



### THE FATE OF SCHOONER LUTHER CHILD

The crew of the Schooner Luther Child was resigned to the fact that they must spend the holidays away from their homes in Dennis. So, when the lumber for St. Kitts was at last loaded, even though it was the 23rd of December, no one protested when Captain Joseph Nickerson decided to sail on the first favorable wind. That wind occurred on the following morning, and as the schooner worked her way downstream, the cook was already planning holiday meals for the crew of Dennis neighbors, six in number, who would take the vessel and her cargo on the voyage south. As the mouth of the harbor neared, the wind appeared to freshen, and the captain began his usual routine of taking frequent observations of wind, position, and sea conditions. Capt. Nickerson was not a newcomer to the perils of the sea. He was born in South Dennis, in the home presently occupied by the Billings family on Main Street. His father, Jephtha, had also been a mariner, and his older brother, Moses, had died at sea when Joseph was but a small boy. Joseph had taken time out from his rising career as a master mariner to marry Susan Rogers of South Dennis. They were the parents of six children, and had built a fine home on the road to Searsville, also in South Dennis. This year, Susan and the children, like other families of mariners, would have to be content to celebrate Christmas alone, while awaiting word from their men, as to the success of their trips coasting and traveling to the Carribean. As the sturdy schooner, upon which the hopes of several Dennis families of investors were placed, moved further away from port and further out into the Atlantic, sea conditions began to worsen. Capt. Joseph was not one to recklessly risk the lives of his crew, and he kept an ever watchful eye on the weather. While taking observations near the bow of the ship, a huge wave came over the bow and Captain Nickerson was swept overboard. The Mate, Mr. Chase, and the second officer, Mr. Clarke, were quick to lower the boat in an attempt to rescue their chief, leaving the vessel in the inexperienced care of three boys who only knew how to obey orders, but knew nothing about navigation. Mr. Chase and Mr. Clarke soon realized that they had no chance to find and rescue Capt. Nickerson in the sea which increased in angriness every minute. They also had very little chance of returning to the schooner, as winds and currents were carrying her ever eastward, with no appreciable results from the green crew's fumbling efforts to navigate. With one life boat already lost, it now appeared to the remaining crew that all--those adrift in the boat and those equally at the whim of the wind and waves who remained on the Luther Child--were doomed to become sad statistics in the annals of the sea. The two men in the open boat were most at risk. They had few supplies, little water, and even as the sea subsided, had little strength to attempt to row to land and safety. Those in the Luther Child, while better supplied, had no means of sailing the battered schooner, and were quick to resign themselves to their supposed fate. The ordeal of both groups were equally severe. Mr. Chase and Mr. Clarke drifted for five days in rough seas, but finally were spotted by the crew of the Bark Holbrook and rescued from impending death. The boys adrift on the Luther Child suffered until the 8th of January, when the Brig Forest City spoke them off the Delaware Capes. The boys wanted to abandon ship, but the captain of the Forest City sent a pilot aboard and safely worked the crippled vessel back to port. Thus an angry sea which sought the lives of all six of the Cape men aboard the Luther Child claimed only one. It was small consolation to the young widow, or to the parents of Capt. Joseph Nickerson, one of several South Dennis men who were lost at sea that year. With little but her home as a legacy, Mrs. Nickerson relied on her family and neighbors to support her efforts to raise and educate her six children, a task which she successfully accomplished in memory of her lost husband. Descendants of that young couple live on the Cape today, and it well may be that they are not aware of the drama of the lives of their ancestors as they prepare to spend a quiet Christmas in our tranquil villages. So be it.

### A BICENTENNIAL BIT

I have had a chance to peek at the quilt being created by the members of the Stitch and Chatter Club. D.H.S. is already indebted to this great group of quilters for their help with our school program at Jericho House each spring. When you see the beautiful work of art they are creating for us and our posterity, in honor of this anniversary, I'm sure you will agree that every citizen of the town owes them a vote of sincere thanks. The quilt has as its center piece a rendition of the town's seal, in blue and gold. In the four quarters of the quilt are scenes from the past and the present from each of the five villages, and include buildings, salt works, monuments and our famous Scargo tower. The scenes represent all seasons, and include natural beauty as well as man-made. Skills used include applique, embroidery, and stencilling, as well as quilting. Hundreds of hours will be spent on completing this town treasure, which will be framed and protected so it will last for the next 200 years. I'm so excited to have been allowed to see work in progress being done by Dennis citizens as a tribute to the town, past and present, and as a gift to the future.

