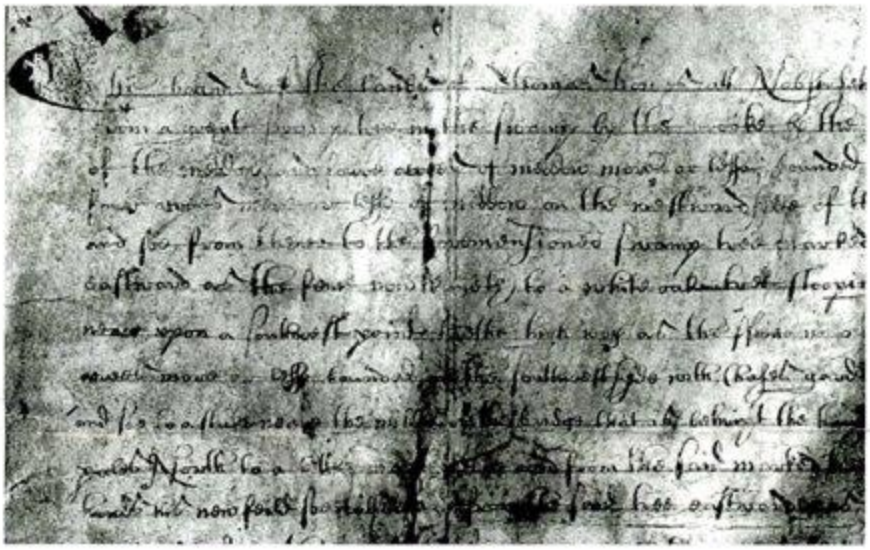
Dennis Historical Society Newsletter

dennishs@cape.com www.dennishistsoc.org

Volume 33 No. 4 Send letters & stories to Dennis Historical Society, Box 607, S. Dennis 02660 or pmrhorton@aol.com **April 2010**

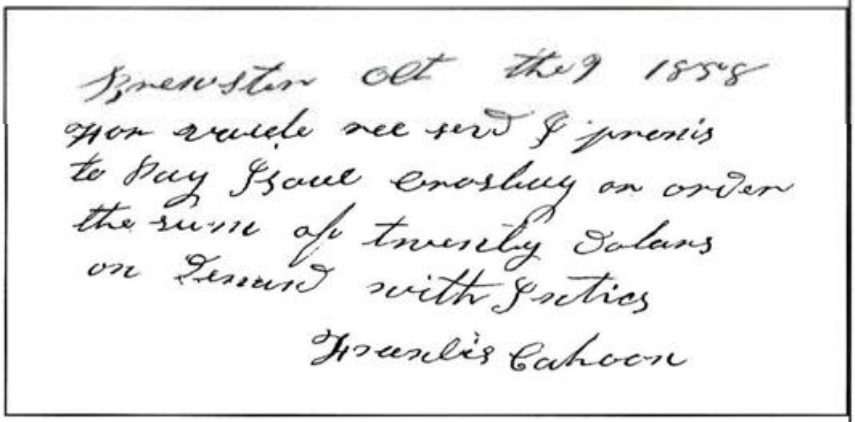
READING OLD DOCUMENTS

One of the tasks we are doing every day in the Library is trying to read old documents. With documents in our collections dating from the mid-1600s, we are confronted with the spellings, idiom, grammar, penmanship and punctuation from people who, in some cases, were only partly literate. Some of the old documents look like they are written in a foreign language with strokes approaching hieroglyphics. Needless to say, it is a challenge. How do we go about it?



An example of the old handwriting is shown here. This is a fragment from a deed by Thomas Howes, written about 1658. The paper has turned brown, the sepia ink has faded, and spellings are unlike anything seen today. The lower-case "d" looks like "@" and the "s" is like or "ſ" or "ſ" or "∫". The flourishes in the handwriting make it even more difficult to read.

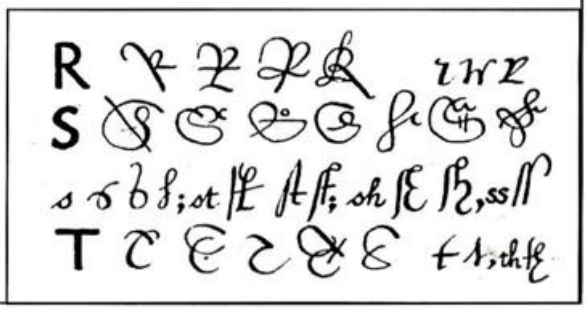
Another example is the following IOU. Poor Francis Cahoon of Chatham was barely literate, and the spelling is rather unique:



For those of you having trouble reading this document, it is:

Brewster oct the 9 1858
For vaule ree sevd I promis
to Pay Isaac Crosbay or order
the sum of twenty dollars
on demand with Intics
Francis Cahoon

For the reading of these documents, one technique has worked for this writer – the use of a "cheat sheet". Unusually formed letters of the alphabet should be written exactly as the writer has done on a scrap paper. Somewhere in that document you will find a word that is recognizable using that letter. Eventually, you will develop a sheet that will give a lot of variants in letter formation, as shown to the right, taken from the Society of Genealogists of Chaucer House, London, based on seventeenth century English parish registers.



