



Dennis Historical Society Newsletter August 2023

Volume 46, No.08

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**The next Board Meeting will be held on Tuesday, August 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

DON'T LET THIS BE YOUR NEXT TO LAST NEWSLETTER!

Those who have not renewed their 2023-24 membership have received a reminder. Now, if you have not paid your dues by the end of August, you will not receive the October Newsletter. If in doubt, renew anyway! Our record keeping is excellent, and if you are already current, your membership will be renewed until April 2025. AND, you will **not** receive a renewal notice next March. All the information you need is on the DHS Website - go to <http://www.dennishistoricalsociety.org/> and click on *Get Involved/Membership*. You can either download the membership form and mail it with a check, or you can renew using PayPal.

Of Mice and Men

As with the best laid plans, the August Newsletter was to have featured the reopening of the Captain Baker House at the Jericho Historical Center. As you saw in the July Newsletter, a cancelled stamp was printed across Kevin Keegan's poster. To insure adequate funding, the restoration work was split into two phases. The work on the house has been completed, and the work on the Barn will soon begin. The new work will make it impossible to reopen Jericho until the Barn is completed, and Jericho Director Dawn Dellner announced the need to postpone the reopening. The latest information on when this anxiously awaited event is rescheduled will be made known as soon as it becomes available!

Shifting Gears

At the monthly meeting of the Josiah Dennis Manse Committee on July 12th, it was decided that the renovation of the *West Schoolhouse* had proceeded to a point where it could finally be reopened! With much quick planning and a huge flurry of activity - including invitations to the Dennis Select Board and the Community Preservation Committee, a press release by Kevin Keegan, this newsletter and a lot of work by the Manse Committee, the date of July 29th between 1 – 4 pm will see it happen!



View of the Front Door from Whig Street



Accessible Ramp to the Front Door

photos by Dave Talbott

There will be much more about the *Captain Baker House & Barn* and the *West Schoolhouse* in upcoming issues of the newsletter, including how both projects were conceived, designed, funded and executed – *please stay tuned!*

Sesuit Harbor – what you might not know

In late January this year, an email came into our website from a Research Assistant Professor at UMass Amherst, Department of Earth, Geographic and Climate Sciences - *I am a geologist doing some research on Sesuit Marsh. I was*

curious if y'all knew - Ed. Note - probably not a local man - when the large harbor went in there? From historical maps and air photos, it looks like sometime between 1950 and 1970. Do you have any more information on the harbor development? I responded with the following synopsis which was extracted from a report prepared for the Town of Dennis – *Sesuit Harbor Use and Capacity Study* which was prepared in 2014, finalized in 2015 for the Town of Dennis *Harbor Study Committee* and prepared by the *Woods Hole Group* in association with *Baxter Nye Engineering & Surveying*. PS – He was very appreciative. I learned a lot and hope you do too!



Aerial Photo of Sesuit Harbor Circa 1950 from the DHS Digital Archive

Sesuit Harbor (the Harbor), a federally authorized navigation channel and harbor of refuge, is located on the Cape Cod Bay shoreline of the Town of Dennis. Throughout its settled history, Sesuit Harbor has been a place where residential, commercial and, later, recreational uses coexist. The areas surrounding Sesuit Harbor, Sesuit Neck and Quivet Neck, were settled in 1639. Between 1776 and 1890, the Salt Works operated on Quivet Neck. Between 1850 and 1863, Shiverick Shipyard operated on Sesuit Neck. Commercial and recreational fishing vessels have historically called Sesuit Harbor home because of its access to Cape Cod Bay. As development expanded across Cape Cod over the past 30 years, residential, commercial, and recreational uses intensified around the Harbor. After centuries of use as a tidal creek with extensive salt marsh systems, Sesuit Harbor developed formally in the 1950s with construction of jetties and dredging of a channel in the Outer Harbor (1945-1950), dredging a turning basin in 1948, and extension/widening of the entrance channel and dredging the Inner Harbor in 1958 (Louis Berger Group, 2009; Woods Hole Group, 2010). As one of the few harbors of refuge along the north facing shoreline of Cape Cod, Sesuit Harbor was authorized as a federal navigation project by the US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) in the early 1980s. The USACE maintained the navigation channel from 1982 to 2004. Since 2005, the Town has contracted the Barnstable County Dredge to maintain the channel (Woods Hole Group, 2010).

Twice a Hero

Recently, the Dennis Historical Society was contacted by William Sweeney, vice president of the *Medal of Honor Historical Society of the United States*. The *MHHSUS* is planning on doing an article about our own Benjamin Franklin Baker and was requesting permission to use the information and photos in our Digital Archive. Along with permission, I also attached the terrific *Email Blast* written by Kevin Keegan which was sent in February of this year. In addition, I told Mr. Sweeney that the original medal was on display along with Benjamin Baker's other decorations at the *Dennis Historical Society Maritime Museum* at the West Dennis Graded School. Although there were pictures of the obverse side of the Medal of Honor on the website, there were none of the reverse side. This was something which

Mr. Sweeney hoped to obtain. Very interested myself, I told him I would see what I could do, and soon met with Pat Corcoran the museum's director to take some pictures.



