



# Dennis Historical Society Newsletter

Volume 31 Number 7 Send letters & stories to Dennis Historical Society, Box 607, S. Dennis 02660 or to pmrhorton@aol.com August 2008

## Calendar

Thursday, August 14,  
10:00 a.m.

### Walk Through Sea Captain's Cemetery

Guided walk in the historic  
South Dennis Cemetery

Meet at the South Dennis  
Congregational Church  
210 Main St., South Dennis

Rain Date Friday,  
August 15, 10:00 a.m.

Saturday, August 16,  
10:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.

### Colonial Open House at the Manse

1736 Josiah Dennis  
Manse Museum

Sunday, August 17,  
11:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.

### Old Fashioned Skill Days at Jericho

1801 Jericho  
Historical Center  
Old Main Street, West  
Dennis

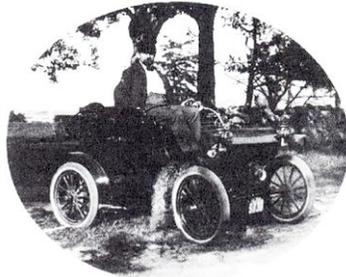
Saturday, September 27,  
1:00 p.m. - 4:00 p.m.

### Autumn at the Manse

The Josiah Dennis  
Manse will be open for  
the public.  
Refreshments will be  
served.

## Sunday Drives

In 1902 Dr. Henry Hart of East Dennis had a curved dash runabout Oldsmobile delivered to his home at the price of \$650. The advertisement that might have swayed his decision declared that this modern mode of transportation would cost him \$35 a year for gasoline compared with \$145 to keep Old Bess going with hay and grain. That Merry Oldsmobile was the first automobile in Dennis and must have caused quite a stir in our rustic villages causing horses to bolt and chickens on the roadside to flap away with feathers flying. Gasoline was in ready supply as cranberry growers used it to fuel their engines for pumping water at their bogs. DHS has a 1911 post card



Dr. Hart and His Oldsmobile  
Joshua Crowell collection

(shown below) showing the Ginn Block in Dennis Port with a sign advertising gasoline for sale behind the store. Dr. Hart covered 10,000 miles with his car the first year he owned it. No doubt many townspeople had a chance to become familiar with motorized transportation.



However, Dr. Hart started Dennis on a great love affair with the automobile. It met with a great deal of opposition from old salts who declared that they were the 'devil's machines' and would never replace the horse and buggy, but young men and women were hooked and they all wanted one. During the Depression Herbert Hoover promised "a car in every garage and a chicken in every pot" and a car became every man's dream.

In the late 1930s most Dennis families had a car of some sort. My family always had a car and father had a truck or two. I can clearly remember Sunday drives to watch the Boston to New York boat go through the Cape Cod Canal. We always parked on the Cape side of the Canal along with many others. By boat time there wasn't a parking space left. People brought picnic suppers and made a party of it. If it were not pouring rain an orchestra would be playing and passengers would be dining, drinking and dancing on deck. The couples looked so elegant. The men were dressed in linen summer suits and the women wore chiffon dresses and pearls. Strings of lights were hung about the boat and it seemed a very festive occasion. We waved at them and they waved back. Cars honked their horns and we were happy to see them having a lovely time.

A favorite Sunday ride was to visit with family members who had moved away from Dennis, but not too far. Our range was from Orleans to Middleboro. It

was always fun to see distant cousins and learn what kids were doing in their town. The Middleboro cousins were older and rather cosmopolitan and their ideas were too risqué for us country bumpkins, but we did enjoy hearing about their lives.

I grew up on a dairy farm so business came before pleasure on many Sundays. Father would drive around to other farms to chat with the farmers and check out their stock. If anyone bought a new bull every dairy farmer on the Cape showed up sooner or later to look it over. We kids and Mother had to sit in the car because Father would ‘only be a minute’, a misnomer if there ever was one. At times that minute lasted an hour or more. Mother should have qualified for sainthood on those trips as she kept us entertained while the minutes added up. Another stop was at the Barnstable County House of Correction. They had a large farm with all kinds of animals. Many farmers had their animals bred at the jail because they had prime stock. They were self-sufficient, raising all their food except staples such as flour and sugar. They also raised all the perishable food for the Barnstable County Sanatorium in Pocasset. Almost always there would be at least one Dennis man in residence because of his relationship with John Barleycorn. That was the major Cape Cod vice in those days. In fact, some Cape men planned it so they were Guests of the County every winter. They had a nice warm place to stay and didn’t mind working with the animals. When we showed up at the barn it was like “Old Home Week”. Over time we became acquainted with backsliders from other towns who were there fairly often. They had to show us whichever new animal had arrived since our last visit. I don’t recall that we looked down on them. It was just a fact of life.

Most of our trips ended with a stop for an ice cream at the Dutchland Farms (now the Paddock Restaurant in Hyannis) or Howard Johnson’s (now Coast’s) in Orleans.

Those were The Good Old Days when a Sunday afternoon meant getting behind the wheel and going to a destination or just riding aimlessly to look at the scenery. Today \$35 will not even fill the tank once and \$650 will just about replace four tires and a spare, plus tax. \$4.19 is a far cry from the \$.12 a gallon we enjoyed back then and the scenery isn’t nearly as nice as it used to be. I suppose we didn’t take pictures because we thought it would be there forever.