And this brings us to another item encountered in old documents – the thorn. What, you may ask, is a "thorn"?

Thorn is an Old English character used for the sound "TH". It is found in medieval documents in the form "þ". (For those of you who have read Beowulf in the Old English, you have seen this before!) In colonial documents, however, the form found is "ye" or "ye" and "yt" or "yt". Although the first character appears to be a "Y", and was so written by colonial scribes, it is truly a thorn, a substitute for the "th" sound. So, when you see a phrase such as "…Henry ye sonne of William yt went to Boston…" it is to be read "…Henry the son of William that went to Boston…"

Burt Derick

Ever wonder why we have a Trotting Park Road?

Dennis had its own horseracing track, known as the Riverside Trotting Park. The track was started in 1890 when shares were sold for $5.00 each. Many of the shareholders were local sea captains. The track was made of clay, 6 inches deep – the same as the roads of the time, and a six-foot fence surrounded the grounds. By 1891, it had a grandstand which could seat 200 as well as stables for 27 horses. There were four or five big races a year with attendance averaging about 300. A special race was reported in the Yarmouth Register on June 3, 1893. A large purse was offered in the advertisement and the accompanying article appealed to the ladies. "Ladies are assured that everything objectionable will be eliminated." There was a baseball field adjacent, and a special attraction was a Thomas A. Edison gramophone. For ten cents, one could listen to it through earphones connected by rubber tubes.

Terri Fox

Another Teaching Moment

The West Dennis Graded School has stood on the corner of School and Pond streets for over one hundred and forty years, serving the town in many capacities. Once again, during the recent Maritime (Mother's Day) Weekend it served us well as place of learning. The DHS conducted an open house on Saturday and Sunday afternoons, during which dozens of people came to hear the history of the building, see the re-created school room and hear Brendan Joyce tell of the Shiverick Ship Yard. It was also an opportunity for visitors to see the newly installed maritime exhibit that is on loan to the WDGS while the Manse undergoes repairs. Phyllis Horton directed the displays and also added a special exhibit "Dennis Mariners in the Civil War." This exhibit shows artifacts from the war and describes citizens' of Dennis involvement in the War Between the States.

This summer, the WDGS will be open on Wednesday afternoons from 1-3PM for tours of the upstairs exhibits – both the 1800's classroom as well as the maritime and civil war exhibits. Please stop by and see these fascinating artifacts from our town's past.

Roger Sullivan

Our Members in Afghanistan

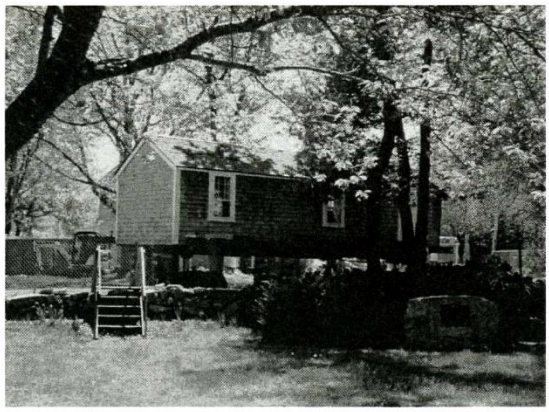
I received a change of address for our newsletter, and it initiated an interchange with a very busy DHS member, Tom Howes. Tom is with the Army Corps of Engineers - Afghanistan Engineer District South located at Kandahar Air Field-Afghanistan. Tom is a civilian electrical engineer with the Corps, involved in electrical analysis for the major construction that is going on. He will be there until February next year, and previously spent a year in Iraq with a different contractor. He was born in Maryland, but has lived in Hingham, CT, TN, FL, SC and Oregon – where we last knew his address. Tom also has a 'cousin' on base with him, Maj. Andrew Howes.

We wish both of them our very best, and a safe return home.

