



Dennis Historical Society Newsletter

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Send letters & stories to Dennis Historical Society, Box 607, S. Dennis 02660 or pmrhorton@aol.com

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Dressing the Captain

When you see the “Dennis Mariner’s in the Civil War” exhibit at the 1867 West Dennis Graded School House (open Wed. 1-3p.m., until Aug 25) please take note of the captain’s model standing in the corner.

Finding artifacts for the exhibit was difficult as few personal items for Dennis mariners have survived. However, we are fortunate to have Capt. Alfred E. Howes’ wedding vest that was included in a clothing and artifact collection from his descendants.

Alfred E. Howes was born in Dennis in 1828 and probably grew up like most Dennis boys by going to sea at an early age. His father, Abner, was a sea captain in foreign trade in the ship *Pagoda* and it was expected that a captain’s son would follow his father’s example. Alfred worked his way up to command status. He was captain of the *Hartley*, *Florida*, and *Avon*, among others.

Capt. Alfred married Miss Eliza Wright in New Orleans in 1858. Eliza was born in Shepherdshire, England and at age 20 must have been a lovely bride. Her lace wedding gown was designed and made in Paris. We do not have her gown but we do have her granddaughter Elizabeth Howes Whorf Hamer’s beautiful lace wedding dress that was fashioned from the train of Eliza’s gown. The original gown must have been breathtaking. Alfred’s pale yellow embroidered vest was also made in Paris.

Alfred and Eliza had four children: Edna Jane, Abby Christina, Eliza Florence and Alfred Evans. They maintained homes in Dennis, Dorchester and on board ships around the world.

During the Civil War Alfred was captured by the Confederate Privateer *Coloma*. We do not have the particulars but traditionally the captain and his crew were removed from the vessel and it was burned, sunk or commandeered by the Confederates to be used for their own purposes. The prisoners were often dropped off at New Orleans to find their own way home.

We assume Alfred continued to sail after the Civil War. He was a member of the Boston Marine Society. He died in Dorchester in 1882 at age 54. Eliza died in Dennis in 1913 at age 75.

In the initial planning for the exhibit Capt. Alfred’s jacket looked to be easy—just button it on to the top of a male mannequin and it’s done. Not so! The jacket was too long for the model. The model had been dressed with the U.S. Navy uniform of World War II Torpedoman Leo Babineau of West Dennis. Leo, at age 19, was slim and trim and his uniform fit the model like a glove.

DHS Board Member Ruth Derick had volunteered to help, if needed. I sent her an SOS. She arrived with husband Burt’s white formal shirt with ruffles down the front and other assorted accessories. Alfred was obviously a slim man about 5’10”. Burt’s shirt was made for a more solid physique.

Leo’s trousers would serve for Alfred. We put the shirt on and it had somewhat of a tent-like appearance. After we stopped laughing we tucked and pinned until it was a good fit, slipped the vest on and buttoned it up. Great! Ruth had a black velvet ribbon we fashioned into a tie with a pearl headed pin to hold it in place.

The good captain was beginning to look great except for a scraggly mustache with about six unruly blondish hairs that definitely would not do. We decided Alfred needed a mustache of some substance and not many options were available. My hair is white—not a good choice for a 30+ man. Ruth is a medium blonde. For the good of the cause she bowed her head down and I snipped some strands from underneath. With the help of Ruth’s embroidery scissors and Elmer’s glue she fashioned a very respectable mustache. Check it out. It looks real.

Thanks to Ruth Derick for being a good sport!

Phyllis Horton

We Are Very Thankful

Sixteen valuable and historic items were taken to and surveyed by The Museum Textile Services (MTS), in Andover, MA earlier this year. This company is the premier textile conservation facility serving private collectors and institutions and enjoys a nationwide clientele. From the detailed conservation reports furnished by MTS, our textile staff has selected nine items to be professionally restored as these are well beyond our capabilities. Conservation is an activity that involves cleaning, repairing and preservation, is very expensive, and thus usually only in the prevue of large museums. We are thrilled and greatly thankful that DHS Member Harry VanIdserstine and his daughter Megan have donated the funding that has allowed this restoration effort to become a reality. The restored items will be completed on time for display when the Manse reopens. Our appreciation of his support of the entire restoration effort will be reflected in a plaque in memory of his wife Pamela VanIdserstine to be prominently displayed in the entrance of the Manse.