Phyllis Robbins Horton

### **The Streets of Our Town**

Aunt Julia Ann’s Road in West Dennis has a name of historical significance and perhaps meaningful symbolism. Julia Ann Baker became the third wife of Capt. Levi Baker, Sr. while still a very young woman. We speak so often of the “Wooden Ships and Iron Men” of the nineteenth century, but what of the women of those days of maritime supremacy? Hard times were expected and accepted with a fortitude it would be hard for modern women, or men for that matter, to master. Try to imagine young Julia Ann sitting by her kitchen fire, with her foot rocking the cradle of a future mariner while her small hands were busy knitting warm socks and caps. With her head she listened to the lessons of the older children, but her heart was no doubt filled with anxiety—for her husband at sea, not heard from for some weeks, for her children so vulnerable to disease for which there was no cure, for the safety of her house, the need for wood and food against the hard winter, and the many daily chores which she and the children must accomplish alone.

Julia Ann lived through the heart wrenching, though common, experience of losing some of her young children. At a young age she became a widow. With only the meager education afforded to females in those days, she continued to keep Levi’s Chandlery, supplying the fishing fleet which left annually for the Grand Banks from the wharf at the end of the street that now bears her name. Alone, she raised her three remaining sons only to have one of them die of a fever contracted on a voyage to a southern port. With what mixed emotions must she also have watched her son, Levi, also take to the sea. And what a feeling of relief must have flooded her heart when her third son chose to enter the publishing business rather than follow in the steps of his father.

Nancy Thacher Reid

## **Barnstable County Fair**

Barnstable County is famous for its sea captains. There was great rivalry among them on the high seas where speed was admired and they vied with each other to set new records. There was also competition when they were in foreign ports as to which one set the best table at the soirees they held for each other. One other contest that is little known is that at home they competed against each other to win blue ribbons at Barnstable County Fair.

Everyone had vegetable gardens and fruit trees in the 1800s, even sea captains who were not home very much. Many of them had a hired man to “do” for the family while they were away. They left strict instructions with their wives on what the man was to do and how he must do it. Certain plants were to be handled with much care in hopes of reaping that perfect squash, turnip or raspberry. Some of them brought exotic seeds home from foreign lands hoping to win the prize for “most unusual entry”. If he was home during the growing season he nurtured the plants himself. They used to visit around to check out other captain’s gardens making comparisons. If another squash looked bigger or better he’d come home and work harder. Of course they were all competing against Cape Cod farmers but beating them didn’t seem to be a necessity. They were in a race with their peers.

The old county fairgrounds stood in Barnstable Village and in the early days the fair was held at harvest time. People from Dennis went by the wagonload to the fair until 1865 when many of them arrived by train from South Dennis to the stop on Railroad Avenue just beyond the County Courthouse. The entries were carefully hand carried to the exhibition hall to be judged. While the judging was being done those crusty old sea captains who would think nothing of going around the Horn in a raging gale stood around like nervous hens waiting to see who would win the coveted prize. It didn’t matter whether he got first, second or third prize as long as another captain wasn’t ahead of him.

Another area where they competed was at the horse race. Certain captains spent a lot of money to buy a horse that couldn’t be beat. Some would ship prize specimens home from down South where horse racing had been honed to the nth degree. It seems that besides the ribbon to be won there were a lot of side wagers that went on and a lot of purses went home quite a bit lighter than when they arrived.

The fair continues today held in the last part of July in Falmouth. Cape Codders still vie for that lovely blue ribbon, but that keen competition died out when the old salts hung up their hoes.

Phyllis Robbins Horton

## **To Tickle Your Funny Bone**

Through the pitch-black night, the ship’s captain sees a light ahead on a collision course with his ship. He sends a signal: “Change your course 10 degrees east.” The light signals back: “No, you change yours 10 degrees west.” Angry, the captain sends: “I’m a navy captain! Change your course, sir!” “I’m a seaman, second class,” comes the reply, “Change your course, sir.” Now the captain is furious. “I’m a battleship! I’m not changing course!” There was one last reply. “I’m a lighthouse. Your call.”

## **The Way We Were**

August 6, 1898 At the Boston Dry Goods Store in Dennis Port, sale prices are: \$1.00 corsets are now 79 cents; 50 cent shirtwaists are 39 cents; ladies under vests, high or low neck are reduced from 17 cents to 12 cents. (This store was on the far right side of the Ginn Block shown on page 1. It was owned by Thomas Small and James T. Snow. Note the gasoline sign on the side of the building with an arrow pointing to the back...Ed.) From the Register.

**Dennis Historical Society**  
**P.O. Box 607**  
**South Dennis, MA 02990-0607**

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

**Non-profit  
Organization  
US POSTAGE  
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Permit No. 2  
South Dennis,**

### **Old-Fashioned Skills Day at Jericho**

We want and need your skills for a day!!! We need folks to bring their knitting, embroidery, quilting, rug-making, spinning – any of the old-time, essential skills of the 19th century that are still popular hobbies today. And if you are so inclined, bring your sketch pad and paints.

Enjoy an old fashioned “sit-a-spell” on the lawn Sunday, August 17, 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the Jericho Historical Center.

Call Peggy at 398-8592 or Joan at 398-9303 to have a place set up for you on the lawn at Jericho. There will also be tours of Jericho House, old-fashioned games for the children and refreshments.



*Jericho Historical Center,  
Old Main Street at  
Trotting Park Road in  
West Dennis, invites you  
to come to "Old Fashioned  
Skills Day", Sunday, Aug.  
17, 11 a.m. to 2 p.m.*