



Dennis Historical Society Newsletter

Volume 23 Number 11

Newsletter Committee: Lura Crowell, Nancy Howes, Richard Howes, Beth Deck

December 2000

Calendar of Events



Sunday

**December 10th
DHS Open House
Open 1 – 5 PM**

Christmas open house at Jericho. Visit this charming 1801 sea captain's home to sample some delicious holiday treats and view period decorations.

**Visions of Christmas
Jericho Historical
Center**



Sunday,

**December 10th
Josiah Dennis Manse
Open 1-5 PM
Visions of Christmas**

**Wednesday,
December 13th
7:00 PM**

Board of Directors Meeting
All interested members are
welcome to attend.

Josiah Dennis Manse

**Wednesday,
December 20th
7:00 PM**

Deadline for submissions,
newsletter committee meets.

Dennis Christmas Tree

Nancy S. Howes

Mr. Hayden Richardson with his wife, Margaret, ran a tea room called the Sign of the Motor Car on Route 6A. Until his death in 1922 he held an annual Christmas party for the village children. His work was probably continued by his wife, until the Chatterbox Club, a group of ladies devoted to charitable works, took over in 1925. They carried on the tradition of the Community Christmas Tree, soliciting money from village residents, purchasing and tagging gifts, decorating a huge tree, and holding the annual Christmas party at the Dennis Union Church hall.



Starting in 1929 Santa presented the gifts to all children through eighth grade. Ice cream was provided by the Dennis Public Market and animal crackers obtained by Water McDowell from Sunshine Biscuit Co. were given to each child. Estelle Savage, former owner of the market, played carols on the piano for many years. In 1934 Willie Nickerson built a fireplace so Santa could come down the chimney with sleigh bells ringing to the delight of the children. The bells were originally from Grafton Howes' rig. Gifts of chocolates, jellies or cookies were delivered to the homes of shut-ins and people over 80 by committee members.

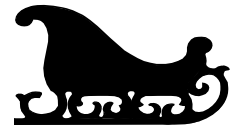
In 1948 the Christmas Party was turned over to a separate committee made up largely of relatives of the Chatterbox ladies.

In 1936 there were 78 children. In 1979, there were 217, even though children only through the fourth grade were now included. Sometime in the 1950's or 1960's the party moved to Carleton Hall. Committee members have changed over the years, with many second or third generation relatives of the original members serving. The date was reluctantly moved to December 23rd in 1979 and even earlier in December later as other events conflicted. In 1982, as the town had grown so much, it was decided to have the parents buy the gifts, tag them, and Santa would still present them to the children at the party.

The committee now sells popcorn and lemonade at summer band concerts and holds an annual yard sale to raise funds. Gifts are purchased and delivered to the homes of children who would otherwise have none, and cookies are

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Dennis Christmas Tree



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still sent to residents over 80 and shut-ins.

Despite the changes that had to be made over the years, it is still wonderful to know that a 123 year old tradition still continues. Mr. Richardson and the Chatterbox ladies would be delighted and very proud of all the hard work carried on over the years.

Information contained in this article came from a scrapbook and account books lent to me by present committee member, Alice Boyle, and from Chatterbox Club records in my possession. Also helpful was a paper written by Carole Bell on this subject in 1979. I also served on this committee for 10 years in the late 1950's and 1960's, as Treasurer at least from 1961-1965. My mother-in-law, Esther W. Howes, was a Chatterbox Club member. NSH

Wanted: YOUR Stories for the Newsletter

Nobody wants to think of himself as “**history**,” but if you live in Dennis, work in Dennis, spend time in Dennis, have family connections in Dennis, you are part of our history. And you do have a story to tell. Won't you share your story with us? You may send contributions to the Newsletter Committee / DHS, P.O. Box 607, South Dennis, MA 02660, or if you would rather tell your story to one of us, call Lura Crowell at 508-385-3268. We will scan any pictures you might have to illustrate your story and return them to you.

FROM THE MEMBERSHIP COMMITTEE:

We want to thank all those who responded to our annual dues appeal to renew their membership in DHS. Burt asked us, “What benefits besides the newsletter do you get from joining DHS anyway?” So we began to think about them again.