Pete Howes

The following anecdote comes from a family history donated by its author.

Captain Theophilus Chase, West Dennis

During a voyage to Spain, Africa, etc., the sailing vessel Wm. L. Bradley (of which Captain Theophilus Chase was Captain) dropped anchor just off the Island of Madagascar. The Captain was ill and confined to his bunk with a raging fever and at times very delirious. During the night his son Lafe, who was 1st mate for him, and had been caring for him, fell asleep during the night watch. Great-grandfather, still delirious, but with super human strength, got up and dressed himself, proceeded out to the aft of the ship where a dingy was fastened to a cleat, (it was high tide) lowered himself into the dingy and rowed to the beach.

It was a bright moonlight night, and when the Captain reached the beach, he was in a very weakened condition and terribly confused. He seemed to arouse enough from his stupor caused by the illness, and thought he heard yelling and a drumming noise close by. In another few minutes he fainted and dropped on the sandy shore. The next thing he knew, or felt, was something wet on his face and head; and momentarily he sensed that he was in a very strange place. A chieftain and members of his tribe from the island had seen the Bradley and the small dingy as it made its way to shore. Cautiously the chieftain approached the man, who was unconscious, in the sand, picked him up and carried him to his village. When the Captain regained consciousness he realized he was being nursed back to health by one of the favorite wives of the Chief. Many of the members of the tribe, and the chief could speak broken English having learned it from visiting missionaries. His being able to communicate with them made it a truly meaningful experience for him. Without the native woman treating him with native herbs and primitive means he would never have recovered from the bout of yellow fever he had. Because of her he was back on the road to recovery and once again feeling well and lucid. However, there was a price he was supposed to pay for his rescue and being nursed back to health by the favorite wife. He was informed to show his gratitude by marrying their favorite daughter. It was made clear to him, that if he refused he would pay with his life.

In the meantime Uncle Lafe and members of the crew had rowed ashore searching for Great-grandfather. This went on for days until one night, under the cover of darkness, great-grandfather was able to escape from the native village, and with his sense of direction true, headed for what he felt was the beach. He heard voices in the night, stopping him in his tracks. Listening carefully, he was able to detect English being spoken and recognized some of the voices. Calling out "Ahoy the Bradley" they answered. "Thank God, they have found me!" Silently as possible, great-grandfather, along with those who had found him, reached their dingy, rowed back to the ship, hoisted sails and left the area for safety.

Lora A. Nowtone

1736 Josiah Dennis Manse Museum Update

“Why is the Manse so high?” That question has been asked from time to time, and the answer is quite mundane. The actual amount that the Manse was raised is only 3½ feet – although with the excavation for the cellar showing those bare concrete walls and with no landscaping it looks HIGH! Why was it raised? The 1979

