Dennis Historical Society Newsletter

dennishs@cape.com www.dennishistsoc.org

Volume 34 No. 2 Send letters & stories to Dennis Historical Society, Box 607, S. Dennis 02660 or pmrhorton@aol.com **March 2011**

Copyright 2011 - Dennis Historical Society

This tale is particularly relevant during our current New England winter. The very severe winters of the 1800's, dependence on the sea for commerce and our Town of Dennis all coalesce in this tragic tale -

THE ALMIRA[1]

"On a hillside overlooking Sandwich Harbor on the afternoon of January 16, 1827, stood an old, experienced captain watching a small schooner sail out to sea. So intent in his gaze was the old man that an acquaintance accosted him asking what was the matter. In response the old sea man raised his hands and said, "Gone out! He will never come in again." His friend reminded him that the wind was southerly, but the old man, totally ignoring this fact, walked away convinced that the ship was doomed.

The master of the schooner in question, the Almira, was Captain Josiah Ellis, a large, dignified man, who had concluded that there would be a few days of pleasant weather, and had sailed from Sandwich with a crew of two--his son and another sailor, John Smith, by name. By early evening the vessel was off Mary Ann Rocks, Manomet, with the northwest sky clear and bright. The temperature dropped so low, however, that the mariners realized that it would be necessary to make the nearest harbor or perish in the bitter cold. They tried to reach Plymouth by tacking, but the wind increased and they failed.

The men realized now that their condition was perilous indeed. The spray soon coated the mainsail with ice and down it came. The vessel was laid to the wind, the foresail braced fore and aft, but the jib, which was frozen, could not be hauled down. The wind soon cracked the ice and tore the canvas to shreds. Obeying the helm, the schooner came up to the wind, where it remained. It was so cold that icicles formed on the bodies of the crew, forcing them all to go below and build a fire in the cabin. When they returned to the deck, they found it covered with ice.

The sun rose on the coldest morning of the winter. Captain Ellis and his crew decided to sail back to Sandwich, but when the Almira reached a position off the harbor, the men in their frozen condition were unable to maneuver the schooner. The sailors were swept past their homes, where they could see the smoke curling from the chimneys of their houses. The last sail now went to pieces, and the vessel drifted helplessly before the wind. Sandwich, Barnstable, and Yarmouth all were passed, but when the schooner approached Dennis, a ledge of rocks loomed ahead, and the schooner crashed upon them.

From the nearby hill one of the Dennis residents saw the schooner approaching. The vessel was so close to the beach that the watchers ashore could look down on the decks, which were masses of ice. Wondering if anyone might be aboard, they shouted out to the vessel, whereupon the three men slowly emerged from the cabin. Standing like statues in their frozen condition, they indicated that they were in desperate need. A boat was put out to them, making its way with difficulty through the frozen sludge, but a wave swamped it. Those on shore then threw out a warp, which was secured by one of the lifesavers in the swamped dory, and the men were drawn back to the beach.

Out on the Almira, the waves still broke over the doomed vessel. One sailor dropped to the deck, and was soon encased in ice. The captain sank down, dying of exposure shortly afterwards. Only the captain's son was still alive. The tide began to rise, freeing the Almira from the rocks, and the schooner drifted nearer the shore, where those on the beach boarded her. Young Ellis, the captain's son, eventually recovered, but the prediction of the ancient mariner came true. Captain Josiah Ellis never came in again to Sandwich Harbor."

---

[1] Snow, Edward Rowe, "Great storms and famous shipwrecks of the New England coast", (Boston MA, The Yankee Publishing Company, 1943)

THE 1918 INFLUENZA EPIDEMIC

When you read this letter, a follow-on to the entry last month, try to imagine what life was like when there were no vaccinations, no antibiotics and when fear ran rampant....

Following is a letter written to my father from his mother dated Somerville, Monday eve, October 14, 1918, 9:15, during the height of the flu epidemic. He was a Lieutenant in the Army at Camp Meade in Maryland.