- A tax deduction! (It's that time of year.)
- Guilt-free visits to the Manse and Jericho. (As a member you may cheerfully ignore the donation baskets and visit any time the houses are open.)
- Good feelings knowing you are supporting the school program for local children.
- Programs and luncheons with nice people.
- The knowledge that you are helping to preserve the history and historical treasures of Dennis, and a library for research and genealogy.
- Maybe you can think of more. (Bet you're thinking refreshments, aren't you?)

We're taking this opportunity to remind those of you who have overlooked the September 1, 2000 renewal date on your newsletter mailing label that your membership has expired. If you see an orange highlight on your label, this will be your last issue of the newsletter. On January 1st we will sadly remove your name from our membership list. Won't you renew today?

\$10.00	Individual
\$15.00	Family
\$100.00	Individual Life Membership

Checks may be sent to DHS, Box 607, South Dennis, MA 02660



Left to right: Peter Crowell, Dorothy Gill Royal, Adelia "Babe" Wixon West, Ernest "Pete" Eastman, Leo Babineau and Herbert "Red" Chase

The 1867 West Dennis Graded School recently underwent extensive renovations and was reopened to the public with a dedication ceremony on October 1, 2000.

Pictured left are some former students of the West Dennis School who attended the dedication. Are any of our readers former students? Does anyone have any memories to share? We'd love to hear from you!

The West Dennis Graded School House is on the National Register of Historic Places.

Remembering John Burton...

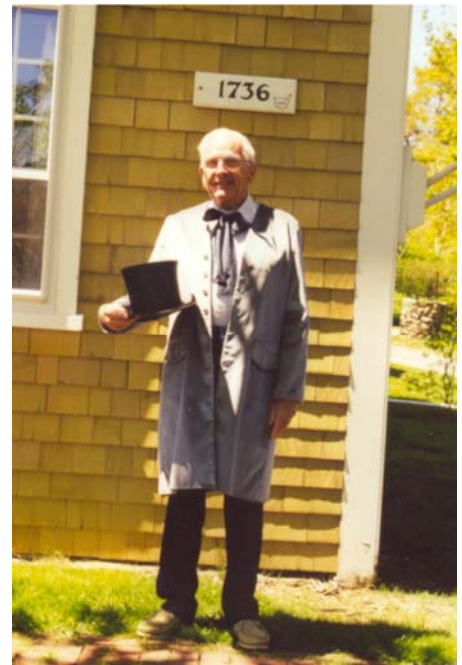
John Burton, a life member of the Dennis Historical Society and a Manse Committee Member since 1991 died in Florida on October 8th. He will be missed, not only because of his volunteering but for the skilled craftwork he produced.

In the summer of 1991 he helped finish off and winterize the attic at the Manse so our spinning and weaving display could be moved there. Later that year, he helped remodel and winterize our old summer kitchen. This was completed in April 1992 in time for our Maritime Exhibit to be set up there.

John hosted in this room for eight summers and contributed much knowledge about ships and their construction. His hobby was model shipbuilding and he produced the Shiverick Shipyard diorama now displayed in the Manse maritime room. He also built and presented to the society a model of a life-saving shallow, a half-hull model of the Belle of the West, and the Wild Hunter quarterboard.

His last gifts to the Manse were a model of the lightship Crossrip and some tools used in ship building.

Our deepest sympathy goes out to Alice Burton and her family. John was a good friend to all at the Manse, a willing volunteer and a consummate craftsman. His work in preserving Dennis' maritime history will not be forgotten.



Dennis Historical Society

P.O. Box 607

South Dennis, MA 02660-0607

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THE WAY WE WERE...

Out and About with our President

At the request of the Cape Cod Commission, in October our President, Ray Urquhart, led an historical and cultural walk around Sesuit Neck in East Dennis. Sixty-seven people met him at the North Side Marina to walk the loop from the harbor, down Sesuit Neck Road to Old Town Lane, to Mooncusser and then to Stephen Phillips Road and back to the harbor. Besides the Shiverick Ship Yard site and the early houses with stories of their own, Ray was able to point out cranberry bogs, marshes, farmlands, and even glacial till. Rumor has it they ran

into an old Cape Codder in red suspenders who "recollected" the good old days. Nickersons from Pennsylvania who are new to the Cape had great praise for our leader. Where will you be hiking next, Ray?



The Christopher Crowell House
Old Town Lane, East Dennis

Photo taken c.1916 courtesy of Lura and Seth Crowell