## CALENDAR

Dec. 8 2-4 P.M. Christmas Open House at Jericho Historical Center  
Dec. Happy Holidays to one and all!!  
Jan. 1 1992 A happy, healthy, and prosperous New Year to everyone.

### COME TO JERICHO

You are cordially welcomed to attend the Christmas Open House at Jericho. The 1801 house will be beautifully decorated by the West Dennis Garden Club and our hostesses will be members of the Questers dressed in costumes of the era. The D.H.S. Colonel Negus punch will be served, along with mulled cider and other goodies. Do come and get your Holiday Season off to a good start.

### HOLIDAY JOY AND PEACE TO ALL

Whatever your religious viewpoint, or even if you choose not to include religion within the circumference of your life experience, this is the season in which almost everyone shares a joy and a hope that peace on earth will one day be a reality. Christmas is a late comer on the scene of holiday celebrations in New England. The celebration of Christmas is never mentioned in the diaries of Nathan Stone, which end in 1805. There is little evidence that Christmas was celebrated to any extent here on the Cape until the middle of the 19th century. But one son of a pioneer Dennis family was attuned to the glorious hope of the Christmas message as early as 1834. He was Edmund H. Sears, whose grandfather Joshua was born in what is now Dennis in 1709, the fourth generation from Richard Sears, first of that name to settle on the Cape. Grandfather Joshua had removed to Connecticut about 1748, as many young families from the mid-Cape had done, looking for more fertile farmlands, and so Edmund was not really a Cape boy. He cherished his Cape roots, however. One of the accomplishments of his life of which he was most proud was the publication of a book which he entitled "Pictures of the Olden Time", a romantic history of the Sears family on the Cape, which unfortunately for genealogists, was more romance than history. Nevertheless, Edmund Sears has a place of prominence within the Sears family history. He was well educated and became an ordained minister, serving in several churches west of Boston from 1839 to the end of his life. Highly esteemed as a Christian gentleman, and a writer, his lasting contribution to our culture may very well lie in his poetry. Edmund H. Sears was the author of two well-known Christmas carols some of us may sing during this Christmas season. The first was written in 1834, and set to an ancient tune. It is a lesser known but beautiful Christmas hymn, "Calm On the Listening Ear of Night", and emphasizes the Universal rejoicing that the birth of Jesus is supposed to have awakened. It is his second carol written in 1840 with which we are more familiar. Set to music by Richard S. Willis, "It Came Upon the Midnight Clear", is one of this country's most beloved carols. Surely its message today, in this year of economic woes, and difficult times, is real and uplifting. As you hear it or sing it in this Christmas season of 1991, call to mind that its author came from Cape stock, a proud and loyal descendant of the Sears family of old Dennis.

"And ye, beneath life's crushing load whose forms are bending low

Who toil along the climbing way with painful steps and slow,

Look now, for glad and golden hours come swiftly on the wing.

O rest beside the weary road, and hear the angels sing."

A blessed and joyful holiday season to all.

### A ROSE BY ANY OTHER NAME.....

Boy, did we get mail about the small but apparently interesting item last month about the Dorothy Perkins rose! Rose lovers, and Dorothy Perkins opponents alike gave us, as one correspondent put it "more information that we wanted to know" about the rambler rose chosen as our town's official blossom. Now, I can't speak for the Bicentennial committee until we meet on December 5th, so I will reserve comment about Dorothy Perkins and her rose. I will just pique your curiosity by telling you that even though the rambler rose is still the official flower for our celebration, the variety is in question. I will also tell you that I have the identity of the very lovely young woman for whom that rose is named, and I also have, courtesy of the Falmouth Historical Society, a new insight on the development of the rambler rose, which has a strong local connection. Doesn't all that make you rose lovers look forward to the next newsletter? I promise to elaborate on "a Rose by Any Other Name!" next time.

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