



# Dennis Historical Society Newsletter

Volume 38 No. 7

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

Aug 2015

Internet: [www.dennishistoricalsociety.org](http://www.dennishistoricalsociety.org)

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E-Mail [info@dennishistoricalsociety.org](mailto:info@dennishistoricalsociety.org)

The next Board Meeting: is Tuesday, August 11 @ 2:00 P.M., West Dennis Graded School, School St. West Dennis

## Hear Ye, Hear Ye!

### Membership Renewal Date Change

At its July Board meeting, the Board voted to change the date for our annual membership renewal campaign. Starting in 2016, membership renewal notices will be moved back in the calendar year and mailed on or about March 1<sup>st</sup>. This gives us the opportunity to tell you all about the upcoming programs for the season at our four historic buildings, the Josiah Dennis Manse Museum, the Jericho Historical Center, West Dennis Graded School and the Rose Victorian.

To implement this change, 2015 will be a transitional year and you will not receive your renewal notice in August, giving you a few extra free months! That said, look out for a special mailing around November 1<sup>st</sup>. We hope you will give it your careful and considered attention! Thank you for your support for the Dennis Historical Society.

*With appreciation, the Board of Directors*

*Every once in a while I come across a non-Dennis Cape Cod tale that has such a special quality that – well, you be the judge---*

### The Gift of the Sea

*A true tale of Cape Cod, written for the New York World by Lillian May Small, only official woman marine observer in the United States.*

Fishing schooner Polly, Capt. Peter Rider, weighed anchor one spring morning in 1800 and sailed away from Provincetown. She was a staunch craft of eighty tons, bound on a fishing voyage to Chaleurs Bay.

Besides the captain there were on board Jot Rider, the captain's son; Ben Smith, broad-shouldered and strong as an ox; the two Larkin boys, ready to furl a gafftopsail in any weather; George Barnes, Tom Olsen, the Swede; Nick Adams, Bob Atwood, the cook, and Ned, the "boy," a bright lad of ten years, Capt. Peter's nephew.

This was Ned's first trip, and he thought himself quite a man until the Polly had rounded Race Point and

began to roll about in the great green swell of the turbulent ocean; then he wished himself back in Granny Rider's kitchen, where the open fireplace kept a fellow dry, where the dishes didn't roll off the table, where things smelled good and clean, not like the nasty bilge water that washed about in the Polly's run, but where a boy could take off his boots when he went to bed, you know.

But he couldn't go back, so, with a quiet cry now and then, all by himself up in the bow of the Polly, where the men wouldn't see him, he managed to brace up and help the cook down in the fo'cas'tle, and pull on the main sheet and reef an furl, anything except steer; discipline aboard a "codder" was as strict as on a man-of-war and boys were not allowed to handle the tiller. Favoring winds wafted the boat eastward along the northern coast, past jutting, rocky headlands and surf-washed spits, to an anchorage on the fishing banks. Three months the Polly swung at her anchors, at times idly upon the smooth waters, at times pitching wildly with a savage pull at the cable when the tempest beat down upon the stormy waters of that desolate coast.

But now the low-set hull told the story of a successful catch. The last basketful of salt had been "wet," the fishing lines were snugly coiled upon the reels. It was Sunday morning. Capt. Peter was no autocrat, and it was his custom to have "all hands" down to breakfast in the cabin on Sabbath mornings.

"Well, boys," said Capt. Peter, when all were gathered around the rough table, "we've got a putty good trip under hatches, so arter breakfuss I guess we'll get the hook aboard and head the Polly for home."

If there was any one in that ship's company who felt his heart give a sudden bound of joyous anticipation it was Ned. Every day of all those long weeks Ned had scored the mental calculation, "one day nearer home."

From his thoughts of home he was startled by a human cry.

Again he heard it coming faintly across the smooth water.

Rushing to where his uncle sat, tiller in hand, for the Captain would allow no one but himself to guide the Polly out of that "pesky hole," Ned sang out, "Did you hear that, uncle? Somebody is crying for help out there toward that rock."

"Oh, nonsense, boy," replied Capt. Rider, as he gave the tiller a sharp pull to bring the Polly up a point,

"guess you was asleep and had a dream."

"No, uncle, listen; there it is again, 'tis a baby's cry,"

"Bless my skin, boy, I b'lieve yer right; my hearin' ain't extra good, but I do hear su'thin off thar to wind'ard. But what in the world could a baby be doin' out thar? I don't see no vessel nor no boat. But we won't leave no mortal round in this hole to drown."

