". Then I went towards the swamp and they followed me. I met Everett Cahoun before I got to the swamp. When I had gone a little way in this swamp, I stopped when I found they were after me, and I asked them what they wanted. They asked me where the whiskey was and I said, "I have not any now but I have some coming from Boston. Winfred Cahoun said, "Why in the H--- didn't you say so and we would not have followed you way down here for nothing." I said, "I didn't ask you to follow me here, but while we are here, tell me why do you keep saying such things about my brother's wife, when you have been drinking, when they are all lies?" Cahoun said, "I will say what I want about your brother's wife". I told him never to say another word and to take back what he had already said. He said, "I won't". Then I thought I might scare him while he was half drunk. I took off my coat and got the rope from off my arm and told Frank Chase to tie him up. Frank said, "What for?" I said, "He won't be hurt and he is going to take back what he has said about me." Winfred said, "I'll see you in H--- first." I told him to put up his hands and fight and I slapped his face. He took me by the throat, was bending me back over a stump and I could hardly breath(e) any more. I thought of the gun and pulled it out to hit him over the head and he took hold of my hand with the gun in it. The gun went off twice hitting him in the forehead and neck. (I did not know this until afterward.) We both went over the stump, he landed on top of me, I had to push him off before I could get up. I ran out of the swamp and saw Frank Chase running for home so I waited around the store a bit, took out the two empty shells and put back two others because I expected Frank Chase to come out and get me with his gun. That is what I thought and I watched to see if he would. Just then my brother came up the street from work and I told him I thought Winfred Cahoun was shot, but he would not believe me.

Then George Cahoun, Winfred's father, came running towards us and I said to him, "Here is my gun; I think Winfred is shot." "What! Winfred shot?" he asked. I said, "I think so." He said, "Where is he?" I told him, "I'll show you." When I asked my brother to come along, he said, "is it true Ell?" I said, "I am not sure, not sure." He started for home; but George Cahoun and I went down to the swamp together and found Winfred laying on his side up against the stump where he had fallen. George took off his sweater and put it under Winfred's head. I saw the bloody places, one on his forehead and one on his neck. (That is how I think he was shot). As George put the sweater under his head, he started to curse me up and down. Then my oldest brother came and George was yelling that I had killed his boy. My brother and I started home and he asked me if I did kill him. I said, "I don't know whether I did or not." We had almost reached home when I was arrested.

Everything seemed to be in a haze for some time. In fact, I cannot seem to remember all that happened on that awful day and night. It must have been hours afterwards that I came to my senses because I could not realize where I was until the next morning --- that I was in Barnstable jail for murder. Then I began to see some things through the haze, and I could not believe them. It seemed impossible that I could have done this. I must be dreaming. But, in a few minutes, I was taken to court with a lawyer. Then the next day, when I washed up, I saw two black marks on my first two fingers. I felt sure that they were powder marks, and I intended to show them to my lawyer Mr. Hopkins. I asked if I could see him right away but I was told he could not be found. So, I forgot them when I washed up again next morning and thought of them when it was too late to do me any good. These marks would have proved the shooting would have been an accident and not a malicious homicide.

Elliott C. Wixon

Quoting from the April 1994 DHS Newsletter, "Wixon was taken before Judge Walter Welsh (grandfather of the present Judge Robert Welsh) at Second District Court in Harwich Center where he was remanded to the Grand Jury sitting in April. He pled not guilty and the case was continued to the October sitting where he then pleaded guilty in the second degree. He was sentenced to 'the term of his natural life at hard labor, one day thereof at solitary confinement, and the residue of said term at hard labor'. He was paroled in 1944 and his sentence terminated in 1957."

Elliot Everett Wixon - born West Dennis, MA - July 20, 1893; died Bourne, MA - February 14, 1965 (Age 71).*

*(www.findagrave.com)

Our New Volunteer Coordinator

Dennis Historical Society president Betsy Harrison is pleased to announce that Dee Collins, a member of our Board of Directors, has been appointed as Volunteer Coordinator of the Society, in keeping with a major operational goal of better serving the needs of our four DHS-run venues.

Dee will act as liaison between DHS and those who oversee volunteers and docents at the 1736 Josiah Dennis Manse (Terri Fox), the 1801 Theophilus Baker House and Barn at Jericho Historical Center (Dawn Dellner), the Maritime Museum at the 1867 West Dennis Graded Schoolhouse (Pat Corcoran), and the DHS historical holdings at the West Dennis Library (Ruth Derick). As the 2022 DHS calendar gets underway by mid-year, look for Dee's outreach for volunteers in local media sources, through direct appeal via DHS emails and this newsletter, and by announcements on various mid-Cape Facebook pages.

If you have been thinking about volunteering with DHS, we would love to hear from you and learn how we can match your interests to myriad efforts at our four venues. Please reach us at DHSVolunteerCoordinator@gmail.com.

Kevin Keegan

Variation on a House Sign

In the November 2021 Newsletter, there was an article announcing the reintroduction and availability of the Dennis Historical Society House Signs. Shortly after, I received the email below from friend, member and frequent newsletter contributor Howard Bonington with the accompanying picture.

Dave

More than one item in the November newsletter caught my eye. The second was the historical house signs.

When I moved to the South Dennis Historic District 25 years ago, the dated signs on the houses were a big factor in my drawing most of them. I noticed that everywhere on The Cape many were captain's houses. It gave me somewhat of a feeling of being left out. I had been a commissioned 1st Lieutenant in the Artillery. I had even owned a medium-sized sailboat on the Hudson River. I wanted to join the crowd, so I created a sign – "The Lieutenant Bonington House – circa 1985" (see attached). I even hoped that if I proved to be a good neighbor that I might be promoted to Commodore someday.

It's nice to have a house sign.

Howard B.



(Photo by Howard Bonington)



(Dennis Historical Society Digital Archive)

Another Unknown

Bearing some similarities to the *Homestead* in the June 2021 Newsletter, this photo was found in the Digital Archive. Of particular interest are the two women in the lower left, one heading toward the door and the other disembarking from the carriage. The image was provided to the DA by Barbara "Bo" Durst. If anyone can identify or has any information about this house, please email me at info@dennishistoricalsociety.org.

Thank you!

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

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2021 Annual Appeal

As of the middle of March, responses have continued to come in for last year's appeal! Because of the wonderful generosity of the membership, not only are the *wish lists* for the museums fully funded, but much needed work in the period classroom at the West Dennis Graded School will be able to be funded too! This work will include the installation of decorative, strong and durable plywood under the student desks and chairs to properly secure them for safety.

Because the WDGS is a town owned building, the desks and chairs cannot be lagged to the floor.

On behalf of all the members of your Board,

Thank you!

It's Membership Renewal Time!

The notices for 2022-2023 have been mailed. This time, don't just renew your membership; give a membership to a family member, or friend. What a great gift!

Not only will that membership be appreciated, it will help us grow!

Please include a note with the name and mailing address of the gift recipient along with your payment.

You can also do so online using **PayPal** at <http://www.dennishistoricalsociety.org/GetInvolved/Membership>

After making your payment, email us at **info@dennishistoricalsociety.org** to send the name and mailing address of the lucky recipient.