



Dennis Historical Society Newsletter

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Send letters & stories to Dennis Historical Society, Box 607, S. Dennis 02660 or pjhowes@verizon.net

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A Love Letter in the Attic

More than 60 years ago when I first saw the love letter, it was already more than 120 years old. When I re-discovered it recently, it had survived 185 years. Still, it remains a mystery. A young man, Timothy, putting his passion in words, wrote the to a young woman named Nancy. Who was Timothy? Who was Nancy? Lovers surely, but what came of their romance? Did it flower or die?

Either way, how did this lone piece of evidence of their romantic encounter end up among dusty papers in the attic of an old house on Church Street in West Dennis?

Dated "September the 16th 1828," the three-page letter has yellowed, the ink faded and difficult to read. The envelope, barely sustains a brief return address: "Apt. 12, Wrentham, Mass." It is addressed to "Miss Nancy Blass, Attleboro, East Post Office."

Where the letter was for more than 120 years I have not been able to find out. My father-in-law, Ernest Eastman, Sr., found it in the 1950s, during the renovation of the old house. The owner told him there was nothing left of value in the attic and he could throw away what was left there.

But, knowing his wife, Ruth, collected anything of historical interest, he brought a box of miscellaneous old letters and clippings home for her to go through. She discovered the love letter and carefully saved it in a plastic sleeve.

She showed it to me and I read what I could of it at the time and agreed it was interesting. Ruth died in 1978, and her collection of old letters and clippings came to me. This winter, organizing my files on "Dennis History," I came across the love letter again. This time I made the effort to decipher its fading archaic script.

Reaching across almost 19 decades, the young man named Timothy, so far removed from this modern era, touched my heart with his amorous prose. But, if Ruth had found out anything about Timothy or Nancy, or how the letter came to be in a West Dennis home, I had never heard.

It was such a lovely letter I decided to decipher and copy it before it totally faded away and was lost forever. I wanted to know who these people were, so young and apparently so much in love? How and why did that one letter survive and end up in the attic of a Cape Cod home? I still don't know.

But, to the letter: The date is September 16, 1828. I picture Timothy bent over an antique desk with a quill pen as he writes a letter under the dim light of a candle. He is probably in his early 20s. And, in my mind, handsome.

"My dearest Nancy," he writes in an old-fashioned cursive script with curlicues. "You who have so long been the object of my sincerest affections are still the one whom I would ever love and would ever wish to be my own. Since I left you, I have often looked back with sorrowful pleasure on those dear moments, which we so lately spent in each other's company.

"The time, my dear, which I have spent in your sweet society is part of the happiest moments of my life. Never shall the remembrance of those happy hours be erased from my memory. All while I remember the beloved object with whom they were so delightfully passed away! I doubt not but my Dearest Nancy often thinks of her affectionate, loving Timothy.

"The reflection, that Nancy loves me, and that she is yet true-hearted, constant and affectionate serves to alleviate the sorrows and the cares of life."

"Dearest love, we may be separated, but our loving hearts shall forever be one. Yes, my own beloved shall always be dear to the heart of her most loving Timothy."

He writes that he dreads how long the time apart will be (seven months). *“Often in imagination shall I visit you and press the affectionate kiss upon your cheek.”* He begs Nancy, if possible, to visit him some time “at Newton,” where he will be taking such courses as literature and writing.

Then on a more optimistic note he writes: *“Shall this separation always continue? Oh not. After a few short years we shall enjoy the sweets of conjugal endearments. And when that welcome hour arrives and we are united in the bonds of wedlock, then shall we enjoy the happy moments we have so long waited for.”*

Timothy fills a third page with news of his school friends whom apparently Nancy also knows. He mentions several school friends who are seriously ill and confined at home or in a hospital.

He mentions that he is excited about the teacher in his writing course, a Dr. Akin, *“who taught the school in your neighborhood last winter.”*

In closing his letter, Timothy writes that when he does come home: *“I hope to find her I love ... with the same tender and endearing affection, which now so closely joins our loving hearts.”*

“Wishing you all the happiness which can possibly attend you, and hoping we may ever mutually love and be loved, I subscribe myself your most loving, constant and affectionate, Timothy.”

