



# Dennis Historical Society Newsletter

Volume 38 No. 3

Send letters & stories to Dennis Historical Society, Box 607, S. Dennis 02660 or to [pjhowes@verizon.net](mailto:pjhowes@verizon.net)

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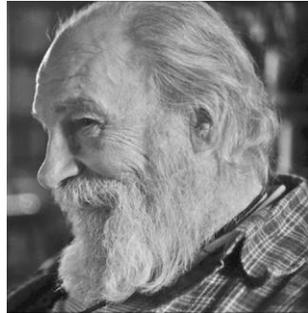
The next Board Meeting: is Tuesday, April 14 @ 2:00 P.M., 2<sup>nd</sup> floor, Dennis Memorial Library, Old Bass River Road, Dennis Village

## In Memoriam

### William Smith Ryder Jr. 1928-2015

March 7, 2015.

Historian, family genealogist and special friend of DHS. Bill was the great-great-grandson of Levi Crowell. He kindly provided DHS the diaries and letters from Levi's Civil War days and other historical information for DHS preservation and use. Bill's mother was Marion Crowell Ryder (*Scuttle Watch, Cape Cod Remembrances, Capt. Levi Crowell Civil War Prisoner His Personal Biography*).



Bill lived in the West Dennis home built by his great-great-grandfather Levi Crowell. A graduate of the University of Massachusetts with a PhD from Cornell, Bill served in the United States Army prior to his 29 years as a senior research specialist for General Foods Corp. in White Plains, N.Y. He is survived by his children William of Marshfield, Mass., Jonathan of Blauvelt, N.Y., Thomas of New York City, and Maria of West Dennis plus grandchildren Timothy, Emily, Jonathan James, and Michael Ryder.

A spring memorial Mass and planting of his 2015 vegetable garden at the family homestead will be announced later.

### Lora Lucile Nowotne 1923-2015

February 28, 2015. Lora provided DHS with wonderful family remembrances of her life in West Dennis and tales of her great-grandfather Captain Theophilus Chase (and others) that provided several articles for our Newsletter. Daughter of Lucile Anderson and Herbert C. Chase. She moved to MD in 1962 and remained very active following a career including Reader's Digest New York City and an engineer for AT&T in Brockton. Widely traveled, she resided on the Cape part of each summer.

She is survived by sons Donald J. Churchill, Stephen W. Churchill, and Mark E. Churchill, and their families. She leaves two grandsons, three granddaughters, three great-grandsons and one great-granddaughter.

A burial service will be held in West Dennis Cemetery, West Dennis, MA at a later date.

## Thunder Snow

If you were watching the Weather Channel on February 15<sup>th</sup> you were privy to seeing Jim Cantori on the night of the 14<sup>th</sup> going nutty—leaping around in the snow bank and shouting. He is their star weatherman whom we have watched for quite a few years in all kinds of weather situations—none of them nice. Jim was seeing and hearing a thunder storm in the middle of a blizzard. This happens when a cold front from the north meets warm weather from the Gulf Stream, and it is quite a spectacular show, especially if you are outside in it. Listeners later learned that it is his favorite weather phenomenon.

It seldom happens around here more than once a year—historically—almost always around February 22<sup>nd</sup>. Don't ask me to explain it. I just know the old timers swore by it. However, this year we also had one over Nantucket Sound between Dennis Port and Nantucket in the January blizzard.

Growing up here I remember the old folks saying, "There, the backbone of winter is broken! Spring is right around the corner. It's time to order the peas." That may have been their barometer instead of Punxsutawney Phil.

The Cape has had some memorable blizzards. I remember the Valentine's night blizzard of 1937. It was a Sunday evening and my parents had friends over to celebrate the engagement of Wallace Garfield and Arlene Rogers and play cards. They were aware that some light snow was falling around 8:00 P.M. At 11:30 when the party broke up there was a 5 ft. drift against the kitchen door and even if they could get out to their cars Route 28 had not been plowed.

What would you do if you had to find sleeping space for six adults on short notice? Mom woke up my sister and me who grumbled about having to get out of our warm beds in our unheated farmhouse bedrooms to relocate downstairs on pallets (that was pre-sleeping bag time). She put our little brother in the crib with our baby sister who were both surprised in the morning at the change of events.

