



Dennis Historical Society Newsletter

November 2022

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**The next Board Meeting will be held on Tuesday, November 8th, 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

Hidden Inscriptions

On August 4, 2021, the following email came into the DHS Website. The subject was the *Columns*. For privacy reasons, the name and phone number of the sender have been intentionally omitted –

There is a significant piece of history on the second floor, which I am not sure you are aware of. It goes back to the civil war!!!! I am sight loss which make communicating thru email quite difficult! Could someone PLEASE call me? Thank you, and hope to hear from someone.

Excited by the prospect of a new piece of information about the historic *Columns* in West Dennis, I forwarded the email to DHS Board Members Diane Rochelle and Bob Poskitt who are also Chair and Vice Chair of the Dennis Historical Commission.

Bob, who had the contact information for the *Columns* new owners, sent them an email identifying and introducing himself.

His email read in part –

I received a call today from a contractor who worked on your property in 2006/2007. He shared with me that there was a date/signature in one of the upstairs bedrooms that he hoped could be preserved. Since I live very close by to the Columns, I went over just now, introduced myself to one of your contractors, and asked for him to take me upstairs. He showed me the signature in the back room as well as the second one uncovered in the front bedroom. The good news is that both have been preserved. I took the liberty to photograph both of them for the town and state historical records. I hope I did not over step my welcome by doing that.

Bob received an email from the owners expressing their support and approval for what he had done. I will wait to show his pictures until you learn *the rest of the story!*

Diane emailed me to say that she had already been called by the gentleman who had sent the original email. On August 5th, she followed up with the following update - *Interesting, he called me again today. Not really new information except that he says there is a Register article with photo of the inscription Isaiah K Ellis carved into the 2nd floor bedroom sheathing in 1861, saying gone to war. I can't find it in Sturgis Library Newspaper Collections, but am looking. Nice guy, Diane*

With her investigative juices flowing, Diane, who has a well established and well deserved reputation for historical research, went to work. The result is the following amazing piece of Dennis history –

Rehabilitation of the Columns, 401 Route 28, W. Dennis, has begun and with it comes public interest. A local resident, who worked on the building years ago, notified both the Dennis Historical Society and the Dennis Historical Commission that an inscription, hidden behind the plaster of a second-floor bedroom, was possibly in danger.

The Historical Commission knew about this inscription. It was discovered by jazz musician Ron Ormsby, one-time owner of the Columns, who framed and covered it for preservation. The new owners had been alerted to its location. It was photographed and will be preserved behind new walls.

The inscription, etched in plaster says "Isaiah Ellis Gone to War Sept. 9th 1861." Isaiah Ellis, born in Dennis, 1839, was a 22 year-old mason, working at the Columns, plastering interior walls. He fought in the Civil War, enlisting in the Dennis Enrollment of June 1863. After the war, he married and eventually moved to Middleboro. Dying at the age 77, he is buried in the North Harwich Cemetery. Why he inscribed this epitaph in plaster is a mystery, but history is full of surprises. There was also a second inscription behind another bedroom wall, which was photographed and will be preserved.

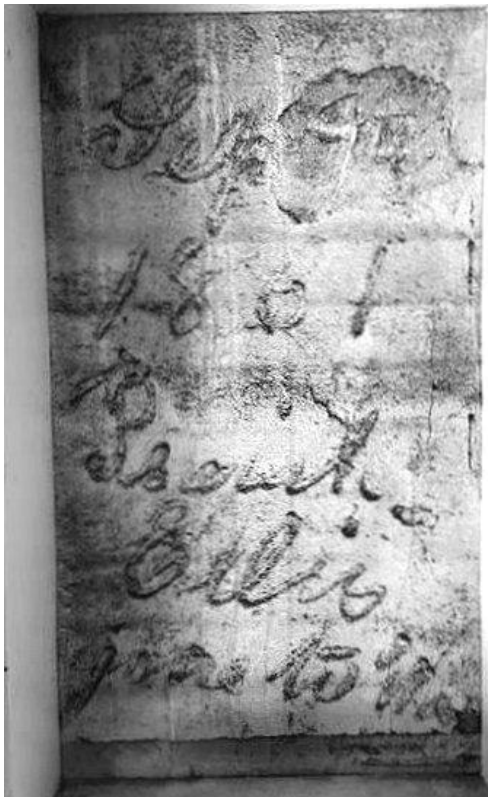
Anonymous, it says "Jeff Davis Sept 5th 1861 Died." There were two Jeff Davis's. One was Jefferson Davis, president of the Confederate States from 1861 to 1865. The other was a Confederate privateer brig Jeff. Davis, who, according