In reading Timothy's letter over a number of times, I began to feel I knew Timothy quite well, but Nancy is harder to discern beyond Timothy's ardent declaration of her perfection in his eyes. As for finding any record of their lives, I doubt I ever will find anything further. Local research has turned up empty. No record of a couple, Timothy and Nancy, here on the Cape or in Massachusetts. Blass is nor a Cape name, and, of course, I don't have Timothy's full name. It seems we will never know how the letter ended up here in an attic in West Dennis.

But of young people in love, the letter assures us that not so much has changed in 185 years. Though, in other ways, it tells us that almost everything else is different.

Peggy Eastman

From time to time visitors to the 1736 Josiah Dennis Manse or folks through e-mail enquiries wonder why seemingly no local industry exists. A bit ago, Burt Derick provided the following overview of the pace of business in Dennis in the centuries past and based it on the North side as a microcosm of what occurred on both coasts.

Ed.

Historical Dennis North Shore Beachfront

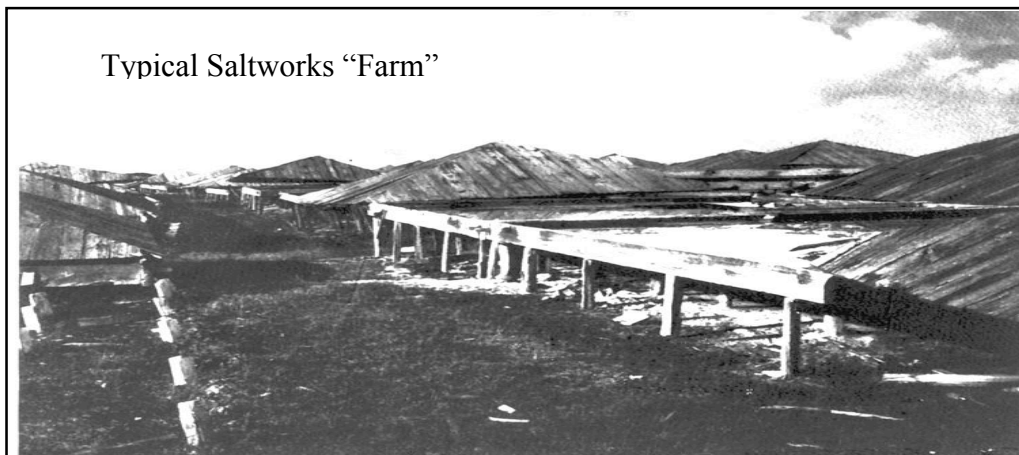
Cape Cod, for the first two and a half centuries of European settlement, was not a place of Potemkin villages of saltbox cottages and pristine beaches for recreation and contemplation. Historically the beaches of Cape Cod and Dennis, including what is now Chapin Beach, were, in the 17th, 18th and 19th century primarily places, not of leisure but of work and commerce. The whaling industry represented significant commerce in Dennis, existed among the Native Americans and continued with white settlement in the 1650's and until at least the 1730's. Pilot whales, historically referred to as "black fish," would be driven by boats to shore at Chapin Beach as elsewhere on this side of Dennis, where they would be cleaned of their blubber which was then boiled in kettles with the whale carcass being left to rot on the beach.

The fishing industry has been a historically important part of Cape Cod and it is part of the cultural history of Barnstable County. Fishing was conducted from the beaches, including Chapin Beach by the use of fishing weirs, located in the waters near the beaches. The weirs were constructed of posts and netting which act as a maze and trap the fish. They collected seaweed and were visible on the beach from a distance. They drew in workers both in boats and in horse drawn carriages to carry away the fish. Weirs have been used since Native American times on Cape Cod; they were used heavily, particularly in the 1800s and into the early 1900s in the tidal flat areas. Indeed, they existed in the shallow areas of Chapin

Beach into the 1970's. Cold storage facilities also were constructed on the coastline to store the fish, including two in Dennis.

The beaches and the marshes of Cape Cod, including the ones here were the location of a very busy salt making industry. The practice of making salt and its related industry first developed in the Revolutionary War when England blockaded the American coasts and denied colonists the opportunity to receive salt from England. The history of the Cape Cod saltworks began in what is now Dennis. The saltworks industry grew substantially during the early to mid 1800's and entrepreneurs from Cape Cod were among some of the major traders of salt on the entire American east coast. The industry only declined in the 1860's once cheaper salt sources elsewhere were discovered.