"Here, George," he shouted, "you and Nick get the boat over and see if ye can find whar that distressed creeter is. And Ned, you kin go along to help. I'll put the Polly's sheets to wind and jog around so you won't lose us."

The tide-ruffled waters splashed and sparkled as the oars, in the hand of the hardy fishermen, rose and fell in unison.

"There, I hear it again," exclaimed Ned from his seat at the stern of the boat; "it comes right from that rock."

The oars sent the boat straight toward the huge rock, on whose sides the tide lapped with a soft rhythmic "swish, swish," gaining slowly, surely. Only a few feet of its slippery top remained exposed, and the water was creeping up inch by inch until soon only a swirl and a fleck of foam would mark the place of the hidden reef.

There on the shelving side of the rock, with the tide lapping her tiny feet, chilled from long exposure and crying bitterly, sat a little girl.

Rough but willing hands soon had the little waif safely in the boat. When they reached the side of the Polly Uncle Peter stood ready to receive the strange charge.

"Well, by hooky, boys," he exclaimed as he received from Ned 's arms the little dripping form. "How could she 've got on to that rock!"

"There's only one way I can 'count for it," said George Barnes. "Some devil wanted to get rid of her, and left her thar to drown."

"Well, I'd like to catch the chap that did it; either he or I'd go overboard," said Ben Smith.

Ned gazed wonderingly into the face of the little child, who now, somewhat reassured, lay smiling in the bunk where the crew had placed her after removing the water-soaked clothing.

"Well, boys," said Capt. Peter after all that was possible had been done for the little charge, "we don't know whar this baby girl came from, and we ain't goin' to try hard to find out; we ain't very handy or well fixed for girl babies aboard the Polly, but, by hooky, we're a nuff site more human than the critters that left that tot out dar on the rock to be killed piecemeal."

The summer winds blew gently on the Polly; homeward she sped. One bright morning the anchor

dropped and the codder was home again in the smooth waters of Provincetown Harbor.

Little Ruth (so the crew of the Polly had named her) had fared well on the voyage, and when the boat had been rowed ashore and the fisher wives and maidens had come down to welcome home their loved ones, great was their astonishment; at what had come home with the Polly's fishermen.

Granny Rider, with her motherly face against little Ruth's cheek, as she received the charge from Capt. Peter, almost forgot to kiss Ned, so interested was she in the wondrous tale. Over and over the story was told, and soon everybody knew of the baby girl that had come in the Polly.

Ruth was the joy of Capt. Peter and Granny Rider's home. Ned was never so happy as when playing with the little sea waif in Granny's kitchen. No one ever learned her history; no one apparently ever cared to do so. Those who go down to the sea in ships learn to leave many mysteries unsolved.

Summer passed into winter, winter into spring, and again the Polly sailed. Ned kissed his little playmate good-bye and turned to the duties of the voyage. Years passed, the boy became a man; Capt. Peter turned the command of the Polly to Ned. Little Ruth had grown to womanhood. They no longer played together as children, but looked forward more eagerly to the homecoming as the years went by. One day in Granny's cozy home two happy hearts were joined, and on the sea, of life their little bark sailed out on the summer sea of years.

Small, Isaac W., *Shipwrecks of Cape Cod*, pp31 et seq. <sup>1</sup>

## And The Living is Easy

Summers were mostly quiet on Cape Cod in the thirties; winters were even quieter. Summer visitors have always been with us but before WWII, they didn't stir things up too much. Most of the house owners came year after year, with substantial year round dwellings "back home" and second homes (cottages) on Cape Cod main streets or by the shore. But there were the inns, B & B's, cottage colonies and some camp meeting mini villages; one as I remember in Eastham, and one in West Yarmouth. There was a grand hotel by Corporation Beach in Dennis Village called the Nobscussett, complete with its own golf course where wealthy city folks used to sail in by Packet Ship, later, by railroad to South Dennis, and across the Cape by

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<sup>1</sup> Highlands of North Truro, MA, Highland Light May 1928, reprinted by The Chatham Press, Inc. Chatham MA 1967

carriage, or motor car for month long stays by the sea. It was, alas, closed by the Depression.

