

AH, TO BE IN DENNIS, NOW THAT APRIL'S THERE

Last month's Newsletter was held up in the hope of including news about April activities, as we always try to be a month ahead. But things just didn't jell and you received your newsletter without any April dates. Now, Presto!, everything has fallen into place and here's your April letter early so you can make plans to be part of the April fun. Please note all of the dates and fill in your calendar. Those of you who live out of town may be wishing that you could be spending "April in Dennis."

AN OLD-FASHIONED GARDEN

Of late, among other interesting projects, I have been copying and indexing the diary of Harriet Newell Sears of East Dennis, which she kept from 1850 to 1870. Mrs. Sears wrote a short entry nearly every day, about her children, her neighbors, her church. Interspersed among the daily happenings she mentions planting, cultivating and harvesting her garden. Mrs. Sears could in no way be called a farmer. Nor is her garden extensive. But it is very clear that for her family in the mid-1800's, the family garden was an important part of the family's economy. Potatoes, turnips, pole beans and herbs - carefully planted and cultivated, and the harvest stored or eaten, all carefully recorded from year to year. Harriet knew the rules for choosing a propitious planting date by the moon. She knew which plants grew well in close proximity to what other plants. Without benefit of lime, commercial fertilizer or sprays, she coaxed the poor soil of Cape Cod to produce nourishing food for her growing family. We will hear more about the family garden plots of the nineteenth century at our April meeting on April 5 at West Dennis Community Building at 7:30, when Jean Gillis of the Heritage Plantation will speak on Herbs and Plants of the 19th Century Garden. Ms. Gillis delights in answering questions about what was grown, and why each herb and vegetable was included in the family plot. Please come and bring a friend.

FIRST BICYCLE TOUR OF 1983

Isabelle and Bill Flynn have undertaken to reorganize the Bicycle Tour that had been planned for Festival Days last year but was rained out. I wonder if April is the time to reschedule it? Anyway, it is planned for April 16, meeting at 1 P.M. at Carleton Hall, Dennis. The tour will include the Hall, Church, and Burying ground, which is known to experts to contain some of the most interesting and artistic grave-stones on Cape Cod. Bikers will then ride to the Playhouse complex, then down Hope Lane and Whig Street to the Manse and Old West School House, visiting other historic sites along the way. Riders of all ages will enjoy this tour, and those who are not bikers are welcome to follow in their cars. And by the way, the rain date is April 18th, just in case!

Our historic Bike Tours gained national recognition when the American Association for State and Local History published news of them in their monthly magazine, as a prototype of an innovative way to attract interest in local history. Our tours were described in an article published in History News in March of 1980. A booklet of maps covering all of the tours we have had can be purchased for \$1. Call Cynthia Hotalling, 385-3378, or ask at a D.H.S. meeting.

"DENNIS" ROAD SHOW KEEPS ROLLING ALONG

We continue to be indebted to Joshua Crowell and Wilson Scofield for putting on our slide and sound show so cheerfully and skillfully wherever and whenever asked. The next scheduled public showing will be on April 11 at 8 P.M. at the Dennis Senior Citizen's Center. This is part of a monthly series of special evening programs for the community. Movies about Nova Scotia will also be shown. The team of Josh and Bill will also present showings for several groups around the Cape in the next few weeks. Each showing represents several hours of their time, which benefits the D.H.S. in good public relations, and even more importantly, acquaints new people with our town's interesting past.

BAKER TOWN

To answer the trivia question of last month, the monument to the memory of Francis Baker is on the triangle of land near Jericho house, where Center Street meets Main Street. Since about 1700 until 1900, this area of town was occupied primarily by descendants of Francis Baker, and presented a much different scene than the quiet residential neighborhood it has become. Once a windmill stood at the top of the hill overlooking the Cove, at the end of Pinefield Lane. Peter Baker kept a tavern on the Main Street near this spot, and the Bakers also had a ship building yard on Grand Cove itself. A chandlery which sold supplies to the fishing fleet stood near the yard. Jericho House, built in 1801, was a Baker house, as were nearly all of the houses near the triangle, and down Old Main Street towards West Dennis, as far as Route 28. Bakertown persisted as a neighborhood, right up to recent times. Sylvanus Evans wrote a leaflet in the early 1900's which gives the owner of almost every house on that street at that time as being connected with the Baker family. Three Baker families that I know of still live in Baker Town. Mrs. Parmalee Fitch is a descendant of that family and the Fitches live in a house which has never been out of the Baker family. The little Baker Park was given to the town by Ezra Henry Baker, in the same deed which gave the land upon which the Ezra H. Baker School was built, in 1930.