The saltworks manufacturing was done by solar evaporation of the water from square or rectangular vats or traps that had tent-like roofs that could be rolled on and off to protect the salt from rain. When the saltworks originated, water was transported to the different vats by hand. Windmills were subsequently



added to power the pumps that sent water through the hollowed out pine logs from the ocean to the vats. These windmills were located contiguous to the saltworks vats.

The windmill, with canvas sails, would be connected to the pump and generated the power needed for

the pump. The pump would be placed in a small cistern and sunk to the level of the tide water from which it carried a subterranean pipe towards the low water mark. The pump sent water to the vats it served and there would be many pumps and related windmills necessary to service the numerous vats located in the saltworks areas. The vats varied in sizes but typically ran approximately 10-16 feet square, although some were as large as 40 feet wide. The vats typically were between 9-12 inches deep and sat on timber posts.

There were over one hundred windmills in Dennis providing power for the saltworks pumps. These windmills were not quaintly shingled but consisted only of the wooden open framing with the interior works exposed. With the many canvas sails, removable roofs, vats and windmill frames the area near Chapin Beach and its environs resembled nothing so much as a dilapidated shantytown. The deteriorating saltworks structures remained late into the 1800's, after they ceased being used. One would have seen the saltworks industries located at Gray's Beach from the Taylor Bray Farm while that Farm was operational.

There were three major ship building locations in Dennis; two on the Bass River, one in Dennisport, and one in Sesuit Harbor (the famous Shiverick Shipyard) and other ship building facilities existed in Yarmouth Port such as the Horseshoe Shipyard on Chase Garden Creek near Chapin's Beach.

Burt Derick

Kap'n Kezzie's Comments

These days, I spend a lot of time thinking about the hereafter.

I go somewhere to get something and then wonder what I'm hereafter

DHS Digital Archive (3/8/13)

Number of Collections – 15

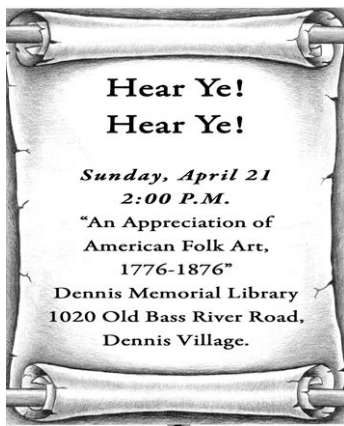
Titles in these Collections – 4,066

Individual Items in these Titles - 11,367

(Web Search: DHS Digital Archive)

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Bits 'n Pieces – April 1963 – from The Dennis-Yarmouth Register:

- 4/05 *Conflict law starts attrition in Dennis where two resign.
*Construction begins on new motel and apartment house across from 6A Cleaners, East Dennis.
- 4/12 *Rear Admiral Donald B. MacMillan, (famous explorer born in Provincetown), will make a rare public appearance at D-Y Regional High School on April 17th.
*Mrs. Ina Howes reported: "Larry Symington from Colby College, ME and Miss Nancy Roulston of Milton, were weekend guests of Larry's parents, Mr. & Mrs. John Symington."
- 4/19 *Atty. William E. Crowell appointed to the Dennis Finance Committee, replacing John Stone.
*The Easter Sunrise Service held on Scargo Hill at 5:05 a.m. was well attended, followed by a bountiful breakfast at Dennis Union Church for the attendees.

Famous Events from other sources:

- 4/01 The soap opera GENERAL HOSPITAL premiered on TV.
- 4/08 35th Academy Awards: Picture: "Lawrence of Arabia"; Actress: Anne Bancroft; Actor: Gregory Peck
- 4/09 Winston Churchill, age 88, becomes the first honorary U. S. Citizen by an Act of Congress with President John F. Kennedy signing the legislation.

Famous People born in April 1963:

- 4/08-Julian Lennon, Musician; 4/16-Jimmy Osmond, youngest Osmond Brother; 4/18-Conan O'Brien

Hit Parade 1963 – a few:

- "Brown Eyed Handsome Man" – Buddy Holly....."One Broken Heart For Sale" – Elvis
"The Wayward Wind" – Frank Ifield....."Can't Get Used to Losing You" – Andy Williams
"Hello Mudduh, Hello Faddah" – Allan Sherman....."Blue Velvet" – Bobby Vinton

Edited by: June Howes