



### CHRISTMAS IS AT JERICHO

From 3-5 P.M. on Sunday, December 15th, the walls of Jericho will enfold a merry group of friends and members of the Dennis Historical Society, as we once again cooperate with the Jericho Committee for our annual Christmas Open House. Our now-famous Negus punch, cider, and appropriate goodies will make the festive board groan, and in the background will be heard the quaint music of Christmas Past, as we listen to tapes of colonial music recorded at Williamsburg. From time to time you may even hear a native Christmas carol, as Cape Cod Christmas Time floats from our antique tape recorder. It will be a pleasant time - it always is. I hope you will be there. Best parking is at Ezra Baker School. Decorations will be supervised by Ann Chalmers.

### TIME TO TRIM THE TREE

Next to Christmas music, my favorite part of the holiday season is the Christmas tree. Dr. Charles Frederick Ernest Minnegerode, a Hessian immigrant, is alleged to have been the first person to cut down and trim a tree for Christmas in this country, in 1842. It was not a common custom until after the Civil War. Then we see reports in the local newspapers of community trees around which neighbors gathered to distribute gifts to the youngest and the oldest members of the village. I believe that the earliest community tree in this town was that established by The Christmas Tree Committee of the village of Dennis, a tradition which continues today. Can anyone help me to pinpoint the exact year that this party was originally held? Carleton Hall became a social hall in the early 1860's, and this celebration seems to be one of its earliest. By 1880, many villages decorated trees and held community parties around them. Now, of course, it just doesn't seem like Christmas without a tree. On Cape Cod the traditional tree is the ubiquitous cedar that grows in our swamps. I have many happy memories from my childhood of trapping into the swamp near Fresh Pond to choose the tree for our South Dennis home. Today we tramp to the nearest empty lot and buy a choice spruce, scotch pine or other variety from western Massachusetts or Maine. It's easier (but a lot more expensive!), but somehow it doesn't smell the same. Oh, well, times do change, and we must change with them. So, in addition to the oldest tree celebration, I will mention the newest. The Old South Dennis Village Association has for the past three years held a tree lighting on the Green at Liberty Hall. The tree that is decorated grows in the park and shows her dress of green in summer and winter, but early in December a ceremony is held, and neighbors gather to sing carols, exchange greetings, and see the lights shine forth on their own tree. Do you suppose that 120 years from now some student of history like myself will be pointing out how long this tradition has survived?

### AMONG OUR NEW MEMBERS.....

Mary Raycroft, Mrs. Nelson Low, Ms. Mary Driscoll, Ms. Lillian Lajeunesse, Mr. and Mrs. Leonard Doherty, Kathryn L. Glodia, Pauline Kennedy, and Thomas Clay. If you meet them, let them know how happy we are that they have joined us.

### SPEAKING OF MEMBERSHIP.....

The dues keep rolling in, and we thank you. However, in some instances, the address which we have is your home address, not your mail address, so some of your mail may be delayed or returned. Please help us by making certain that the address we use is correct.

### OLD-FASHIONED FUN AND GAMES

Not Bingo or Trivial Pursuits, but games from 1850 to the turn of the century will be offered for your entertainment at the January meeting at Carleton Hall on January 12 from 3-5 P.M. Meanwhile, out in the kitchen, we will be making taffy under the supervision of 'old-timer' Sarah Kruger, who never made taffy in her life! Whether you think you could come to Sarah's rescue, or play the old-time games, or just socialize, which really is the point of a social, please be with us.

### POETRY IS THE UNIVERSAL LANGUAGE

Or is that music? At any rate, we were delighted with the response to our "Poetry Edition" and have received several additions to our collection of the works of local poets. Here's a short one, sent to us from New Jersey, and recited, it is said, by Obed Shiverick. It concerns a painter known as "Three-Thumb David" and his love affair with one Susan Taylor.