to the Yarmouth Register of 1861, had become a terror to the Yankees. Launched in 1845, and commissioned in June 1861, with a letter of marque, the Jefferson Davis or Jeff Davis was captained by Louis M Coxetter. Armed with five British cannon, nine Union ships were quickly captured for their prize. The Barnstable Patriot of August 20, 1861 printed: "Off Nantucket Shoals, July 23, 1861, Private Johnson on board the Privateer Jeff Davis. I am confined on board as a Prisoner, whoever picks this up will please let my folks know in Boston. I have been ordered to be shot for trying to escape, tell them to avenge my death ... Trusting something will happen to make good my escape before this unjust sentence can be executed on me, Publish this in the Boston Papers, for God sake and let them know about it, hoping someone will pick this up, I bid farewell to all. Yours Wm A Johnson." The fate of William A Johnson is unknown.

An article published in the Charleston Mercury Aug. 26 & reprinted in the Yarmouth Register Sept. 6, 1861, "gives the subjoined account of the wreck of the privateer Jeff Davis – Capt Coxetter, on the 16th ult (last month), was off St Augustine, but the wind having increased to half a gale, he could not venture in. He remained outside the bar the whole of Saturday without observing any of Lincoln's fleet. On Sunday morning, at half-past six, while trying to cross the bar, the Jeff Davis struck, and though every possible exertion was made to relieve her by throwing the heavy guns overboard, yet the noble vessel, after her perilous voyage, and the running of innumerable blockades, became a total wreck." Perhaps, these inscriptions were inspired by the wreck of the Jeff Davis.

In the next few days, the Barnstable Patriot printed several articles, one claiming the death of Jefferson Davis. Another: "A young lady in Bellows Falls, of "sweet sixteen," good looking and accomplished, declares her readiness to wed the man who shall shoot Jeff Davis, provided the lucky one is not already encumbered." Such was the sentiment on Cape Cod against the Confederacy. **Thank you Diane!**

Here are Bob Poskitt's pictures – **Thank you Bob!**



Isaiah Ellis, Gone to War, Sept. 9th 1861 photos and captions by Bob Poskitt *Jeff Davis, Sept. 5th 1861 died*

More Memories

I am pleased to report that responses continue to come in from the request for Dennis recollections of the 20th century! The following was unsolicited and came from our youngest son Geoff who currently lives in Maryland. Geoff is extremely happy with where he and his family live, but I have to add, he will return to the Cape to visit on almost any pretext! His letter is included in this month's newsletter, because I am so pleased that he sent it, and that it shows what has been said before – even though the original newsletter article was focused on Dennis Village in 1956, memories of all of Dennis in the 20th century are welcomed and encouraged –

Reading Kevin Maher's recollections of 1956, my mind drifted back to Dennis 25 years later and some of my own. I enjoyed reminiscing about what were the days of yore for me, and thought I'd share.

Press the FWD button on the cassette player, and we fast forward twenty-five years to 1981. I am a member of the last generation that knew what being bored was. There was an unspoken kid rule that you never told your parents you were bored. Across Dennis and probably the entire Cape the response would be "well, find something to do, or we will give you something to do."

As in 1956, it was a simpler time. In 1981, Atari hadn't made an appearance, and the exciting world of Cablevision and its 15+ channels was still a couple of years away.

I am positive Summer Days lasted weeks back then.

A good portion of the week was spent at the Dennis Racquet and Swim Club. Mornings consisted of swimming lessons taught by Nancy Symington and Beth Crowell. This was soon followed by tennis lessons from Buzz Friend, and very often a dip in the pool afterward.