"My dear Dale,

I am sitting out in the kitchen trying to get my thoughts together, for there is a G.E.K. meeting going on in the front part of the house. Roland was anxious to have this meeting, and then he would be through for this season. I was willing enough to have it but I do think it rather a risky thing to have the meeting just now when there is so much sickness around.. .....

Well now I must tell you that we went to the Cape for the weekend, Friday afternoon. Father came home after being in town all day with the news that he had got a job as night inspector at the Grey & Davis place over to Camb. and had spoken to Mr. Richardson in the Mkt. for a job for Roland for Saturdays. So as I had left the small Thermos bottle and all my hdkfs at the Cape, we thought that if Roland was going to works Saturdays, there would not be any other chance to go down there, so we started Sat. morning, getting down there about the middle of the afternoon and as there is no automobiling Sundays, we started at seven o'clock this morning, and got home here just ten min. of twelve. So I have been hustling, baking cake, and pies, and getting a hearty dinner for four thirty, so Father could get over to Camb. by six o'clock, as this is his first day, or rather night, his hours are from six to six, and no work Sat. or Sun. nights, and twenty five per. If he makes good, it will be a good thing all round. .....

Everything is quiet down to the Cape, in fact it is here and in Boston, with all the Theatres closed. Churches and schools closed too. Going down Sat. morn we had to wait in Union Sq. for two funerals at the Catholic Church, and two or three at Forest Hills. The Ambulences and Hearses are flying around, here thicker than anything else. They say at the Keith car shops in Sagamore, they are making coffins, instead of cars. In Camb. they have had to call on the city for laborers to dig graves in the cemetery, and last week in one place they had one hundred and forty bodies waiting to be buried. If we can all escape, we will be fortunate. Do be as careful as you can. I cannot bear to read the war news or about the influenza. I start to read, then after I have read a little, it makes me feel so bad I have to give it up. But I am feeling better, generally, than I did last spring. It did seem then as if I was all in. I have had a good appetite this summer and everything tastes good. I think after we get a little settled here at home I shall feel much better. And if this war should ever end I shall be a different person. It has been my nerves and I guess the Ostheopath Physician I went to last summer was right when she said it was a shock to the nerves I had had sometime that was my trouble. And I think the time I collapsed when that girl was nearly drowned was the time. A trouble with the nerves is a longtime getting straightened out.....

I am so glad you have set for your pictures, and they are all so good. I don't see what kind of a camera that man in Camb. had, for those proofs did not look like you. I keep looking these over this eve, but really they are all so good I shall want one of each. Too bad you had the sad job of shipping that young man's body home, poor fellow.

In the Wedgewood tenement house they have had two or three cases of Pneumonia, and Sat one of the daughters died. Howard Tochtermann came out in the kitchen tonight and said he was told by one of the boys from Devens that two Dr's had been shot up there for inoculating poison into the boys which caused this influenza. This is the second time I have heard of that. A nurse told Miss Kennison who had been working up there. They deserve to be shot if the story is true.

Well I guess you will think I am a little off. I have been running on in this letter but there has been so much noise in the house I hardly knew what I was doing. Roland says he will write tomorrow. The party is over so I guess I will clear things up a little and get ready for bed for we are both pretty tired. Both times we have been down and coming home had quite heavy loads, and not a hitch with the flivver, we came right along just as nice as if she was new.

Well I must say good night for it is quite late.

Much love from, Mother"

Richard Barker

Reviving A Grand Old Tradition

When Hurricane Earl was knocking on the door I suddenly remembered that my grape vines were loaded with the best crop we've had in years. It also dawned on me that it's much easier picking grapes off the vine than picking them up from the ground after the storm has passed. (I've done both.)

I called old friends Ruth and Burt Derick to see if they wanted to come help. They arrived in early afternoon having visited his late Mom's arbor with a large container full of juicy Concord grapes. We stripped my vines and we had enough grapes to keep us busy for several days.

