

### THE HANDS OF TIME

Kirkwood Brown took us through a delightful review of the development of clocks and timepieces. His collection of antique clocks, part of which he displayed, covers the history of timekeeping from sand glass to alarm clocks, and contains some lovely examples of the works of famous and lesser known clock makers. For those of you who do not know, Mr. Brown was one of the founders of the Dennis Historical Society, and is at present a valuable member of our Board. He is a former Selectman, a genial gentleman, and he sure knows a lot about clocks! Thanks, Kirk, for a great program which was enjoyed by a large group of members and guests.

### IT'S TIME FOR THE HERRING TO RUN

If you've lived here for any length of time, you know that they are not really herring. But the spectacular migration of the alewife back to its native pond to spawn draws hundreds to the shores of brooks and streams of Cape Cod to watch The Run. The Cape Cod Museum of Natural History has produced an artistically beautiful movie called "The Run" and it will be shown for D.H.S. members at the West Dennis Community Building at 7:30 P.M. on Wednesday, April 23. We will hear from George MacDonald, Natural Resources Officer of Dennis about efforts to restore runs in the town, and will have a brief talk about the economic importance of the alewife, or herring, in our town's history. Plan to be with us.

### SPRING ON CAPE COD

"Oh, to be in England, now that April's there..."

Had these words been penned before April, 1642, they most certainly would have echoed the words of the 25 or so families in the new English plantation at Mattachessett, now the towns of Yarmouth and Dennis. Unlike the winter of 79-80, the winter of 1641-1642 had been most severe. Local Indians could not remember such harsh winter weather in their lifetime, nor did they recall a legendary one from the tales of their ancestors. Wind, snow and ice had combined to do their best to discourage the settlers, dwelling in temporary homes, many spending their first year in the wilderness. It is a tribute to their fortitude that the little settlement survived. How anxiously they must have looked forward to spring, as they remembered it at home in England, where in April the chaffinch would be singing on the orchard bough and elms would already be in bud. I have never been in England in April, but I have seen many Aprils on Cape Cod and I have come to wonder why we anticipate that because the calendar says it's spring, the weather will be warm? The Indians knew better and used the faithful oak tree as a sign by which the progress of Spring could be measured. Our native scrub oaks are very modest tress. They are loathe to expose their bare branches to view. All through the storms of January and March, they cling tenaciously to their bronze leaves and it is left for the winds of March to strip them naked. Sometimes the wind has to work well into April to clean these stubborn old leaves from the oak. Then the rain must fall to encourage the delicate blush of the new pink leaf buds. Now we can anticipate the arrival of spring. The new leaf buds must be watched with care, for only when the new oak leaves are as big as a mouse's ear, would any Cape Cod Indian plant his corn and beans. The settlers soon learned to follow this rule and if you contemplate a garden on Cape Cod, you should do the same.

I cannot resist the chance to get into the on-going argument in our local Sunday paper about whether or not the Cape has any Spring. Of course we do. We are blessed with four delightful seasons. First the long, breeze cooled summer, unsurpassed in any other place. Then, beautiful blue fall days, with the leaves in the hollows as brilliant as any in the north country. When winter finally comes, it is harsh enough to force us to appreciate our fireside, but generally milder than the mainland. And last, and perhaps least, but by far most welcome-- one warm day in May.

### EZRA BAKER FIELD TRIPS

Again this year, D.H.S. members will work with the Jericho and Manse Committees to provide educational field trips to the two historic centers for the children of the third and fourth grade of the Ezra H. Baker School. This is a large undertaking covering six days in late May and early June, running simultaneously at both houses, and requires about ten individuals at each house on each day. In addition, members are already at work freshening the costumes and preparing the nametags for each child, which serve to orient them to the period of history of our town they will learn about. Sending the children back in time, we try to help them imagine how it would be like to actually live in these old houses in the time in which they were built. All in all, it is a good time for both students and helpers, so if you would like to be a part of this innovative way of teaching history to our school children, please call Paula Bacon or Nancy Reid, 398-8842. Evenings are the best time to call. We will welcome your help.

### HISTORIC BUS TOURS

Bacon Tours continues to offer Historic Bus Tours to Seaports, and because so many of our members have enjoyed these, we list the schedule of those upcoming. Salem on April 9, covering the architecture of this beautiful town. Mystic Seaport May 1 with brunch and tea included--\$24. Newport on May 4, all those beautiful mansions--\$15. and in June, trips to view the tall ships. You can request a brochure or be placed on the Bacon Tour mailing list for further information by contacting Paula Bacon, 394-5739 or by mail at High Bank Road, South Dennis, MA 02660.

