



Dennis Historical Society Newsletter

Volume 24 Number 3

April 2001

Calendar of Events

Wednesday, April 11 Board Meeting

All interested members are welcome to attend.

**Josiah Dennis Manse
7:00 PM**

Sunday, April 22 Backstage at the Cape Playhouse

Marcia Mobleau, noted author and Playhouse publicist, will tell some stories about people and events at this famous summer playhouse. Refreshments.

**Jacob Sears Memorial
Library, East Dennis
2:00 PM**

Wednesday, May 16 Who Wants to be a Cape Cod Expert?

Jack Sheedy, local author, will narrate a slide show about Cape Cod. Come and test your Cape knowledge. Refreshments.

**West Dennis Graded
School
7:30 PM**

Saturday, May 17 The Life and Times of Capt. Marcus Lafayette Howes

Maritime exhibit at 1736 Josiah Dennis Manse Museum telling the trials and tribulations of a Dennis clipper ship captain.

1-4 PM

First There was Jericho...

The Dennis Historical Society (D.H.S.) has been devoted to preserving and teaching the history of our town. Its organization came about in an interesting way. It was learned that Miss Virginia Gildersleeve, a former dean of Barnard College at Columbia, wanted Jericho House in West Dennis to be a library or historical center in memory of her cousin, author Elizabeth Reynard. Since the town had no historical society, she was concerned that the citizens might not be interested in maintaining the house for this purpose. Many dedicated residents of Dennis felt otherwise. Led by such devoted local historians as Dean S. Sears and Kirkwood Brown, a group worked hard to obtain signatures to present to Dean Gildersleeve, assuring her of a broad base of citizen support. Dean Gildersleeve did offer the 1801 homestead of Theophilus Baker to the town and it was accepted by town meeting in August of 1962. A committee was appointed by the selectmen to set up the historic center and care for it, and from this a town-wide interest in preserving our history become obvious. In July of 1963 an organizational meeting was held at Carleton Hall to establish the Dennis Historical Society. Dean S. Sears was elected as its first president. Since that time our members have been active in historic preservation and education.

Excerpt from the New Members Newsletter

*March, 2001 – A Note from Ann Chalmers,
Chairperson of the Jericho Committee*

The Jericho Committee is planning a Bicentennial Celebration and Opening Tea at the Theophilus Baker 1801 house on June 24, 2001. We would like to invite all past members of the Jericho Committee and those who were instrumental in making Jericho a part of Dennis. As we do not have a complete list of all and their addresses, we are still trying. If you know the whereabouts of any of the following people we would appreciate it very much if you would contact Ann Chalmers at 508-394-0206.

The Dennis Historical Society encouraged the town to procure the Josiah

*Mrs. Ella Aborn
Bertram Doherty
Everett Durgan
Mrs. Malcolm M. Haskell
Edward W. Herland
Harold Phillips*

*George Robb
John M. Stone
Mrs. DeWitt Stucke
Mrs. George I. Mckimm
Mr. and Mrs. Louis Petland*



(Continued on page 2)

Then There Was the Manse...

(Continued from page 1)

Dennis Manse and the Old West Schoolhouse, now on the Manse grounds. We conducted one of the first Historic Surveys under the direction of the Massachusetts Historic Commission. This survey of the historic assets of the town includes a list of historic sites and documentation of houses and other buildings which were built before 1830.

And Now There is a New Historical Center.

Historical Center to Chronicle Dennis' Storied Past

Raymond Urquhart

History is, truly, everywhere in Dennis. Each of the town's five villages offers marvelous examples of the historic richness on display for residents and visitors alike. Its history has been skillfully described in Nancy Thacher Reid's 958 page tome, Dennis, Cape Cod: From Firstcomers to Newcomers 1639 – 1993, the first published history of Dennis. It is this storied history that the West Dennis Community Building Restoration Committee, appointed by the Board of Selectmen in late 1997, is proposing to chronicle in a historical center at the newly restored 1867 West Dennis Graded School House.

Among the tasks presented to the seven member Restoration Committee was the need to identify ways to improve the building's "functionality" beyond the continuing availability of the school house for meetings, voting and diverse social activities. An oversight committee to be appointed by the Board of Selectmen will be charged with protecting the architectural and historical integrity of the school house; and will be expected to make recommendations to the Board about ways to "celebrate the town's history, seafaring heritage and educational opportunities."

