

DENNIS HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

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Co-Edited by Phyllis Robbins Horton and Nancy Thacher Reid



FROM THE MEMBERSHIP CHAIRMAN

New members since November: Elizabeth A. Baillargeon; Christine R. Chirokas; Jean H. Goheen; Dr and Mrs. Terry Hadley; Jackson T. Kitson; Mr. and Mrs. Robert P. Mahoney; Mr. and Mrs. Denmark K. McNear; Mr. and Mrs. Donald C. Packard; Jan Rollins Family; Charles W. Sherwood and Dennis Hanley. If you know any of these fine folks, call and invite them to come with you to our program meeting on April 19th.

LIBRARIES FOR DENNIS

The subject of town libraries will be among the debates at the 1998 town meeting. The Library Board is sponsoring measures to set up a central library in rented space, hire additional personnel and provide substantial funding for the existing private libraries. Until 1995, Dennis had never had a town-wide library system. The town's readers were served by our four private village libraries with a small amount of support voted upon annually at Town Meeting. This is not the first time that the matter of a town-wide system has been debated, however. The legislation which allowed towns to appropriate money for free public libraries was passed in 1851, with additions and changes in 1888 and 1890. Town Meeting of 1893 considered establishing a library Board of Trustees to oversee a town supported system but the idea was rejected. So it has been left to local associations to provide this service.

The Library Associations began appearing in Dennis in the mid-1800's, often in connection with a women's club. By the 1870's the associations were busy raising money for books. In 1876, the South Dennis Literary Association sponsored a performance of the five-act drama entitled "Ten Nights in a Barroom", (admission 25 cents), presented for two nights at Liberty Hall. That same year the East Dennis Association boasted that it had 531 volumes plus magazines available for circulation. For many years the books were kept in a private home or in the social halls of each village, Carleton Hall, Liberty Hall, Worden Hall--all had a corner with bookcases at one time.

Each of our village libraries has an interesting history and personality of its own, each has had an important part in village life. Mother allowed us to walk to the library in South Dennis on a Friday afternoon (the only time it was opened in those days,) long before we were allowed to go anywhere else without her. The librarians, always women it seems, were our neighbors and they could be counted on to see that we behaved. I remember Mrs. Mabel Sears was in charge when I was little. She called herself "Mabel B. Bessie B. Bumblebee Sears" and presided over the tiny place with a sense of humor and informality. She was born on February 29th, and told us she only had a birthday every four years. Poor Mrs. Sears! I clearly remember when we celebrated her "sixteenth" birthday with a party. Ethel Hall succeeded Mrs. Sears, and that lady knew more about books than anyone in the world. The tiny library building was left to the Library Association of South Dennis by Captain Jonathan Matthews in 1926.

Jacob Sears Memorial Hall in East Dennis was built in 1895 with money bequeathed to the village for library and cultural purposes by Jacob Sears. Another Mrs. Sears was for many years the librarian there. She was the daughter-in-law of the South Dennis Mrs. Sears and wife of Dean Sears and was known in the old Cape Cod way as Esther Dean. Now, her ship was run a little bit tighter than was Mabel Bessie's! Esther Dean did not care to have overdue books! Her manner could be as imposing as the building. But she was beloved and respected by all in her many years at the library desk.

The West Dennis Free Library Association was formed in 1920. The library was housed next to the Community Church, in the same building with Solomon Davis's cobbler shop. While the present building was constructed in 1923, the books were moved to Baxter's Emporium just across from School Street. Miss Ina Crowell was the first librarian followed by Miss Bessie Emma Howes. Miss Bessie was the village historian and the kids got a dose of history with every book they borrowed. She lived to be nearly 100 years old, and was still telling stories of the old days when the shoe factory whistle blew each morning, and Gage and Rogers baked that glorious bread.

In 1923, the town appropriated \$500. towards the cost of building the Dennis Memorial Library which was dedicated to "our boys who served in the World War." Still the control and management of that library was left in the hands of the Association. And let us not forget the Chase Memorial Library just across the border into Harwich, which Dennis Port people have enjoyed for years. Dennis Porters got to know their librarian really well, also. Miss Mary Hentz claimed that she had served the Library Association of West Harwich and Dennis Port for 64 years! (Over, please)

CALENDAR

April 8 7:30 Board meets at the Manse
April 19 2:30 Program meeting, West Dennis Community Building
Pre-Historic Archeology along Bass River
May 3 1-4 Open House, ALL village libraries. Refreshments

April Trivia Question-- Where in Dennis is Finnergan's Meadow?

LIBRARIES (cont.)

It's not just us old-timers who have a deep attachment to the local village libraries. Many newcomers soon learned how much of a community center these venerable buildings are. Some folks I know go to the library at the same time each week, because they are certain to meet their friends there, ready to share opinions of the latest books. We all need a place to go where everybody knows our name. The good folks who volunteer on the Library Board know that. Something as good as we already have will not be lost. There is no plan to close any libraries, only to expand resources and bring us another step along the way, from the corner of the social hall to the world of a new century.

Please study the library articles carefully and get to town meeting to vote. And take advantage of an opportunity to know our local libraries better by attending Open House at each, to be held on Sunday, May 3 from 1 to 4 P.M. Staffs will be available to answer your questions.

THE INDIAN CULTURE ALONG BASS RIVER

Mark Horvath of Yarmouth will speak to us about the evidences of pre-historic civilization along Bass River. Mr. Horvath is chairman of the Yarmouth Historic Commission and an archaeologist specializing in excavation of pre-historic sites. He has much to tell us about the Native Americans who lived for centuries along Bass River. Be sure to come and bring a friend. Young people will enjoy this presentation. Mr. Horvath is a lively speaker and there will be displays of artifacts.

MEA CULPA

I apologize whole heartedly for the fact that you are getting two newsletters at once. I was already to print out the March letter, but I must have said something which insulted my Trusty Tandy computer. It saw me through 958 pages of town history, but suddenly it won't talk to me. With the help of our faithful printer, Harry Ives, I trust these letters will be on time, and I will try to make up with my Tandy before the May issue is due out. NTR

INTERESTED IN PRODUCING TV?

DHS has recently become a non-profit member of CV3TV. With this membership comes the opportunity for five people to take the course on how to use the equipment at our public access studio. Would you like to learn? If so, call Brendan Joyce at 385-6492.

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