When not engaged in activities in the pool or on the courts, I would jump on my favorite mode of transportation, which at the time, was a Schwinn Varsity. I don't recall ever asking my parents for a ride anywhere. This machine with 10 gears made travel a breeze; it allowed you to actually ride up Old Bass River Hill. It was the days before the bike path and bike helmets. In one day, I could travel effortlessly to a friend's house in South Dennis, a quick stop at the Mercantile for penny candy, more visits to friends' homes, some beach time at Corporation, and on the way home, buy a pack of baseball cards from DPM, or an Apple Pie ice cream at The Smuggler.

Evenings after dinner were spent playing backyard baseball until it became too dark to see. This was often followed by a neighborhood game of flashlight tag. Even though we were running through neighbors' yards in the dark with flashlights, we never had to worry about being caught by someone's ring camera or the police being called. Often, you would check in to see how Remy, Evans, Burleson and Rice were doing on channel 38 - keep your Sox on TV 38!

The feel of the breeze and the smell of honeysuckle as I biked down Corporation Road and Whig Street are permanently etched in my mind. Such an amazing village to call home! **Thank you Geoff!**

Remember, *our memories are our history*, please send me yours – info@dennishistoricalsociety.org.

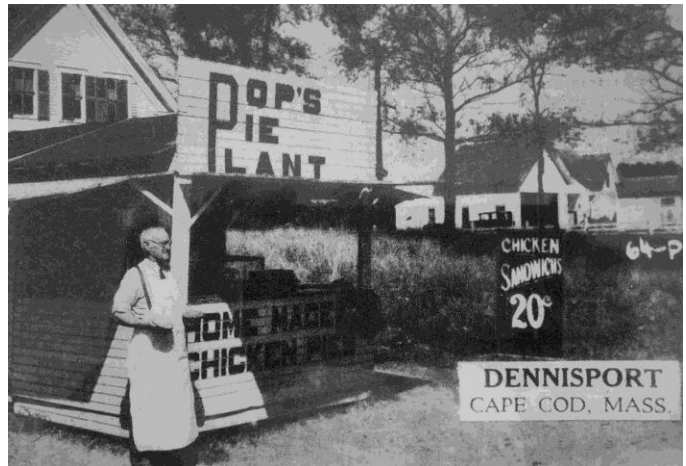
A Look Back at Dennis Port

Fortunately for all of us, especially me as a newsletter deadline approaches, items of interest mysteriously materialize! The next two pictures were emailed to us by the *Dennis Chamber of Commerce* along with the accompanying information

The first photo was taken by Dennis Chamber Director Lois Andre while visiting an exhibit at the Heritage Museums & Gardens Exhibit in Sandwich. It is entitled ***Auto Trailer Camp, Dennis Port, Massachusetts***. The photo by Carl Mydans was taken for the Farm Security Administration in August, 1936. It is in the Library of Congress Collection.



The caption on this photo reads... "This scene of camping on Cape Cod was probably taken at Arthur Chase's Camp Ground in Dennis Port, which he opened about 1925."



From the 1930s to the early 50s. A.E. "Pop" O'Brien used to run a little roadside stand in Dennis Port peddling homemade chicken pies and sandwiches to hungry summer folk.

Coming up in December, the Annual Meeting & more looks back into Our Past!

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for this Holiday Season?
Visit the DHS Website.***

Type www.dennishistoricalsociety.org in your browser and click on Bookstore. You will find a great selection of books which will make the perfect gifts for the special people on your list!

As an added bonus, anyone who purchases a copy of Nancy Thatcher Reid's definitive history of Dennis, *Dennis, Cape Cod* and pays the full retail price of \$50.00, can give the gift of an Individual Membership to a person of their choosing! After making your purchase, just email the name and address of the lucky recipient to -

info@dennishistoricalsociety.org

The membership will last until April 2024!

***The 2022 Dennis
Historical Society's
Annual Appeal***

Next month, members will receive their Society's 2022 Annual Appeal letter asking for support for *wish list* items for each of our three museums.

Please give generously! Your contribution will greatly assist our museum volunteers in fulfilling our Mission Statement.

***To Preserve, Protect & Promote the
the History of Dennis, Massachusetts***

(For some, it may still be tax deductable)



Happy Thanksgiving



Wishing everyone a truly wonderful day!