



### LET'S SPEND AN AFTERNOON TOGETHER

For the benefit of those who do not like going out in the evening, the Board has planned an afternoon program this month. Our meeting will be held at the Jacob Sears Memorial Building, better known as the East Dennis Library. Jim Coogan will be our speaker, presenting a slide show and talk about "Shipwrecks of Cape Cod" on Sunday, April 9th. Refreshments will be served and our latest historical acquisition will be on display. Please be there.

### A PROJECT TO HONOR OUR FOUNDERS

As part of our tribute to the founders of Old Yarmouth, the Dennis Historical Commission is planning to inventory and restore some of the gravestones in our old burying grounds. There is a need for volunteers who will copy and describe the stones, using a form approved by the members of the Commission. If you are interested in helping, will you drop a postal card or note to Nancy Reid, Box 547, South Dennis 02660, with your name, address, and phone number? Very soon we will have a meeting to orient volunteers and assign areas to be covered. Then you can work at your own pace to complete your area. It is interesting to read these old tributes to those who lived here before us, and seems a fitting way to honor our founder's memory.

### THE JACOB SEARS MEMORIAL BUILDING

The Jacob Sears Memorial Building stands out in sharp contrast to the smaller, cozy, libraries in our other villages. It was the gift to the residents of East Dennis from a native son, an eighth generation descendant of Richard Sears. Jacob was born on Sea Street, East Dennis in 1823, the son of Daniel and Lucy (Eldridge) Sears. He was educated in the common school, a one room affair which stood very near to the present library, but on School Street. He was named for his grandfather, who owned one of the early packet schooners between East Dennis and Boston, but I cannot tell you if Jacob ever went to sea. Perhaps he did, but he never became a Master Mariner. Instead, he devoted his life to business, shipping fish and cranberries from East Dennis to all ports along the East Coast. He perfected a method of packing cranberries which meant that they would arrive in perfect condition, even after long voyages. Through his business expertise he was able to amass a comfortable living. He married Olive, one of the daughters of Stillman Kelley, also a man of business in East Dennis. Unfortunately for them, they were not blessed with children, but they enjoyed a very sociable life, and had the respect of their neighbors. When Jacob died, in 1871, at the early age of 48, he left a will which, after the payment of bequests to his brother's family and his sister, gave the use and improvement of all his assets to his wife Olive for as long as she remained his widow. If she died or remarried, all that remained of his sizeable estate was given to the inhabitants of East Dennis, 1/3 of it to establish a building for educational purposes, and 2/3 to be invested to support that building. It was to be built on Quivet Neck and controlled by the inhabitants thereof, but was intended for the benefit of all the residents of East Dennis and vicinity. Mrs. Sears lived in the old homestead until 1894, when the legacy became available to Quivet. Promptly, the Quivet neighborhood moved to carry out Jacob Sears' wishes. Kendall and Stevens, architects, of Boston were hired to draw plans for a building that would do honor to the memory of this generous man. J. M. Kelleway, contractor, from Newton Center was hired to build it. A contemporary newspaper account describes the building -of "modern architecture"- as being 69' by 34' with full basement. The "audience room" is 37½' by 33½' with a 13' stage, and ante rooms on each side. A corridor and vestibule are 21' by 9½'. A reading room of 14' by 13' has an open fireplace, (for which Olive Sears brother has provided "a very pretty fireplace set", and the library rooms are 22½' by 13½' and 11' by 10'. There is also a balcony, 14' by 12'. The building was completed in 1896 and dedicated in grand style. There were vocal solos, readings, and a 12 piece orchestra, printed programs, and an address by the Hon. Samuel Powers, Esq., of Newton. His remarks included examples of self-made men who taught themselves through reading. I think Jacob Sears would have liked that. Through the years, the "Audience Room" has been the scene of a variety of entertainments and village gatherings, but due to the fine collection of books which have accumulated, most of the Jacob Sears Memorial Building is now needed to house the library. We are indebted to the trustees of the Jacob Sears Memorial Building, Mrs. Cynthia Hotaling, Librarian, and Jacob Sears for the opportunity to use this interesting hall for our April meeting.