Making jams, jellies and juices is an old Dennis tradition I learned from my Mom, aunts and grandmother. Their jelly making was part of a summer-long exercise of "putting food by" for winter. The Cape Cod of my youth was one where we never went hungry during the Great Depression. We lived with little cash money but plenty of food from the land and sea.. Peas, green beans, corn, tomatoes, etc were canned, root vegetables were put down in the root cellar, gallons of chicken soup, jars of tuna fish and quarts of blueberries, peaches and pears were processed on the cast-iron Glenwood range against the long, cold winter ahead.

All of the above were utilitarian fare taken for granted to keep body and soul in good health until spring arrived.

Where Cape Cod women rose to perfection in their culinary arts was in their row after row of jars of jams and jellies, each one gleaming like a gem when held up against sunlight. Cape Codders had a sweet tooth. They always had to have something sweet to "top off" every meal. Apple pie for breakfast was a given. Saltratus biscuits with jelly was expected at every meal. Whoever would think of putting hot biscuits on the table without the jelly jar?

Ruth, Burt and a friend processed their grapes and made jam and jelly. I cooked my grapes and let the juice drip through several layers of cheesecloth until it stopped dripping. In earlier times everyone used a jelly bag with a drawstring in the top, clean but stained from previous years of making jellies. The bag was hung from a nail or hook in the kitchen that stayed in place year long but was only used at jelly making time. No one ever touched the bag and only the juice that flowed by gravity was used as that made the clearest jelly.

I have not made my jelly yet. I learned a trick some years back from my Canning and Cooking book put out by the Farm Home Journal magazine. I freeze the juice in four cup batches and take it out later in the fall and winter when I have more time. There is a certain pleasure derived from filling those jars when snow is on the ground.

I suspect my mother and grandmother would have loved to have that luxury.

Phyllis Horton

TREASURES FROM THE STONE COLLECTION

Joanna Stone, b. Southborough, 22 Apr 1747, d/o Rev. Nathan Stone (1708-1781) & Judith (Fox) Stone. The transcriber has no evidence that she ever married.

The Brookfield, Mass., Vital Records give the death of Joshua Spooner, "murdered March 1, 1778 by three soldiers of the Revolution, Ross, Brooks and Buchanan, at the instigation of his wife Bathsheba. They were all executed at Worcester July 2, 1778," which inscription is on Joshua's gravestone. The records also show that Joshua Spooner and Bathsheba Ruggles, m. int. Dec 1765, and were the parents of several children. The implication of the poem is that the murder was done for financial gain by the wife.

Burt Derick

DENNIS HISTORICAL SOCIETY BOARD MEETING

Note: All members are invited to attend monthly DHS Board Meetings. The next meeting is at 3 pm on March 16 at a private home. If members wish to attend, please call June Howes at 508-385-9308.

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

Non-profit Organization US POSTAGE PAID Permit No. 2 South Dennis, MA 02660

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

ELDRED

ROBERT C. ELDRED CO., INC.
1483 Rt. 6A, P.O. Box 796
East Dennis, MA 02641

Search your attics for: pewter, paintings, marine art, Asian items & art, pottery, glass, 18th/19th C. coins & currency, toys, oriental rugs, jewelry - not precious stones, Americana, etc. Consignments welcomed.

Free Antique Appraisal Day – Tuesday, March 8, 2011
10:00 am to 4:00 pm

Donations to benefit Dennis Historical Society: $5 per item; $10 for three; (3 maximum)
Reservations not required. If item(s) too large, call for appointments: (508) 385-3116

"Children, Their Toys and Games in American Art since 1620"

Sunday, March 20, 2011 at 2:00 p.m.
Jacob Sears Library, 23 Center St., East Dennis, MA

How has childhood changed over the centuries? Children have gone from being "miniature adults" in Puritan times to being treated as real children today. Join Henry Callan who through words, displays and a slide presentation will show you how "The Art tells it all".

Henry Callan of Sandwich is a noted historian, art collector, educator, authority on Americana *and* scholar. Henry also has a Master of Arts in History and a Master of Science in Library Science.

REFRESHMENTS