



# Dennis Historical Society

## Newsletter

### January 2018

**Volume 41, No1**

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**There is no DHS Board Meeting in January**

Please send information & stories for the newsletter to Dave Talbott at the DHS Website email address: [info@dennishistoricalsociety.org](mailto:info@dennishistoricalsociety.org)

## A BAKER, A CAKE and A COLUMN...

Our readers might enjoy a different 'take' on a well-recognized Dennis Historical subject, The Columns. Nancy Thacher Reid wrote in *Dennis, Cape Cod*, "Once the home of Captain Obed Baker, this pillared mansion had been a place for fine dining for a number of years in the 1960s. From 1970 – 1977, under the management of the Maddows, it was the Cape's premier location for fine jazz."

Built c. 1861, the beautiful Greek Revival home, now vacant, is located at 401 Main Street, Route 28 in West Dennis. Standing tall and bare on the remaining acre of upland, persons driving by today wonder how and why such an amazing building sits there, all alone. Here is The Column's story, with details of who exactly built this mansion; for no one really has seemed to know – it's always just "Capt. Obed Baker," but there were several of them! Even in Nancy Reid's quote above, she does not indicate which Captain Obed Baker is THE Captain Obed Baker!

Just 200 years ago, on 15 November 1817, the Columns future creator, Obed Baker, 3rd was born in Dennis. Although several Obed Bakers already lived in Dennis then, this OBED BAKER 3rd, named as such at birth, chose to distinguish himself by using his full name from birth to grave – it is prominently engraved on his magnificent tombstone in the Fisk Street Cemetery in West Dennis.

Of his birth family little is known. However, historical research provides persuasive hints that Obed Baker 3rd is the illegitimate son of Mary Look Baker, (1802-1880) of Yarmouth, born when Mary was 15 and unmarried, the daughter of Obed and Sarah Baker of So. Yarmouth. Mary Look raised her son Obed 3rd with her maiden name, although she later did marry, becoming Mary L. Baxter. Yet the father of Obed Baker 3rd, her first child, was never revealed, nor did Obed 3 adopt the name of his Baxter stepfather.

Considering the circumstances of his birth, he likely grew up under an illegitimate cloud, perhaps self-determining that he would succeed and "show up," the bullies of his childhood by attaining an extraordinary and very visible success. This he accomplished quickly, first, becoming a successful mariner, earning the title and respect of Captain and later by building his elegant home, The Columns, that outshone all in his West Dennis hometown.

Beginning life at the lowest rung of the ladder, Obed 3rd, rapidly worked his way to the top, choosing steam versus sail. Early on, he took command of a new steamer of the fledgling Winsor Line, an event leading to his uninterrupted success. Active as senior commander of the fleet for many years, as an early investor, he owned one-sixteenth of the prosperous line until shortly before his death. Obed 3<sup>rd</sup>, enjoyed great financial success! By 1861, he was able to build the original Columns manor house. His Town of Dennis 1870 real property tax was \$394. At the then rate of \$12 per \$1,000, that would value it at over \$32,000 in 1870 dollars, placing the value at over \$575,000 in today's dollars!

Of his personal life, less is known, however, there are a few reported events that tell some of his story.

Prior to 1867, he became an attendee at the Martha's Vineyard Camp Meeting and, as reported in the August 1867 Barnstable Patriot, "he had the only clapboard building in the encampment." One presumes that the other living quarters were, at that date, still all tents on platforms. Over the years the Obed Baker 3rd family frequently visited their so-called, "Camp Cottage."

Obed 3rd was well respected in Dennis and beyond, his integrity unquestioned. He served for years as a Director of the First National Bank of Yarmouth and as Treasurer and Trustee of the Bass River Savings Bank, until his death. In 1873, he was elected to the Dennis School Committee serving for two terms and was long an active member of the Methodist Episcopal Church in West Dennis. When at home, he was a farmer of note, for in October 1873, "Captain Obed Baker 3rd donated a generous lot of mammoth potatoes" to the Barnstable County Fair, reported the Patriot. While he most certainly owned livestock, the only record is his purchase of a horse, "Daisy" in 1892. He remained very close to his family, for in May 1875, he had his Mother's home moved from South Dennis to West Dennis to be nearer to him, the Patriot reported, while in April 1885, Obed 3rd bought Alvin Crowell's former home for his eldest daughter, Susan, Mrs. Simeon Crowell.