Daylight found our mother at the Glenwood range with her big coffee pot doing heavy duty, scrambled eggs in the cast iron skillet, biscuits in the oven and a kitchen full of hungry people. When the men were well provisioned they grabbed anything that could move snow—Mom's cookie sheets, bread board, table leaf, etc. Naturally, the shovels were out in the barn!! They not only had to clean out the cars and the driveway but there were cows in the barn that needed to be milked. Some of the participants talked about it for years.

*Phyllis Horton*

### **Reveille Revels**

Waking up on a school morning was mostly a matter of sound, first. Until we had settled into the new house with the kerosene cook stove in the kitchen, both heating and cooking were dependent on building a fire. Had to take the top plates (cooking surface) off the fire box, put in scrunched up paper, lay kindling on it, carefully position the first of the split logs so that they had the best chance of igniting, light off the paper, re-assemble the stove top, wait until you were sure the logs had begun to burn, then put out the spider, scramble the eggs, call the kids, and commence. Or, if you were having fried bread, well, you get the idea. There was an interesting heat regulator on the cook stove; you moved the pan around on top until you found the properly heated area, which could change any time in the cooking process. Dad usually started the living room stove. He hinted, in his complimentary manner, that Mother, like all women, knew little about how to lay a good fire, ignoring the fact that she did it every day in the kitchen.

About the first feel of a new winter day was the cold rock which your feet found at the bottom of the bed when you stretched. You had of course kicked the flannel wrap off the icy soap stone, brick or sad iron which felt so warm and cozy when you were drifting off, and the heat had dissipated. After the fashion of most homes in town, neither of ours was insulated, which made the first move from

under the comforter an uncomfortable experience. Along about storm window time in the fall, Dad piled leaves and pine needles against the foundations, usually covered them with roofing tar paper, and staked here and there to hold this improvised layer of weather proofing close to the building. It helped keep the wind from snarling through the cracks between the old brick work and kept the floor warmer. Mother always did her newspaper thing under any rugs, which also helped, but in Dad's ancestral home, when we moved in, a mean wind sometimes actually lifted the rug up on the living floor. Even with storm windows, which were second hand, and fit just more or less, a winter blizzard would sometimes deposit a small amount of snow on the bed in my north east corner upstairs room, and an especially frigid night sometimes iced the contents of the pot under the bed.

Winter kid garb in the thirties started with a cold weather version of the one piece Union Suit, equipped with somewhat extended legs and arms, but with the same button up rear door facilities. Up through all of early grade school it was shorts in the summer, and corduroy knickers for the winter, with long socks which never stayed up, and that accursed whistling as you walked. How I yearned for long pants!

Dressed, fed, and out the door, lunch box in hand, bus pickup in front of the house, at first, then later at Liberty Hall just up the street. Dad sometimes drove the bus, a square yellow thing (we called it the 'Cheese box') which may have carried twenty kids on its bench-like seats. The route belonged to our ice man, Mr. Howard, and was, as with most happenings in town, sort of a family affair. We always knew our drivers, and they knew us and our parents. The bus could be a tiny bit ripe on occasion, as several of the boys ran trap lines, and serviced them before school. The main 'catch' was skunks. The skins (dressed out and partially tanned) were shipped off to the fur coat industry. More white fur on the pelt, better the price, as I remember from talking with the woodsmen. They contacted the buyers via a magazine ad, and bought the traps, pelt stretching frames, and what ever they needed to semi-cure the skins and ship them, so the dealers made out well. Even before the skunk population got clobbered, the Company was making money. I never found out if the Mighty Hunters made more than their expenses, or not.

The guys all trapped in generally the same area and skunks weren't THAT plentiful. When the

morning chore was done carefully, only a vague aroma accompanied the boys as they trooped onto the bus, but one morning, Harold and Frenchie, trappers both, arrived running, a tad late for the bus, but as the driver saw them, he waited. Mr. Ellis, the driver then, a wonderfully gentle and patient man, popped the door open and in rushed the intrepid pair, bearing with them, like a foul cloud, evidence of a direct hit by one of their victims. As they rushed for a rear seat, Mr. Ellis, startled by the sudden enveloping odor swung around in his seat, and in a most apologetic tone said,

"Oh, my God, boys! I'm sorry, but you just have to get off this bus, I can't possibly deliver you to school smelling like that!"

The two dutifully trudged down the aisle, and off the bus, leaving behind kids holding their noses, and the bus pulled away. Just a few weeks ago (seventy years after the great odor affair) I mentioned the day to Harold.