Pete Howes

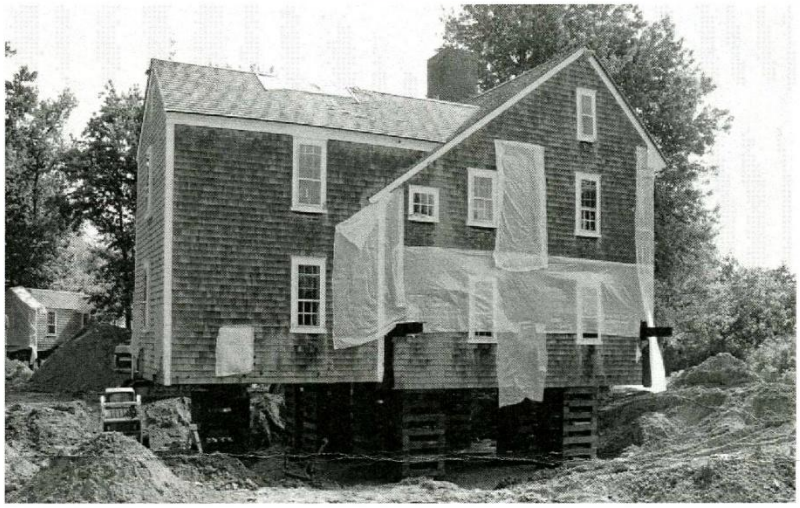
1736 Josiah Dennis Manse Museum Update

The project is continuing on schedule, with the completion scheduled by the end of the year, although some items will remain such as seeding the lawn in the spring. The Manse will reopen for a full schedule in 2011 with some to-be-announced opportunities to welcome the newly restored building.



Since the last newsletter, the Maritime Room has hauled anchor and sailed across the driveway to its temporary home under the trees, shown on the left. With this section moved out of the way and lifted to allow structural repairs to it's framing, the subsequent lifting of the main building was possible.

With all of the posts and other key structural repairs completed, the venerable (and we were concerned that it was vulnerable as well!) old Manse has been raised to allow excavation for the new cellar and foundation. This photo shows the building perched up on cribbing and the under-basement drainage system being installed. During June, the cellar concrete will be poured, extensive waterproofing installed on the concrete and the completion of the tasks required to have the building resting on its new foundation by mid-July. When completed the building will be about three feet higher than before the work started, compensating for the amount that it had sunken into the ground during almost 250 years and to keep its feet out of the high local water table.



Pete Howes

"Dennis

The Dennis High School had a picnic at the Observatory on Scargo Hill, last Tuesday. The day was very pleasantly spent in playing games, swinging, boating, and ice cream and refreshments "gratis", were received with a welcome."

Barnstable Patriot, June 8, 1880

Note: All members are invited to attend monthly DHS Board Meetings. The next meeting is at 3 pm on June 9 at the Jericho Historical Center, Old Main Street, West Dennis.

PLEASE NOTE – THE NEWSLETTER CANNOT BE FORWARDED

If you move or are temporarily away, the post office will *not* forward your newsletter. Before leaving, notify us and we will change your address for four months or more. If your newsletter is returned we have to pay extra postage, and we will remove you from the mailing list until notified.

Emailed Copies – We will gladly change your newsletter delivery to email *instead of* snail mail while you are away. Just drop a note to us at **dennishs@cape.com** with "Newsletter" in the subject line. This is a wonderful way to keep your newsletter coming, especially if you're a 'snowbird'!

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

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RETURN SERVICES REQUESTED

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**Mr. and Mrs. David P. Talbott
74 Black Ball Hill Rd.
Dennis, MA 02638

Mark Your Calendars – Upcoming DHS Programs

Yep – We're doing it for the 13th time!!
The Old Fashioned Pie Sale on the Green
The Only 1736 Josiah Dennis Manse Fundraiser
LIKE TO BAKE A PIE FOR US??

On Monday, July 5, 6:00 p.m. the Manse Bakers will hold its13th annual pie sale!! It's a FAST sellout.
Help us work HARDER and LONGER that day by baking pies for us.
We provide the pans!

We'd love to have you volunteer. Every Pie Counts!

Call June @ 508-385-9308

Saturday, June 19, 10:30 a.m.

Walking Tour of Historic Quivet Neck

Please join historian Brendan Joyce for a stroll through Quivet Neck to learn about its history and connection to the Shiverics

Meet at Jacob Sears Library
23 Center St. East Dennis
Rain Date – Sunday June 20

Saturday, June 26, 1:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.

Victorian Opening Reception

Enjoy tea and refreshments; tour Capt. Baker's lovely home; view the vintage fan display then visit the Barn at Jericho containing antique tools, a country store, carriages, cranberry sorters and more.

1801 Jericho Historical Center
90 Old Main Street, West Dennis