

WE TOUR THE SOUTH SEA

We were treated to an all too brief tour of the South Sea, past and present, when Dolly Dodge and Georgia Ferguson brought their slide show to our November meeting. A fine group gathered at West Dennis to view the lovely pictures and fine narrative, which gave us many interesting anecdotes about the Sound side of Cape Cod. Our deep thanks to Dolly and Georgia for another excellent program.

CHRISTMAS AT JERICHO

The ancient sound of handbells and the voices of carollers will help to set the proper atmosphere for our old-fashioned Christmas Party at our lovely old town-owned Historic Center. The house, built in 1801, has seen a lot of Christmases, but none will surpass in memory Christmas 1981, when D.H.S. and the Jericho Committee invite you all to Open House, on Sunday, December 13 from 3-5. Christmas decorations and refreshments will set the holiday atmosphere, and all that is needed is you, to make the day complete. Drop in anytime, from 3-5. The Handbell Choir from the Orleans Federated Church will perform at 3:30 and again at 4:30.

THE MAIL MUST GO THROUGH

Now that we have Thanksgiving "under our belts" so to speak, we can get on to the business of Christmas. Traditionally a time to get in touch with old friends, we all become mail conscious in December. What a thrill to receive a card from across the country, from someone we haven't seen for years! At 20¢ a letter, we can't exactly say we take the mail for granted, but probably not many of us stop to think of this relative miracle of overnight mail delivery from hundreds of miles away. In Colonial days, postal service was haphazard until Benjamin Franklin was appointed to run it in 1751. Post riders, their saddle bags and their trusty steeds were lock, stock and barrel of the mail service. Postage was collected from the addressee, if he could be found, and mail was often left at the local tavern to be perused by any and sundry, until collected by the proper party. Ben tightened up considerably on the system and made the mails more trustworthy. After the Revolution, Alexander Hamilton saw the Post Office as a money-making department. But the high cost of postage created private competition by express companies, and forced the Congress to decrease postage rates in 1845. On the Cape the mail service consisted of one lone rider until the late 1790's. John Thacher, Sr. and later his son John, traveled to Boston via Sandwich and Plymouth once a week, and could carry all the Cape's mail in one saddle bag. In 1792 Nathaniel Stone was appointed the first Post Master within our town. In 1822 Miller Wheldon opened the South Dennis Post Office, and later Thacher Clark became East Dennis P. M., Luther Child - West Dennis and Thomas Howes at Crocker's Neck, which name he changed to Dennis Port. A trivia question for those who enjoy such like - The following is engraved on the N.Y.C. Post Office: "Neither snow nor rain nor heat nor gloom of night shall stay this courier from the swift completion of his appointed rounds." Who said it? Ben Franklin, Alexander Hamilton, John Thacher, or none of the above? Answer elsewhere.

THE WEST SCHOOL HOUSE

One of our town's most precious historic treasures is this one-room school house, which was built in 1770. Experts believe that it may be the oldest school extant in Massachusetts. It originally stood on the point created by the intersection of New Boston Road and Route 6A and served as a school at that site until 1858, when the large graded school was built opposite Carleton Hall. It was then moved to become a barn for Nehemiah Hall near the Dennis Public market. In the 1930's, remodelled, it served as an antique shop. In 1973, when it was threatened with demolition, a group of citizens convinced the town meeting to buy the building and move it to its present location on the grounds of the Josiah Dennis Manse, where it has been restored. Heated only by a large fireplace, the room has wainscoting to the windows and is plastered above. The roof, which is its most interesting architectural feature, has been left open to show its large timbers and Dragon-beam corner construction. Reproductions of the original simple furnishings have been made, and will illustrate the school in its earliest days. The east end of the room will serve as an educational exhibit area, with old school furniture, maps, books and globes. We also are anxious to collect pictures of other Dennis schoolhouses, and class pictures. We hope that all of you will scan your attics, cellars and hay lofts for any school artifacts that you are willing to share with us. Mr. Wilfred Schofield is chairman of the Restoration Committee and will be glad to hear from you.

CALENDAR

- Dec. 13 - 3-5 P.M. - Jericho House - Christmas Open House
Handbell Choir of Orleans Federated Church
Jan. 13 - 7:30 p.m. - West Dennis Community Building - Ben Thacher, "Cape Codgers" -
Stories and legends of old timers
Coming in February - Mid-winter Festivity Luncheon
Also of interest to our members -
Dec. 26 - Christmas Candlelight House Tour in Newport
Jan. 20 - Cape Cod in the Winter with writer and naturalist Bob Prescott
For information call Paula Bacon, 394-5739

THE STREETS OF OUR TOWN

The name of King James Drive in East Dennis reminds us that our ancestors were, by and large, loyal subjects of the British Crown for the first 136 years of their lives here in the new World. Early documents of the Plimouth Colony refer to "Our Gracious Sovereign James the First of England and Sixth of Scotland." But should the truth be known, the old-comers might not be at all pleased to have a street in our town named in honor of King James. It was the ill-treatment which they received at the hands of this gracious sovereign which forced the Pilgrim Fathers to leave their homeland and search for a more pleasant dwelling place. The English Reformation was in no way a move to establish religious freedom for the people. It was rather an exchange of domination, from the Pope and his Cardinals to the King and his Bishops. True Reformation was not an idea that was entertained in any form by King Henry VIII or any of his unhappy children. So when King James, a Scottish Presbyterian, ascended to the throne, the Puritans, who wished to take advantage of the reformation to establish freedom of conscious in religion, took a bold step. They called the Millinary Convocation and asked their new sovereign to hear their requests for a reform in religious attitudes. King James answered their request by pronouncing that he would treat all those who challenged his divine authority by harassing them out of the country, "or worse." That they chose Cape Cod as their permanent dwelling after their exile has certainly been a blessing to this area. So perhaps it's not amiss that we recognize the King who harassed them from their homes with the name of a street.

At this particular time of the year we have another reason to remember King James with a certain amount of kindness. It was as a result of a request by these same reformists - ancestors of ours that he authorized the translation of the Holy Bible into English, so that all could read and interpret it for themselves. The King James Version of the Bible has served as a source of literary and religious inspiration since it was printed in 1611. Ironically, the Puritans who called for its compilation did not use it. They read instead from the Breeches Bible, so-called because the translator chose to have Adam and Eve modestly "cover their nakedness" with trousers instead of fig leaves. But the King James Version is that from which the familiar Christmas story is most often read today. "And there were in the same country shepherds, abiding in the fields, keeping watch over their flocks by night." Agnostic and devout alike must admire the music of this beautiful prose-poetry. So in the true Christmas spirit, let us remember King James the First and Sixth, who has given his most gracious name to one of the Streets of Our Town.

NONE OF THE ABOVE

The quotation on the N.Y.C. Post Office is from Herodotus, who lived in the 5th century B.C. I hope that "None of the Above" interferes with the prompt delivery of your Christmas mail. And may I take this opportunity to wish you all very Happy Holidays.

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