### NEW MEMBERS SOUGHT

As part of our spring campaign to enroll new members, the Board has requested permission from the committees of the two historic centers to hold a Sunday afternoon Open House in each center. The dates we have requested, subject to the committee's approval, are listed in this month's calendar. We are counting on you, our loyal present members, to invite a friend or neighbor you think might enjoy visiting these fine house museums and sharing light refreshments. We will have exhibits which show some of the activities which D.H.S. sponsors, as well as a special exhibit from our collections at Jericho and the Manse. Will you do your part and attend with one or more friends? Mark the dates on your calendar.

## CALENDAR

April 9 3:00 P.M. Program: Ship Wrecks of Cape Cod by Jim Coogan  
Refreshments No charge  
April 11 7:30 P.M. Board meets at Sarah's  
Looking ahead  
June 3 Lady Slipper Walk Indian Lands Conservation Area  
Tentative dates for D.H.S. Open House at Manse May 21 Jericho June 4 3-5 P.M.

### THE YANKEE GALE OF 1851

No one could blame Capt. James Wixon if he seemed a bit proud that his four sons were all mariners. Capt. Wixon had been master of the Schooner Hope and Susan for a number of years, involved in coastal trading and fishing. Most men are pleased when their sons follow them in their chosen line of work. Capt. James had reason to be especially proud of his eldest son, James Jr. Although still a young man he had been given command of the Sch. J. R. Thompson, a packet going from Boston to Richmond, VA on a regular schedule. Now, however, in the fall of 1851, he was serving as captain of the fishing schooner Franklin Dexter, off to the Maritimes with a large fleet of other Cape fishermen. He hoped to "wet all his salt"--that is, fill the hold with fish--and get home in time for the birth of his first child--perhaps the third Capt. James Wixon. Among the crew of nine were his three younger brothers. Yes, both parents and young wife were proud of their men, but mixed with that pride there was always a tinge of anxiety. The dangers of the seafaring life were very much on the minds of the people of Crocker's Neck, as Dennis Port was then called, as they met on the streets and conversed on these first bright days of October, 1851. For it was just 10 years ago that the terrible October Gale of 1841 had caught the fishing fleet on George's Bank. But October days are usually fair on the Cape and it was easy to imagine that such a thing would not happen again. One or two schooners returned early from the Straits of Belle Isle and brought no warning from afar. News travelled slowly in 1851 and the storm which would become known as the Yankee Gale had come and gone before the first inkling of the disaster reached Crocker's Neck. Even then it was hard to sort out truth from rumor. Accounts came by word of mouth that many vessels and lives had been lost, but no figures or names could be verified. One thing only was clear. Another tragedy of vast proportions had struck the Cape fishing fleet near Prince Edward Island. That was exactly where the Franklin Dexter was expected to be. Local people had played this agonizing waiting game before. It was possible, and longingly believed that all were safe, having made port or left the area before the storm arrived. It was also possible that all were lost. All those with loved ones in the fleet waited prayerfully. Capt. James Wixon decided to go and find out the truth for himself. He took the packet to Boston and the Steamer Admiral down east. When he reached his destination, his worst fears were confirmed. The Schooner Franklin Dexter was among the scores of wrecks, and none of her crew had survived. The bodies of 3 of his sons and one other crew member had washed ashore, and Capt. Wixon sorrowfully arranged for caskets to be made for them. In port was another Dennis mariner, Capt. Seth Hall Jr., whose schooner, the Seth Hall had escaped serious damage. He was taking on a load of potatoes for Dennis and agreed to transport the bodies to NobsCUSsett Harbor. Capt. Wixon made the sad journey home to do what he could to comfort the mother of his sons and the young widow of James Jr. whose babe had been born on the very day her husband was lost. Sadly, they waited together, to inter their dead among their ancestors. But they waited in vain. The Sch. Seth Hall never arrived at NobsCUSsett, her fate was never learned. This time, the bodies of the men whose lives the sea had taken remained in their watery grave. The sea will have it's way.

### SCHOOL PROGRAMS SCHEDULED

Field trips will be held between June 8 and June 16 this year. We can always use help and if you want to volunteer call Nancy, 398-8842, Lilla at 398-3367, or Mig Maher at 385-3910.

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