A painter did in Dennis dwell  
Who loved Miss Susan Taylor well.  
And when Miss Susan came to know  
That painter David loved her so,  
She sent a letter right away;  
"Saint David, come without delay."

Then David packed up all his duds  
And left his brushes in the suds  
And started off for Providence --  
"To seek light work" was his pretense.

## CALENDAR

- December 15 3-5 P.M. Jericho House. CHRISTMAS OPEN HOUSE. Sponsored with the cooperation of the Jericho House Committee.
- December 17 7:30 P.M. Executive Board meets with Phyllis Horton.
- January 1 Happy New Year!
- January 12 3-5 P.M. Social and Taffy Pull at Carleton Hall.  
Snow date - January 19.
- Coming in February -- MID WINTER FESTIVITY. February 15, Colonial House Inn.  
Luncheon at 1 P.M. Save the date. Details later.

### HALLEY'S IS HIGH IN THE HEAVENS

With all we hear these days about Halley's Comet, I thought it would be interesting to see what reactions people had in the past when these celestial fireworks appeared. In the early history of the Cape, notice is made of four comets which appeared in 1664, 1667, 1680 and 1682. I asked my "celestial consultant" why it was that so many comets were visible to the naked eye in such a short span of time. He answered me, as most experts do, by giving me a book to read, and I must admit, I learned a lot. Did you know that in the years 1970-1979 there were no fewer than three comets that were visible to the naked eye? I don't remember seeing one of them! So this frequent sighting in the early years of settlement is not all that unusual. Probably they were noted because the superstitious people of that time thought they were forewarnings of disaster. And remember, people spent more time looking at the sky, especially in a maritime society. Also, no smog or sky glow made the sightings dimmer.

The comet reported in 1682 was undoubtedly Halley's, for that is the year when he made his prediction regarding its return. Unfortunately, he did not live to see his prediction come true, for the comet did return in December of 1758. We know that it was clearly visible in Dennis, for Capt. Thomas Prince Howes wrote much later that his uncle Jonathan Howes had told him often what a spectacular sight it was. I have found no local source which mentions the comet on its next cycle in 1834-35. Some of our present-day citizen's recall the excitement in 1910, but the comet they recall may not have been the predicted return of Halley's, but another comet, so bright that it could be seen in daylight. As scientists became able to predict and explain comets, the general public lost some of the fear which such celestial wanderers had historically generated. In fact, the Great Comet of 1811 was actually seen as a good omen, at least by the people of Portugal. In that year, their grape crop was superior both in amount and quality and the wine proved excellent and valuable. Comet Wine was listed on the wine lists of fine merchants until 1880. Superstition and fear die hard, however. During the year 1910, some enterprising American entrepreneur marketed "Comet Pills". Whatever it was that ailed you, they would cure. Wonder what was in them?

I hope to get a look at Halley's in the winter's sky. I will write about it for my grandchildren. But I will tell you about another celestial phenomena which you and I will probably never view, one which made a deep impression on a young East Dennis boy years ago - when next we meet.

### MEMORIAL FUND REESTABLISHED

For many years, Dennis Historical Society had a Memorial Fund, and contributions were encouraged in memory of those who had an interest in the town's history. When, after many years of service, the chairman of that fund retired, the money was divided between the two historic centers for their use, and a memorial book inscribed with the names of those memorialized was placed in each house. Now the Board has voted to re-establish a memorial fund, and to ask that members and friends of the Society consider making contributions to it whenever they feel it is appropriate. We have reopened the account with an initial contribution from the treasury in fond memory of Byron Peirce and Dean S. Sears, former presidents who have left us in this past year. The money that is given will be used in our efforts to preserve the town's history. If you wish to make a memorial gift, please send it to Mr. Joshua Crowell, Box 936, Dennis, 02638. Indicate in whose memory the gift is given and to whom you would like an acknowledgement sent. For those who have worked to attain the goals of the Society, there could be no finer memorial.

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

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