Capt. Obed Baker 3rd married first on 10 January 1839, to Susan Kelley Crowell (1819–1856), dau. of Edward Crowell & Sarah Baker. The Obed Bakers 3rd produced 3 sons and 3 daughters, with their last child, Susan Kelley Baker (1855 -1930) their only child to survive into adulthood. This daughter, Susan Baker, married first Simeon Crowell, by whom she had two sons, Edward B. Crowell (1880-1901) and Obed Franklin Crowell (1882-1920). While Edward died without issue, Obed F. Crowell did marry, Pearl Gillion, with one daughter, Rebecca Baker Crowell born in Dennis on March 21, 1908. She is the only known great-grandchild of Captain Obed Baker 3rd that may have had children; if so these would be the only descendants of Obed 3rd. In spite of considerable research we have not been able to locate her; she perhaps married in 1931, yet her spouses name is not known. If any persons know of this Rebecca Baker Crowell, please do be in contact with the Dennis Historical Society.

Following his first wife's death in 1856, Obed 3rd married a second time, in 1857, to Rebecca Howes Nickerson (1833-1917) dau. of Coleman Nickerson and Rebecca Tobey. There were two daughters of this marriage: first, Elvira Nickerson Baker (1862 –1915) who married Henry Thatcher in 1886, settling in Boston, where he was an apothecary. Their one son, Joseph Lucas Thatcher (1887-1936) also died without issue, thus Obed 3rd line via daughter Elvira ends with this grandson.

Their second daughter, also named Rebecca, (1866–1957), married in 1891, Lester Carlton Keith (1866 - 1943) of Brockton, where he and his father, Edwin Keith, were prominent Brockton Shoe Factory owners. Rebecca and Lester soon moved the company's corporate offices to Boston, where they lived permanently. The Keith's had one daughter, Florence May Keith (1893–1953). In turn Florence, this fourth grandchild of Obed's did marry and have two daughters who appear to have had no children. Thus a third line from Obed 3rd is lost, ending with the two Keith great granddaughters via daughter Rebecca.

One observes, that in spite of his beautiful mansion, it was in Capt. Obed Baker 3rd's own family, that he experienced the greatest of life's losses and joys. Research indicates that while Obed 3rd had some eight children, he had only 4 grandchildren. His three surviving daughters, Susan, Elvira and Rebecca, lived to maturity, married and they in turn had these 4 children, his grandchildren that reached adulthood. Yet in the next generation, great-grandchildren –we have located three born, two without issue and the third one, Susan Baker Crowell, disappears from all records-perhaps still to be found and if so, she and her heirs would be the only descendants of Captain Obed Baker 3rd.



PHOTO~c.1961

## **The Columns Cheesecake West Dennis, Cape Cod, Massachusetts**

The favorite dessert of diners in this very gourmet restaurant – at that time!

1. GRAHAM CRACKER CRUST– Prepare first. Crush, not too finely, about 1 1/2 inner packages of original graham crackers. Mix with 1/2 cup melted butter. Pat down flat only on bottom of a spring form cake pan.

2. MIX TOGETHER IN MIXER OR MIX WELL BY HAND

3-8 oz packages cream cheese [Philadelphia Brand works best]

1/2 cup white sugar

3 large eggs

1/4 cup freshly squeezed lemon juice

1 teaspoon real vanilla – add last and mix again.

Pour mixture into prepared pan over the Graham Cracker Crust.

Bake approximately 1/2 hour at 350° or until cake springs to the touch at center.

3. TOPPING

1/2 pint sour cream

1/4 cup sugar

Mix sour cream and sugar — spread over cooked cake — return to oven at 500° for 5 minutes.

Cool & Serve cold. Remove Pan Rim to serve slices, but store in refrigerator with rim on.

Source: The Columns Restaurant, West Dennis, Massachusetts.

Jane Barrows Tatibouet, a graduate of Cornell University, with a degree in Foods & Nutrition, was the Columns' Baker, during the long (May–September) summers of 1961, 1962 & 1963, where she was alias "Betty Crocker" to cooks and wait staff! Here she shares this special recipe for the very first time – with the DHS.

## THE COLUMNS ~ FIRST HUNDRED YEARS

*(All pictures in this article are from the DHS Digital Archives)*



**PHOTO ~ c. 1861---1876**  
**“At The Beginning”**

**Note ~ when built the actual columns rise only one story.**



**PHOTO ~ c.1876---1916**  
**“The Middle Years”**

**Obed 3rd Estate**  
**view from Main St. -**  
**(Route28)—then a dirt road**  
**Note ~ a windmill at the rear**



**PHOTO~c.1916---1958**  
**“The Final Family Years”**

**Rebecca Baker Keith, Obed 3rd,**  
**daughter managing the estate and gardens.**  
**Note ~ she rebuilt the actual columns**  
**to rise above the 2nd floor into the roof.**

**“SOLD out of Family”**  
**Note ~ Following the death of Rebecca**  
**Baker Keith, there being no close**  
**descendants, the property was sold**  
**after 100 years and was repurposed**  
**as The Columns Restaurant.**

Articles show that Captain Obed 3rd, did travel extensively around the U.S., and in 1881, with his wife, Rebecca, they enjoyed a 6 month trip abroad, visiting 8 European countries according to US Passport information. After this voyage, until Obed 3rd's death in 1895, it appears that he and his wife, with their talented daughter Rebecca Keith, began expanding the Columns, while adding some European touches.