South Dennis had a cluster of family owned houses near the river, called Heirs Landing where some groups from New Jersey summered. I am sure there was more action up Cape, in Falmouth, Bourne, Barnstable and such, but by the time the traffic filtered down here to South Dennis, things stayed calm. As with other vacation centers and college towns, the arrival of these part time citizens caused mixed reaction amongst the Natives. Financially, the migration was a boon, outside money helped to catch up on winter bills and as most of the summer folks were repeaters, they were "on to" Cape ways. Lots of them didn't think of year rounders as a bunch of web footed inbred fishermen scuffling about on the sandbars in search of clams as we were pictured on many of the post cards they sent back home; lots did.

My friends and I were buying nails at our local lumberyard, in one of our hut building phases, and were as usual, light in the finance department, but still treated with friendly patience by the clerk. We were picking, almost nail by nail our small change purchases, and he dutifully pulled them from the various barrels. He was bagging them when a less than gracious wealthy woman who owned a large pillared house near the Church approached the counter. She was obviously expecting instant attention as befitted one who had arrived in a chauffeured limo. Clint W. continued to work with us, his earlier clients, debating the need for some of the bigger, more expensive nails, "Them 20 penny spikes is costly, maybe we ought to stick in a few more of these 8 penny..." and so forth. The woman coughed none too gently for attention, but got none. She asked for service, and was told politely, he'd be with her as soon as this current sale is completed. The nail count went on, and finally in high dudgeon the woman exclaimed, "Young man, I'll have you know I am Mrs. P.!" Clint removed his ever present and fragrant pipe from his mouth with his left hand, cordially grasped her right hand with his and, shook it enthusiastically, "Well I'm Clint W., how do you do! Now, Boys, think you need some shingle nails in this order?" Mrs. P. in higher dudgeon marched back to her limo.

When there were disagreements between the city folk and the natives, they were quite apt to be

about time. Cape clocks and calendars never ran to the same tempo as the visitors and "I'll be there to work next Wednesday," meant different things to the speaker, and the hearer. After one unsatisfactory discussion on this subject, the workman walked off, leaving his would be employer fuming. He truculently remarked to a native bystander, "There sure are some peculiar people on Cape Cod!"

"Yep," agreed the native, "But they'll all be gone, come Labor Day!"

Thacher, Ben, *Whose Boy Be You?* pp23

## STORY HOUR AT ROSE VICTORIAN

Reading is alive and well both in and outside the Teeny Tiny Library. On a very warm July 15<sup>th</sup> visiting Librarian from Dennis Memorial Library, Nancy Symington, read outside and her three granddaughters read inside. Story hour continues through the month of August. Bring your visitors (ages 4-8), invite your neighbors – this is the property of Dennis Historical Society. Please support the dedicated volunteers from the five Dennis Libraries and your membership.

*Thank you, June Howes*



Errata: "Olde Cape Cod Whale Stew" in the July issue was kindly provided by *Nancy Howes*.

Dennis Historical Society  
 P.O. Box 607  
 South Dennis, MA 02660-0607



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## Dennis Village Cemetery Walk

Friday, August 14, 10:00am  
 Meet Guide Terri Fox at the Receiving Tomb



*Tour This Historic Resting Place*

Enjoy Tales Of Many Historic Dennis Citizens  
 Learn of those long gone and those not buried here!  
 Discover the tombs of Reverend Dennis  
 And His Family

### LOCATION

Just West of the Village Green & Dennis Union Church  
 Rt. 6A & Old Bass River Rd., Dennis Village  
 Rain Date: Sunday, August 16, 2:00 p.m.

Dennis Historical Society, Inc.  
 A Not For Profit Corporation

## COLONIAL DAY AT THE MANSE

1736 JOSIAH DENNIS MANSE  
 FAMILY FUN DAY



Spinners



Sturbridge Village Blacksmith

SATURDAY, AUGUST 15, 10:00a.m. - 4:00p.m.

- Candle Making
- Cobbler
- Herbalist
- Historical Dressmaker
- Pie Sale
- Rug Hookers
- Special School Program

Nobscusset Rd., Corner Whig St., Dennis Village

Sponsored By Manse Committee & Dennis Historical Society

www.dennishistoricalsociety.org Phone: 508-385-2232 or 508-385-3528

## TEDDY BEAR PICNIC

Our Third Annual  
 Fun Event!  
 Bring your favorite toy to JERICHO

Saturday,  
 August 22

Noon to  
 3 P.M.



Moms & Grandmoms Must Be Accompanied By A Child



Pre-Register by August 17th - Call: Jinny at 508-385-4441  
 Jericho Historical Center, 90 Old Main Street, West Dennis