\*\*\*\*\* CALENDAR \*\*\*\*\*

April 2--Final Seminar of Dennis History, "From Sail to Rail". Speakers include Jim Coogan and Esther Howes, 2:30-4 PM, Wixon School.  
April 16--Executive board meeting, Home of Pres. Hart, 7:30 PM  
April 23--"The Run", a movie on the annual migration of the alewife, with speakers George MacDonald and Wesley Eaton, 7:30 PM, West Dennis Community Bldg.  
April 28, 29 & 30--Historic Preservation Workshop. Cape Cod National Seashore Park, South Wellfleet. For information, call 349-3785.  
May--National Historic Preservation Month.  
May 17--Bike Tour of Dennisport. Meet at Sea St. Beach Parking Lot at 1 PM.  
May 18--"Focus on South Dennis" (see below) 3-5 PM, Liberty Hall, S.Dennis.  
Coming in June--Celebration of the 187th Birthday of the Town of Dennis.

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THE HISTORY OF OUR TOWN RETOLD

A series of four seminars on the history of the town of Dennis have been conducted at the Wixon School and were so well attended that we had to move from the library to the auditorium. If there is enough interest, this series will be repeated, perhaps in the evening and possibly over the summer. Any comments? We aim to please. Let us know of your interest and preference by mail, Box 607, South Dennis 02660, or by phone to any board member or to President Hart, 398-9359, evenings.

IN MAY WE FOCUS ON PRESERVATION

Liberty Hall will be the location and South Dennis will be the star of the show on Sunday afternoon, May 18, from 3-5 PM. The Dennis Historic Commission is preparing to nominate that village to the National Register of Historic Places, and a great deal of work is being done to prepare for this nomination. In the process of dating these houses, a lot of information about the town's history has been uncovered, and we would like to share some of it with you. We will also hear a talk by Edmund Rhodes Nickerson, who has compiled a history of Liberty Hall which he hopes to publish soon, which incorporates a good deal of South Dennis history. We will see a movie on Cape Cod history filmed locally, which we will show to arouse interest in preparing audiovisual presentations about Dennis. A full afternoon, and we hope you will be there.

THE STREETS OF OUR TOWN

A pleasant street named Salt Works Lane runs from Cold Storage Road to Sea Street in East Dennis. At the Sesuit Harbor end is a commemorative boulder placed by the Bicentennial Commission. It reads: "In 1776, on this site on Quivet Neck Sleepy John Sears (1744-1817) built the first salt works using solar evaporation of sea water." Lest you think that this was the start of the great salt industry or the only salt works in Dennis, let me tell you something about this economically important early industry. Salt was vital to the colonists--not just as a table condiment, but because the only known way to preserve food was by drying and salting it. The first written record that I have found that refers to salt making is in the ancient town meeting records of Yarmouth, 23 February, 1690-91, which state that liberty was granted to Joseph Hall, Sr. to use town land at sesuet neck to make salt, "for so long a time as it may prove for the benefit of said town." In the early days salt was produced by boiling sea water, and fuel for this process destroyed many acres of forest. 135 gallons must be reduced to produce one gallon of salt. But what about Sleepy John? Did he earn his nickname because he was a dreamer, or because he objected to cutting and hauling so much wood? His invention was dubbed Sears Folly, and the first year, plagued by leaky vats, he produced only 8 bushels of salt. Still he experimented, and in 1778 thirty bushels were scraped from the bottom of his 100 foot long, 10 foot wide vat. Others suggested improvements, including ways to cover the works in damp weather and the use of a windmill to pump the water from the sea. In 1799 Sears received a patent for his invention and by 1830, when the industry was at its height, well over half a million bushels were being produced on the Cape. Every bit of waterfront, creek shores and river banks not used for other waterfront industries were covered with strings of salt works. The industry began to decline as salt mines were developed and import duty lowered, but as late as 1884, a few salt works still were active. So Sleepy John's idea, begun at Quivet, blossomed into an industry which brought temporary economic success to much of the Cape. It is well to commemorate his invention in the name Salt Works Lane, one of the Streets of Our Town.

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