CALENDAR

- April 5 7:30 P.M. West Dennis Community Building - 'Herbs and Plants of an Old-Fashioned Garden' Speaker Jean Gillis of Heritage Plantation
April 11 8 P.M. Senior Citizen's Center 'Dennis' and movies of Nova Scotia
April 16 1 P.M. Bike Tour, meet at Carleton Hall. Automobiles also welcome.
May 21 Or May 28 TO BE ANNOUNCED Walk on Indian Lands conservation area
June 18-19 Dennis 190th Birthday celebration and the 250th anniversary of Massachusetts Grand Lodge of Masons.
June 18 1-3:30 P.M. Sesuit Harbor, Boat trip on Cape Cod Bay - champagne, cake and entertainment

ALSO OF INTEREST TO D.H.S. MEMBERS

- April 18-22 Williamsburg Bus Tour
April 25 Daffodil Day on Nantucket
April 27 Brewster Historical Society will sponsor a trip to New Bedford
For further information call Paula Bacon, 394-5739

WOMEN WHO WENT TO SEA: THE CHINESE WOMAN, CONTINUED

After an uneventful passage home from Hong Kong, Sarah Baker, her children and their Chinese Amah arrived safely back home in South Dennis. Mrs. Baker was welcomed by a loving family and neighbors anxious to see the new baby and to hear of her adventures abroad. But it was very different for the Chinese woman. There could be no greater contrast than that between her native city and this rural village. As the baby grew and needed her attention less and less, she began to pine for home. Strange food, the harsh climate and her loneliness took their toll, and soon it became apparent that she was truly ill. Capt. Baker promised to have her taken back to her native city as soon as he could arrange it, but before the time had arrived, the gentle woman died. She was sorrowfully buried in the South Dennis cemetery, next to the Baker's family lot. Years later, when the son performed the filial duty of erecting monuments as memorials for his deceased parents, he remembered his childhood nurse. But unfortunately, no one still lived who remembered her name, for she had always been called simply "Amah". So Mr. Baker erected a stone without a name, to honor the memory of his Chinese friend, the helper of his mother, who came to South Dennis from far away Hong Kong. Today the adjacent graves of the two women who went to sea with Capt. Alpheus Baker can be seen, as marked by the son they both loved. "Sarah B. Baker, died Nov. 28, 1925 ages 87 yrs., 11 months" and "Chinese Woman, Brought from Hong Cong (sic) by Capt. Alpheus Baker, Jr. ages 31 years, 5 April, 1872."

THE TOOLS THAT BUILT AMERICA

That's the title of a very interesting book which I added to my library a couple of years ago. I bought it partly in the hope that I could learn something about the extensive collection of old woodworking tools which are displayed at the Jericho Barn Museum. The book is interesting but not detailed enough to identify the differences between the number of planing tools which are displayed. Sometime later, I gave a friend of ours, Mr. Joseph Mitnik, a copy of the Historic Center brochures. Joe immediately expressed an interest in seeing our tool collection. So, one very cold day in February, I arranged with Parm Fitch to let Joe and his friend Tom Richards into the barn, where they spent several hours examining the tools. They found that many were marked with the maker's name and date, others with the owner's initials. Subsequently another call came from Mr. Mitnik, who lives, by the way, "over the bridge" in Rehoboth. Again, Parm opened the barn and Joe and Tom spent a rainy day labelling our display and sharing some of the interesting things they had learned about our collection. When the Barn opens this spring, I hope you will take the time to see this accurately and artistically arranged display of tools used right here in Dennis by shipwrights, housewrights and coopers - tools that, in fact, did help to build our part of America. The Jericho Committee thanks Mr. Mitnik and Mr. Richards for helping us to interpret this bit of local history.

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

Postal Permit No. 2 South Dennis Mass. 02660