Early colonial settlement patterns depict "firstcomers" locating along a primal Indian trail (Route 6A) in what is now the village of Dennis, then settling in East Dennis (1723), Dennis Port (1776) and eventually in West Dennis (1800s). Dennis Port, once the site of a thriving fishing industry, boasted of three wharves each extending 600 feet into Nantucket Sound. East of the mouth of the Bass River is a lighthouse built in 1855 that served as a beacon for the fishing fleet and packets for 60 years. The Shiverick brothers, quintessential 19th century shipbuilders, crafted some of the world's most graceful clipper ships along the banks of Sesuit Creek. The town's rich maritime history is a product of its unique location along the east side of the Bass River, the longest tidal river on the east coast, and its reach into Cape Cod Bay and Nantucket Sound.

Liberty Hall, situated on the edge of a white fenced village green, is also in a place described by the Massachusetts Historical Society as one of the most perfectly preserved 19th century crossroads in the Commonwealth. A diorama of this historic intersection would be a notable way to honor this former trading post and stage coach stop in the town's history. Train service to Cape Cod began in 1848 and reached Dennis 17 years later when a Cape Cod Central Railroad train arrived at a train station built on the north side of the present town hall parking area. Retired Capt. Frederick Nickerson was then the depot master. Cranberry cultivation, a thriving saltworks and sea captains villages expressing Federal, Greek Revival, Georgian and the sturdy Cape Cod architectural styles are but a few of the scores of the historic structures, places and events that can aptly illustrate the town's rich heritage. All of this could be depicted by words, photographs, exhibits and dioramas in a historical center located in the north room on the second floor of the school house.

The south room on the second floor could function as a classroom in which school district teachers could conduct classes, offering students an opportunity to experience life in the classroom and in an

(Continued on page 3)

Historical Center to Chronicle Dennis' Storied Past

(Continued from page 2)

adjacent recitation room, both used by children living in an other century. The classroom contains the original chalkboards. Some students would sit at 19th century desks. In time, it is hoped all participating students will, as more old desks are acquired, have this opportunity. The large gathering room with its 34 gas type lights illuminating the first floor, will continue, as in the past, to be a place for a wide range of civic and social functions.

There is an urgent need for Dennis residents to serve on a committee to oversee this new Historical Center. If you are interested, please stop at the Town Hall and fill out a green card.



Nancy Thacher Reid, tickling the ivories at the Covered Dish Luncheon.
West Dennis Graded School, March 10th
Photo courtesy of Richard S. Howes

We sincerely appreciate receiving articles, photographs & suggestions from our members. Special thanks to Ernest and Helen Lockhart of West Dennis for sharing a glimpse of Dennis history sent to them by the late Harrison S. Fisk of Holderness, New Hampshire. We are pleased to add to our Harrison S. Fisk Collection this personal letter and two issues of The Weirs Times and Tourists' Gazette.

Dear Helen and Earl,

It was very generous of you to send us the mugs of the West Dennis School, and I'm writing this to tell you to accept my thanks in addition to those Irma has already sent.

I'm enclosing two reminiscences that I wrote for a local weekly. "Two First Visits" will answer some of your questions about my father's connection with the school, and his parents....

Dad was the fourth child of Captain Henry Harrison Fisk, one of four brother who were all sea captains in the age of sail. The first was Luther Fisk, who followed his father in a sea career. At 20 years, he had worked up to first mate and was to be captain on his next trip when he fell into the hold of the ship and was killed.

Jenny May was the second child, ...and Sarah A. the third. Like Jenny May's husband (*Charles Edward Corliss*), Dad was turned from a watery occupation by hearing only tales of sea disasters from his mother, whose father had been lost at sea, and by the waning of sail and its replacement by steam.

Like Charles Edward Corliss, he turned to teaching for his profession and trained at Hyannis "Normal" School. One of his first jobs was at a one-room school on the north side of Dennis, and when my mother, Pauline Sears, was ready for High School, Dad was in charge of it on the second floor at West Dennis. At that time, the second floor was high school and the first, "Grammer" school. They married not many years after she graduated.

Hope you find both stories enjoyable. Thanks again for the mugs.

Best wishes always,
Harry

Dennis Historical Society

P.O. Box 607

South Dennis, MA 02660-0607

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

Non-profit
Organization
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
Permit No. 2
South Dennis, MA
02660

THE WAY WE WERE...

The last member of the Baker family to live in Jericho was Miss Emma Baker. The following description of Miss Emma was taken from Nancy Thacher Reid's history.

"Miss Emma was regarded as a bit 'strange' by the children who passed her corner on the way to and from school. She would often be seen drawing water from the well in the backyard, talking to a person unseen. Even in the 1950's she continued to heat her home with the kitchen range and to light it with kerosene lamps. She walked to do her errands in West Dennis village or



1801 Jericho House

wherever else she desired to go. She was fiercely independent and adverse to change, not only in her own life but in the goings on about the neighborhood as well. 'Baker Town' was her territory, and she took great interest in all of the properties in that part of the village."