Reverse Side of the Medal – Photo by Dave Talbott

Although the article alludes to a Medal of Honor, I have found nothing to indicate that a second one was ever awarded. There is no mention in any military records, and there is not one amongst the medals which are in the DHS Maritime Museum. These medals all accompanied Benjamin's body when it traveled from Brockton to the Swan Lake Cemetery for burial in Dennis Port.

This is the reverse side of Benjamin Franklin Baker's Medal of Honor. It reads as follows –

**FOR HEROISM AND GALLANTRY UNDER FIRE OF ENEMY.
BENJAMIN F. BAKER. COXSWAIN. U.S.S. NASHVILLE.
CUTTING CABLES CIENFUECOS, CUBA. MAY 11, 1898.**

Ed. Note – The name of the medal is Medal of Honor. The “Congressional” is often mistakenly used before Medal of Honor because the medal was created by Congress in 1863. The medal is, however, a purely military award. Today, it is bestowed by the President of the United States either to a living recipient or sadly, posthumously.

The exchange of emails with William Sweeney included him sending this clipping. It is from the Saint Albans, VT *Daily Messenger*, date line Brockton, MA, December 21, 1898 –

Read on and wonder if there might be such a thing as hero's blood, a substance with which one is born?

SAVED BOYS FROM A SHARK.

Medal of Honor Awarded Benjamin F. Baker, of Brockton.

Brockton, Dec. 21.—Benjamin F. Baker, of this city, sailmaker's mate, has been recommended by the officers of the United States training ship Alliance for a medal of honor. When the vessel was at St. Thomas, D. W. I. the crew were ordered to refrain from swimming, as the harbor was full of sharks.

One night three boys stole overboard, taking the ship's dog with them. The dog was seized by a monster shark. Terror-stricken, the three boys swam for the ship, but the shark gained upon them.

Baker dived over the rail, and armed only with a dirk, swam directly toward the approaching shark, and, diving beneath it, thrust his knife into its belly, ripping it open from throat to tail.

The shark measured fourteen feet nine inches. The dog had been swallowed whole.

Baker has already been awarded one medal for personal bravery, as he assisted in cutting the cable at Guantanamo under fire.

Follow up

Diane Rochelle emailed me this information about another Captain Bassett who will be featured in the forthcoming history of the residents of Yarmouth and its East Precinct (now Dennis) who served during the Revolutionary War.

Captain Elisha Bassett, son of William Bassett IV & Abigail Bourne; husband of Ruhamah Jennings (Sandwich 5/1/1716 – 4/15/1811 age 95), married 10/11/1739 in Sandwich.

Lived: 821 Route 6A, Dennis “at Nobscussett in a house that stood on the spot where Charles Hall now resides” (Deyo, Simeon. History of Barnstable County. p. 513) – next door to where Scargo Café now stands.

Service: represented the town of Yarmouth in a provincial Congress of deputies at Salem, Mass., October, 1774; also, at a provincial Congress convened at Cambridge, February 1775; also, at a provincial Congress held at Watertown, Mass., May 1775; represented the town of Yarmouth in the house of representatives which convened at Watertown May, 1776; at the commencement of the Revolution, he was a zealous Whig and surrendered his commission and was offered a captain's commission in the continental army, but his age and the circumstances of his family obliged him to decline accepting it. He was elected representative from Yarmouth to the provincial congress, as it was called, which assembled at Cambridge and Watertown in the years 1774, 1776 and 1778.



821 Main Street, Dennis – Image Provided by Diane Rochelle

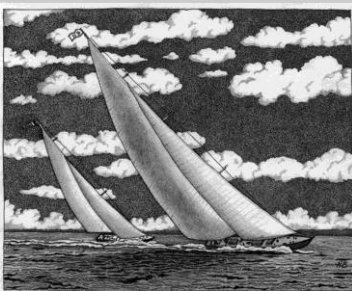
Ed. Note from Diane – Captain Joseph Bassett Jr. mentioned in last month's Tea Party article was Elisha's nephew.

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02664

**THE NAUTICAL ARTWORK
OF HOWARD BONINGTON**

A Special Exhibition Opening
at the Dennis Maritime Museum



Saturday, August 5, 1-4pm
Dennis Maritime Museum
67 School Street, West Dennis
FREE ADMISSION/WHEELCHAIR ACCESSIBLE



COLONIAL DAY IS BACK!
Saturday, August 19: 10am - 3pm at Josiah Dennis Manse



**FREE ADMISSION AND FUN
FOR THE WHOLE FAMILY
AT THIS SPECTACULAR
SUMMER EVENT**
Step back to the 1700s as you visit the restored
Old West School House and the 18th century home
of the town's namesake minister.
61 WHIG STREET IN DENNIS VILLAGE

**West
Dennis
Cemetery
Walk**

with local guide
Terri Fox

**Friday,
August 25th,
at 10am**

Rain date:
Sunday, August 27th, at 2pm

FREE ADMISSION
WEST DENNIS CEMETERY
AT THE INTERSECTION OF POND AND FISK STREETS

(Note: No parking in the cemetery itself)



August is really a exciting month, don't miss these events!