



### "BEST DAMNED CASKET IN DENNIS PORT"

'Leeza Crowell's Corner. Do you know where it is? Perhaps only a handful of old Dennis Porters can answer that question. It is the corner of Upper County Road and Depot Street. Captain Eleazer Kelley Crowell owned the entire area now occupied by the Church of Our Lady of Annunciation. His substantial house with barns and outbuildings faced Depot Street. The rest of the property was pasture except for a cooper shop on the south end of the Sea Street side where James Frizzell made barrels for the captain's cranberry crop.

Eleazer was born in 1836 in West Dennis, son of Freeman and Mehitabel (Paine) Crowell. He went to sea at age 12 in the fishing business, as did his brother Perry, to help support their widowed mother who was not well, and their two sisters. 'Leeza enjoyed going to sea and became proficient in all aspects of seamanship. At 18 he was a mate and at 21 became a captain, a position he held for 40 years retiring in 1882. Captain Crowell had the reputation of sailing in the coastal and foreign trade without an accident or loss, having never asked the insurance companies for a cent. After retirement he used his expertise to buy and sell vessels and cargos--sometimes sailing as part owner.

Ashore he was just as ambitious as he had been at sea. He had married Laura Ann Kelley, daughter of Bangs and Priscilla Kelley who lived across the street where Salt Works Village II is now. This entire area was known as the Kelley neighborhood and it's quite possible that Laura's dowry was the property where she and Eleazer built their house. Their only son died in 1870 at 15 months and Laura died in 1879. Eleazer then married Mary D. Chase of Harwich. He kept a fine pair of carriage horses, a pair of work horses, a fair-sized herd of cows and a bull. He was an extensive cranberry grower having 30 acres of his own under cultivation and managing several bogs for others. He gained fame experimenting with spray made from tobacco to combat the fire worm--a scourge of early cranberry farming. Deyo's History of Barnstable County also describes Captain Crowell as "a director in the Harwich Savings Bank, member of Mt. Horeb Lodge, a strong supporter of the Baptist society, the republican party, and of every good work in his town". Quite an accolade for a Dennis boy who went to sea at age 12. Needless to say he was a man of considerable means.

Two incidents in his retirement may have made him wonder why he ever left the sea. The first occurred out in his pasture. The captain was walking across the pasture, perhaps going to or from the cooper shop, and stopped to admire his fine herd. The bull took offense to his being there, came after him, and cornered him by the fence. 'Leeza grabbed the bull's horns and after a brief struggle the bull threw his head up and a horn caught 'Leeza in the eye. He was taken to Dr. Richard Ginn, he being the only doctor in Dennis Port. After that the captain always cocked his head to one side when he talked with anyone. Some of the less respectful called him "Old Cockeye"--but not within his hearing! The second incident took place at the North Harwich depot where 'Leeza made regular trips to pick up freight. He was sitting in his wagon alongside the tracks conversing with other friends who were also waiting for the train. When the train arrived with bells clanging, brakes squealing, and steam hissing the horse reared and took off in a mad dash along the right of way and the captain could do nothing but hang on for dear life. Suddenly, the horse swung across in front of the moving train. The horse made it, but not the wagon or the captain. When the dust had settled the wagon was in pieces, the captain was pretty well banged up but conscious and cussing, and the engine--was off the track! That meant another trip to Dr. Ginn's to have broken ribs repaired and for the remainder of his life he walked with a limp, but he was proud of his brush with death, saying, "Only man in a horse 'n' wagon to knock a damned train off it's track!"

These incidents, plus the death of his beloved Mary, made the captain mindful of his departure for the Other Shore and he decided to have his coffin made and ready for that event. The local undertaker was Charles Young, minister of the Reformed Church of the Latter Day Saints in Dennis Port. He made the caskets from local cedar and his wife, "Mary Charles", a dressmaker, made the linings. She paid local boys one cent a bag for dry, clean pine needles to use for stuffing. All this for \$6.00! But Captain Eleazer decided he wanted something a little nicer, as befitted his station in life, so he hired Alonzo Capron to make one, hand rubbed, with hinges special ordered from Boston. For quite a few years it was stored up in the hay loft of his barn and on occasion he would take visitors up to the loft, uncover his casket and climb in so they could see what he'd look like when he was laid out. He'd say, "Casket cost me \$25.00. Best damned casket in Dennis Port. Yes sirree. Comfortable as hell." However, it was not until his 82nd year that Captain 'Leeza felt called upon to ask someone to bring his casket out of the loft and dust it off as he was "getting ready to make sail".

