



Dennis Historical Society

Newsletter

September 2018

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Dennis Historical Society – copyright 2018 Internet: www.dennishistoricalsociety.org E-mail: info@dennishistoricalsociety.org
The Next DHS Board Meeting will be held on Tuesday, September 11th, 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

Ansel Preston Howes, "Captain Preston"

Each town on the Cape has characteristics which makes it distinct. Dennis Village is special to me, because my cottage is built on property once owned by my great grandfather, Ansel Preston Howes (1843-1939), better known as Captain Preston. This land was his fruit orchard, and a nearby shed was used as the coop for his wife's chickens. Ansel was born and raised across the street in the Big House, an elegant gray building set on a knoll. It had a fireplace in every room, their only source of heat in the winter, a beehive cellar with only a dirt floor, and no indoor plumbing, until 1939.

Old Cape Codders called the intersection of Corporation Road, Elm Street and Whig Street, *Pirates' Junction* in memory of Ansel's shenanigans, and he was delighted. He gave my father *Pyle's Book of Pirates*, and inscribed on the inside, "From one pirate to another. Love, Grandpa."

Captain Preston was the oldest of nine children. He was six feet, two inches tall, which was unusual then, and he had blonde hair. His lack of formal education didn't stop him from exaggerating his adventures. He wasn't just a sailor on clipper ships, he was a captain. He supposedly sailed around Cape Horn to China seven times starting at the age of nine. Since the clipper ship era was from 1843-1869, it makes these stories highly unlikely. Ansel could tell tales taller and longer than most men in Dennis.

Ansel was called Captain Preston, although he was never officially in charge of a ship; it was more a term of endearment by the town's people, and the importance they placed on men going to sea. When I told my New York City friends my great grandfather was a clipper ship captain, they were impressed. I was too.

Ansel was old enough to fight in the Civil War (1861-1865), but he didn't. One day he was chopping down a tree on his property, and a lady who lived across the street approached him, and asked why he wasn't fighting in the war. He looked at her and said, "You can't chop down a tree and fight in the war at the same time." She left in a huff.

An elderly neighbor, who remembered Ansel's family, told me about Charlie, Captain Preston's brother. Charlie, perhaps wounded in the war, had no legs and sold pencils in Onset, the town where my father and his two sisters lived.

Legend has it Ansel walked across the country because he missed his boat in Boston. He was on his way to prospect for gold and was seen in San Francisco in a Confederate uniform. No explanation was ever given. He returned empty handed.

Captain Preston worked hard after he came back from the sea. He had cranberry bogs, a fruit orchard, and a small boat for fishing and lobstering. Today lobster is considered a delicacy, but when my grandmother was

growing up on Cape Cod in the late 1800s, lobsters were so plentiful, only the poor fishing folk ate them. Her family buried their lobster shells in the back yard, rather than let their neighbors know what they were eating. In the 1960s, Brant, a jolly, elderly man in town, always had a good story about Captain Preston. He loved to tell me about when he worked for Ansel building houses, and how he would sing. His voice was so bad Ansel paid him to stop. Brant laughed, saying it was the only time he was ever paid for his singing.

Brant also told me about someone stealing pears from Ansel's orchard. As a fisherman, Ansel had nets and fish hooks, so one night, he attached the hooks to the netting and put it on the lower part of the trees. When the thief went to steal the pears, he had a very unpleasant surprise. There were no more problems with Ansel's pears being taken.

Ansel also owned cranberry bogs across the street from a family who lived in Washington, D.C. in the winter; they invited him there to visit. The glass paper weight with a picture of the White House – a souvenir he brought back – is on the top of the book case in my cottage.

Ansel and his family had a respectable life. They worked hard, owned their own house, a large parcel of land, cranberry bogs, and a horse and buggy. Ansel loved to share all he had with his grandchildren. In the winter he took them sliding on a nearby hill, and in the summer, fishing in Cape Cod Bay. In memory of these times, my aunt gave my father the book, *Blue-Water Men and Other Cape Codders*. Inside she inscribed, "In memory of Grandpa." Ansel meant a great deal to them. That love of Dennis, *Pirates' Junction*, and the sea was instilled in me.

Each Cape town has its own legends, stories and history: Dennis Village has Captain Preston, and Ansel would be pleased his hard work paid off.

Article by Martha Reeves Lang, Ph.D.

Yesterday Is Already History

A Nostalgic Look Back to the 1950s

When I lived on Quivet Neck in East Dennis in the fifties, everyone was named Sears. As a result, no one was ever called "Mr. or Mrs. Sears". There was David Henry, Joe Henry, Joe Homer, Howard Bailey, Howard Everett, and everyone's last name was Sears. The wives were Esther Howard, Esther Dean etc. and their last names were Sears.