"Oh," He said, with a smile, "That wasn't an accident, me and Frenchy wanted a day off, so we acquired that smell accidentally on purpose!"

*Thacher, Ben, "Whose Boy Be You", pp145, 146*

### **Next Station Stop: South Dennis**

Those were the magic words we had been waiting for! All the way down on the morning train from Fall River we children had been scanning the wayside for familiar landmarks and welcoming each one joyously. When we crossed the railroad bridge, we were almost there! Then the conductor's long-awaited call sent us crowding into the aisle, laden with our bags, dolls, pet cats. Oh, the smell of that first breath of salt-pine-bayberry air as we jumped down to the platform! There stood Grandpa, beaming his hearty welcome. Behind him waited James T's "three seater" ready to carry us all to the homestead in West Dennis. Drawn up beside it was the stage, with carpet-covered seats, waiting for its assorted passengers and the mail bags to be delivered to the South and West Dennis Post Offices. On the driver's seat of the stage sat Nate Phillips, grinning at the commotion and adding his jaunty greetings to the hubbub. Many of us who came regularly, year in and year out, were welcomed as members of the family. Once when one neighbor family had come down on the evening train and Nate was making his usual stop at the South Dennis Post Office to leave the mail sack and collect the most recent news, the mother cautioned him, "Now, Nate, you hitch that horse good and proper!" Nate's reply

was, "I will. I will, Carrie May, I know how you be." And he carefully drew out the reins and looped them over a twig on a nearby tree.

On the platform lounged one-armed Joe Nickerson, laconic of speech but of prodigious strength in handling baggage in spite of his disability. He acknowledged our arrival with a nod and watched while we identified our numerous trunks. Later in the day he would come over with them from the station and help to get them into the house and to their respective rooms. Finally we were all settled in the "three seater" and were off for home, commenting excitedly at any changes along the way.

On our kitchen wall, above the shelf by the stove and beside the nail on which was always hung the Old Farmer's Almanac, there is still pasted a yellowing paper labeled "Summer Schedule" written in Grandpa's Spencerian penmanship, and giving the times of trains at South Dennis. It is a mute testimony to the important part the railroad then played in the summer's comings and goings. How often we consulted it when we were planning to set out to "welcome the coming or speed the parting guest." Because of the station's location near the upper reaches of Bass River, we sometimes varied the routine by paddling up in the canoe or hurrying along in the motorboat to a small wooden landing on the shore. From there we walked up through the fields and a very ancient little cemetery and climbed a fence to the station platform. "City clothes" always marked off the victim of arrival or departure from the rest of us happy dwellers on the Cape. Now and again, as some of the circle of cousins grew up, there was a strictly twosome journey to the station via James T's buggy. How the rest of us schemed and tried to contrive ways of reaching the platform and barging in on those significant moments of greeting or farewell! Happily for the budding young romances, we were usually foiled in our efforts.

Inevitably, at the end of summer, the South Dennis station became the focal point of our reluctant departure. Assembled on the platform, all decked out with beautiful dahlias from Grandpa's garden in a gaiety that belied our feelings, we hated the sight of the approaching train. Once on board we raced through the cars, trying to reach the back platform in time for a last glimpse of the little station which, for all its dinginess, was for us the gateway to "the Cape."

*Ryder, Marion Crowell, Cape Cod Remembrances, pp 13-14*

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# OLD HOUSES OF DENNIS



Pauline Kennedy Photo

Creatively Presented By  
*Phyllis Horton*

An Illustrated Lecture On Our  
Old Houses, Both Still  
Standing *And* Long Gone  
*A Part Of Our History*

Saturday, April 11, 2:00p.m.

Dennis Public Library  
5 Hall St., Dennis Port

\$5.00  
Donation



Saturday, May 16, 1:00-4:00P.M.

**Maritime Days Exhibit**

**“Home Port: West Dennis-Life and Times  
of Some West Dennis Captains”**

Dennis Maritime Museum  
West Dennis Graded School  
67 School Street, West Dennis

Sunday, May 17, 2:00 P.M.

**Saltworks on Cape Cod**

-And Most Particularly in Dennis-  
One of the most historic features of Cape Cod

Presented by John G. Sears III  
West Dennis Library, second floor  
260 Main Street (Rt. 28), West Dennis