It was this daughter, Rebecca Keith who, when she inherited her share of The Columns, re-imagined the simpler Greek Revival home of her childhood with its' modest one story columns, adding a massive set of columns rising above the second floor of the building. It was she who oversaw the upkeep and perfect appearance of the home throughout her lifetime, insuring that the home became truly the elegant manor house of her father's dreams, and that which we continue to behold today. Rebecca Keith died in 1957, preceded by her husband in 1943 and their only child, daughter Florence May Keith Bittner (Obed 3rd's Grandchild) in 1953. With no other grandchildren heirs, The Columns was sold out of the family after 100 years.

The purchasers, Arnold "Wally" & Gerry Wallen, were a just-retired couple, from Wallingford, Conn. with two grown sons, Stuart "Stew" and Robert "Rob." Stuart had been a host at the famed New York City restaurant, The Four Seasons, for a very short time. Yet, with only this brief restaurant background, the family had an idea that a Cape Cod Restaurant might provide robust careers for both sons; Stewart became The Column's general manager and Rob the assistant manager.

The Columns and the Wallens were most fortunate, in some ways, and must be given credit for creating a fine, gourmet restaurant, fondly remembered by many. These early 1960's were the heyday of other now, long-gone, famous Cape summer restaurants. However, the Columns had a unique service among its competitors; elegant valet parking, that allowed dinner guests to drive up the magnificent entrance, hand over their car to a valet, and walk through Rebecca Baker Keith's, columned façade and directly into the formal foyer.

As one entered The Columns, on the left, the original, red Victorian Parlor had become the latest high style cocktail lounge serving cosmopolitan drinks as well as beer by the yard, should one choose. To the right were several rooms, now used for dining and each kept by the Wallens as originals of the Obed Baker 3rd's family, with the floors, marble fireplaces and lighting, all intact. Additional kitchens were built in back and the bakeshop was in the basement. The wait staff were all male, unusual on the Cape in those times; college students from Ames, Iowa who came to Cape Cod each summer. However, the restaurant business was then, and is today, filled with well-meaning folks, who have visions of great success by opening a restaurant, while statistically 90% fail by their 2nd year. The Wallens having no deep awareness of the attention such a business takes, non-stop; 7-day work weeks, were simply overwhelmed. The Columns was no exception and, in spite of its history and stunning beauty, its' constant operational difficulties, caused the restaurant to have a brief but memorable existence.

Now at 155 years old, The Columns, following its years as a Jazz Club, stands in all its glory, vacant, and stripped of its beautiful trees and gardens, while awaiting a new life to again find fulfillment for its destiny.

By Jane Barrows Tatibouet at [HawaiiHoteliers@aol.com](mailto:HawaiiHoteliers@aol.com)

The BAKER of the CheeseCAKE at the COLUMNs...

Bringing you the history of the Columns and sharing for the first time her long sought after cheesecake recipe that she baked there, summers, from 1961 to 1963.

A descendant of Mayflower & Cape Cod Families, particularly of Dennis, Harwich & Yarmouth

***Wishing everyone a happy, healthy 2018!***

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### **The 2017 DHS Annual Appeal**

By now, members will have received their Annual Appeal letter asking for support for *wish list* items for each of our three museums.

If you haven't yet done so, *please* give generously! Your tax deductible contribution will greatly assist our museum volunteers in fulfilling our Society's Mission Statement:

**To Preserve, Promote & Present  
the history of Dennis, Massachusetts**

### **Looking for a Special Present?**

Have you visited the DHS online Bookstore? Type [www.dennishistoricalsociety.org](http://www.dennishistoricalsociety.org) in your browser and then click on Bookstore. You will find a great selection of what might be the perfect gift for a birthday, graduation, or to tuck away for the next holiday season. Highly recommended is *Dennis, Cape Cod*, the definitive volume of Dennis History!

### **Give the Gift of History**

When your membership renewal arrives in the mail this spring, don't just renew your own membership, start a new membership for a family member, or friend with a connection to the Town of Dennis.

Not only will your gift be appreciated, it will help grow your Society!

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

You can do so online using PayPal at [http://www.dennishistoricalsociety.org/Get Involved/Membership](http://www.dennishistoricalsociety.org/GetInvolved/Membership)

After making your payment, email us at [info@dennishistoricalsociety.org](mailto:info@dennishistoricalsociety.org) to send the name and address of the recipient.

***Thank you!***