During the summer months, once a month on the full moon, we used to go sea clamming when the moon was full and the tide was at its lowest. Of course vehicles were not driven onto the flats. I have no idea how the writer in the *Cape Cod Times* thought that vehicles had been driven onto the flats for "generations". We rode our bicycles down the house-less road past the cemetery to the beach. Then, we walked out to the water's edge with our pails. We dug the clams with our hands, or sometimes we went into Brewster Creek up to our necks, felt the clams under our feet, dived down and picked up the clams.

One day, my friend Jeannette (Jeannette Sears, now Jeannette Wood), and I decided to take my rowboat and row to Brewster Creek instead of taking the road. At that time, there were no large boats in the harbor. There were only small boats with outboard motors. At low tide, the water was so low between the jetties that even a rowboat would become stuck on the sandbar there. I am enclosing a poem I wrote in 1954, when I was at Yarmouth High School, telling of Jeannette's and my sea clamming adventure.

I think our adventure occurred in 1951.

Article by Judy Pierce Livingston

SEA CLAMMING

An original poem in iambic meter.

One day, Jeannette and I went out
A-sea clamming to go,
Instead of walking on the flats
We took a boat to row.

1

Jeannette and I rowed bravely on,
While in our little craft,
But when we reached the place to clam,
The boys sat down and laughed.

3

"Now look at all the clams we've dug,
While you've been rowing here,
We've walked and dug, and filled our pails,
And thought you'd ne're appear."

5

Jeanette grew cold, and stopped to rest,
But I could not stop then,
I had to break my brother's score
"Cause girls are greater than men!"

7

The boys had left awhile ago,
And Mr. Sun was low,
When two young girls packed up their clams,
And then began to row.

9

Soon night came down upon us there,
As we kept rowing still,
The moon came up, all cold and white
And through us went a chill.

11

At last the jetties were in view,
A welcome sight at that,
Between the two we steered our boat,
But it got stuck on a flat.

13

We sat and thought, just for a sec,
When what should we behold
But Rod and Claude, mothers and Paul
Too worried for to scold.

15

At last we came to 'home sweet home,'
A welcome sight to me,
I vowed that next time land would be
The way I'd go for clams of the sea!

17

To race us on our little spree
Came my dear brother Rod.
He rode his 'bike' and walked the flats
With an old friend named Claude.

2

"Where have you been, you silly girls,
A-glow with all your pow'rs
You told us you would win this race,
But we've been here for hours!"

4

Jeannette and I looked at our feet,
But not give up would we,
We dived into the creek, nearby,
Came up with clams of the sea.

6

I dived and dug and finally,
Jeannette the color blue,
I found I had enough sea clams
To show dear Rod who's who!

8

The sun was setting rapidly,
As o'er the sea we sped,
We sang and rowed, and rowed and talked,
The sky was turning red.

10

Though cold, and wet, and shivering,
Our spirits still were high,
For after all we had some clams
For Mom to make a pie.

12

It seems that while we were away,
The water went to sea,
The tide was out, the boat was stuck,
A sorry sight were we!

14

The boys were good and helped us in,
Then tied the boat secure.
Our mothers, so upset, of course,
Said how foolish we were.

16

THE END



(Sesuit Harbor, circa 1950, Barb Durst Collection, DHS Digital Archives)

Editor's Note:

Thank you to both Martha and Judy for providing the personal and nostalgic looks back into Cape Cod history for the September Newsletter! There is such a wealth of information contained in the notes, diaries and especially in the memory banks of our readers that I encourage all of you to share it with the membership. Such sharing preserves the present and brings the past back to life! Please email me at: info@dennishistoricalsociety.org

'This Unknown House'

This month's "Unknown House" picture is from Album 3 of the "Florrie Hall Collection Images" in the DHS Digital Archives, circa 1905. There is what appears to be a young girl in the doorway, and 3 panes of glass are missing in the second floor window...lived in, or being explored?

If anyone can identify it, or provide any information, please email Dave Talbott at info@dennishistoricalsociety.org

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AUTUMN AT THE MANSE

Saturday, September 22, from 1-4pm

Interface with the 18th century for a special one-day-only event at the 1736 home of the minister for whom the Town of Dennis is named.

Josiah Dennis Manse, 61 Whig Street in Dennis
FREE ADMISSION (donations gladly accepted)

*Not September, but
definitely not too early
to start thinking about
attending the DHS
Annual
Meeting/Luncheon on
October 20th,
11:30 am at the
Riverway Lobster
House. When the
mailing arrives, sign
up; don't miss it!*

CAPE COD SCHOOL DAYS

Join local librarian Anne Speyer for a revealing and informative look at local education in years gone by



Saturday, September 29, 2pm

Dennis Memorial Library
1020 Old Bass River Road, Dennis Village

A \$5.00 donation is recommended

DHS Upcoming Events for September