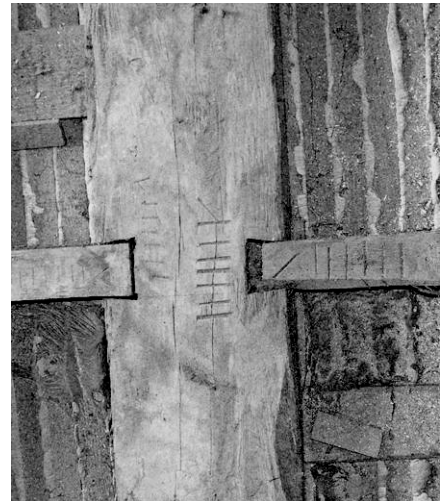
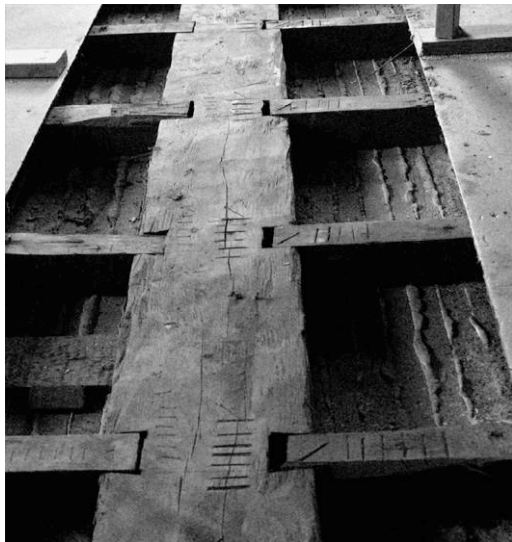
septic system on the schoolhouse side of the Manse was now illegal, thanks to the current wetland laws that prohibit use of that side of the building. The new septic system had to be above the water table, and there needed to be a downhill slope from the bathroom. That set the building height. In order not to raise the building higher, the slope was set at the minimum with the pipe from the Manse lying not far below the driveway, suitably protected from traffic. However, the old manse had sunk about two feet into the ground, enough that the walls of two sides were actually under the soil in parts and rotting, so two problems were solved.

The planned landscaping will result in the Manse being returned to its original prominence as a Town landmark.

Pete Howes

Early Construction Techniques

With the floors removed in the Manse as a part of the overhaul, the early construction technique of numbering the joists and beams became visible. These pieces were hand-hewn on the ground and marked so that the correct joist went in its previously fitted slot. In this photo taken in the Master Bedroom, you can clearly see the sequence of chiseled markings in the wood. The other photo provides a close-up of two separate markings. It's interesting to see the methods that were used for centuries before mechanization and standardization came into use.



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Pete Howes

August Shipping News

Barnstable Patriot, August 1, 1849

“A fine schooner of 75 tons, called the Grafton, was launched from the yard of Messrs Shiverick, in East Dennis, on the 21st inst. She is owned by Watson Baker and others, of South Dennis, is intended for the coasting and fishing business, and will be commanded by Capt Grafton Sears. The Messrs Shiverick will immediately lay the keel of a ship of 500 tons, for Capt Christopher Hall and others, of Dennis.”

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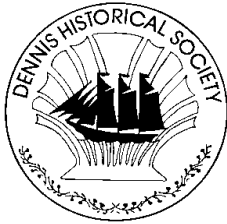
**Note:** All members are invited to attend monthly DHS Board Meetings. **The next meeting is at 3 pm on August 11 at the Jericho Historical Center, Old Main Street, West Dennis.**

***PLEASE NOTE – THE NEWSLETTER CANNOT BE FORWARDED***

Changing from a winter to summer address? Summer to a winter address? Moving? PLEASE NOTIFY US at [dennishs@cape.com](mailto:dennishs@cape.com) or send us a note! The Post Office Will Not Forward Your Newsletter. You loose a newsletter, we loose the extra postage for returning it to us. If your newsletter is returned we have to remove you from the mailing list until we learn where you are.

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## Mark Your Calendars – Upcoming DHS Events

### August 7, 10am-4pm, “Colonial Day on the Green”

A family event organized by the Manse Committee. “Clarence the Cranberry” @ 11am with Cape Cod Author Jim Coogan; Terri’s Village Cemetery Walks @ 11am & 2:30 pm; Spinning; Caning; Cooking; and the Yarmouth Militia; Refreshments.

### August 22, 11am-2pm, “Skills Day at Jericho”

Demonstrations of skills needed for life in the 1800’s; Barn museum bulging with good stuff; 1801 home of Capt. Baker (air conditioned!) with tours and refreshments.

### August 22, Noon-4pm

Open House at West Dennis Graded School, containing an 19<sup>th</sup> Century school room; Exhibit: “Dennis Mariners in the Civil War”; Also Indian & ship exhibits.

### September 11, 6pm

“Twilight Cemetery Visions” with reenactors. Please reserve early as space is limited.

\$13 per person.

Appropriate for teens and up.