### IT'S EXCITING TO BE A TEACHER

The Ezra Baker third grade field trip to Josiah Dennis Manse this year will be on May 15, 16, 18, 20, 22, 23, and 24. A good number of enthusiastic volunteers have already signed up--in fact, most said to count them in for this year when they finished last year's program!--but, there are still some vacancies that must be filled. Some of our long time volunteers reluctantly retired after 20 years for health reasons. The program takes the students back to being boys and girls in the 1700's. They assume identities from that time, don costumes, and learn what life was like without home computers, television, and 25 minute hot showers. These classes will also visit Jericho on June 7 to learn about life in the 1800's. There will be a training session and you will have an instruction guide to go over at home. It's easy to do and it's fun to do. Your reward is a slice of freshly baked bread with butter the students make and the nice warm feeling that comes from doing something useful. Call Nancy Howes at 385-3528. She'll appreciate your help--even if it's only one day.

## CALENDAR

Apr. 12 7:30 P.M. DHS Board meets at the Manse.  
Apr. 15 Did you pay your taxes?  
Apr. 23 2:00 P.M. "Seals of Cape Cod", a slide presentation by Robert Prescott,

### THE SEALS OF CAPE COD

This winter, and especially the first part of March, our Dennis beaches played host to numerous seals. The mild winter we all enjoyed was also appreciated by the seals as they hauled up on both north and south side beaches to relax and catch a few rays. They especially like to stretch out on the jetties. We watched one at Corporation Beach on a delightfully warm afternoon as it basked in the sun, stretched, groomed, and turned over to toast the other side.

We will have the opportunity to hear about these interesting mammals at the Jacob Sears Memorial Library in East Dennis on April 23, at 2:00 P.M. Robert Prescott, Director of the Audubon Society's Wellfleet Wildlife Sanctuary will present an illustrated talk on the harbor and gray seals in the Cape Cod area. Join us for a pleasant, informative afternoon. Our refreshment committee will have all kinds of goodies for you to sample. Come and bring a friend.

### GREAT NEWS!

The first sections of the Jericho post and rail fence will be installed. The Jericho Board has met several times with town officials and because of the fence many safety problems are being addressed. Jericho sits at an intersection on a curve on a hill, and driving visibility has been limited, at best. Two trees will be taken down, Jericho's sign will be moved back, some grading will be done and long-standing problems will be taken care of. At present two sections have been installed on either side of the front opening. Kitty McNamara of the Jericho Board would like to especially thank DPW Chief Dennis Hanson, Police Chief John Symington, and Town Engineer Joe Rodricks for their assistance. Kitty will meet with a representative of the Cape Cod Regional Technical High School this week to finish details on installing the picket fence around the memorial garden. This month's donations are:

Richard D. Ellis in memory of his parents Agnes Adele and Wilfred (Bill) Atkins Ellis  
Gertrude Lailey in loving memory of Harold Ferguson Lailey and Margaret Hollis Adams  
Shirley Loud Putnam in memory of Hermon S. J. and Lucile H. R. Loud  
Frances Brown in loving memory of Kirkwood B. Brown

### SUPERIOR CLEANING CO.

The Josiah Dennis Manse and everything in it has been washed, scoured, cleaned, dusted, vacuumed, and polished like never before. The chimney restoration done during the winter included sand blasting some type of barn red plastic covering that had been painted over all five fireplaces. Here's word of advise to you all. It you ever have sandblasting done inside a building take everything that will move to another location! We put all the artifacts into rooms removed from the fireplaces and covered them with cotton sheets and then plastic drop cloths. The furniture was grouped away from the fireplaces and similarly covered. The workmen stapled plastic sheeting over the fireplaces and did the sand blasting behind that covering. Still--everything was covered with red dust! A hardy group from the Manse Committee has worked diligently to get the house ready for April 6. DHS will host a meeting of the Cape and Islands Historical Association and I'll give a slide presentation on the restoration work. The wonderful people who worked so hard are: Mig Maher, Nancy Howes, Maureen Joyce, Fred Ebel, Lu Crowell--who does windows!, Dick Howes, Phyllis Horton, and an extra special thanks to Beverly Thacher from Harwich Historical Society who came to help because I mentioned what a big job we had to do! Thanks guys!!

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

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