



Dennis Historical Society Newsletter

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Excerpted from DHS Newsletter of December 1994:

Christmases Past

Thoughts of Christmas loom ahead with all its attendant hustle and bustle. These same thoughts send us off in several different directions. One is back to our earliest years. The first Pilgrim Christmas was spent, as was many a later one, in work. They came here with an animosity towards the “wanton Bacchanalian Christmases” spent throughout England in “reveling, dicing, carding, masking, mumming, consumed in comotation, in interludes, in excess of wine, in mad mirth” as detailed by Cotton Mather. Our Pilgrim fathers wanted to remove themselves from the excesses of a festival, which had ceased to be a Christian holiday, and had become a time of noisy sports, revels, and personal degradation. Accordingly, the New England colonies had about 200 years of quiet Christmas times devoted to work and prayer. Our present day Christmas, which became fashionable in the 1800’s, seem to have been influenced as much by German Settlers to America with their stories of St. Nicholas as from any other source.

My earliest memories of this holiday are of my grandfather, Alton Robbins. He was the first one in Dennis Port to have a lighted outdoor tree. He painted regular electric light bulbs various colors, wired them together, and hired Cape and Vineyard Electric Co. and, later, Dennis Port electrician Charlie Finley, to put them up to the top of a large spruce tree in his front yard. About this same time his friend Ellis D. Atwood in Carver was doing the same thing, but on a larger scale. That eventually became Edaville. If Gramp hadn’t stopped with that one tree Dennis Port might have become a mecca for holiday sightseers.

On Christmas Eve Grampie harnessed Old Dick to the sleigh or carriage, depending on the weather, dressed up with a black hat pulled over his eyes and a long black cape, and came dashing noisily with sleigh bells jingling to our back door. His cape had inside pockets full of candy and trinkets which he passed out while he demanded in a gruff voice to be told ‘why we were still up this late on Christmas Eve...(probably 6 p.m.)...and didn’t we know Santa wouldn’t arrive if we didn’t go to bed?’ Believe me we didn’t waste a minute getting under the covers after that! I’m not sure how old I was before I realized it was my own grandfather under all that disguise. Years later I knew he did it for his own enjoyment, also to help buy Mother a little extra time for all those thousand things that need to be done before Christmas morning. I also learned later that he went around to some other houses where Christmas would have been a little slim because of the Depression and left something extra for those kids. Thanks Gramp, from all your “kids”!--- and Happy Holidays to you all.

Phyllis Robbins Horton

Dennis Remembrances

Mrs. Lora L. Nowotne sent us these remembrances from her Maryland home. She also noted that she lived on board a ship in Newport harbor with her grandparents ‘at an early age’. We hope that she can share additional historical bits with us.

The following is taken from an ancient newspaper clipping, or part of a clipping that had been “tucked” away in a book. Captain Clinton Chase of West Dennis, was being interviewed, apparently, by a reporter.... I do not know what year it was, but a rough guess would put into the early 1900's or perhaps before that time. By taking my time and using a magnifying glass, I 'II type for future generations that may be interested in sea captains of long, long ago, that which has not completely faded from the printed article..... Captain Baker had a home on Fisk Street and apparently made many contributions to the West

Dennis Community Church on Main Street, West Dennis, MA. He started as a cabin boy at the age of 9 years old. At 19 he took command of his first schooner, the Luther Childs, which was the first one to sail into the Harbor of Malta. Later, another schooner commanded by him was capsized off Norfolk, VA.... Capt Baker was picked up, also the wreck; but the crew was lost. The last of his years were spent as captain of the S.S. Roman on the Winsor Line.

Captain Baker's next door neighbor was Capt Van Buren Chase who retired from over a score of years at sea to take appointment as Collector of Customs in the Barnstable District.

Dr. Ernest Osborne's, (buried in the West Dennis Cemetery) residence on Main Street (and now a gift shop) was once the home of Captain Calvin F. Baker who went to sea at the age of 9. He was captain of different vessels, the last one being the Schooner Calvin F. Baker.

A short distance away was the home of Capt. Luther B. Crowell, 2nd Captain Luther B. Crowell, who also began his sea life at the age of 10. At age 21 he was Master of the Bark Rebecca Crowell. He commanded square riggers and sailing ships and later was connected with the Winsor Line.

Captain Clint Chase went on to relate of an incident about a very fine old lady who was perhaps the oldest living widow of a West Dennis Sea Captain. "At a Church supper in this Chapel (West Dennis Church) this nice old lady approached me, and asked if I was Capt. Clint Chase of Ferry Street. I said I was he and she said "The last time I saw you, Clinton, you were gazing up at the Blarney Castle, Ireland, while your mother and I took turns kissing the Blarney Stone. This woman was Mrs. Rebecca Baxter, widow of Capt. George Baxter. It seems Capt. Baxter's ship and my father's the William L. Bradley, were in port Cork, Ireland at the same time. George Baxter was a captain for many years. In the year 1886 his Schooner Mlle Burnham, on a trip from Cuba to Philadelphia was lost with all hands.

In closing his interview, he went on to relate he could go on indefinitely telling about sea captains, but he closed by saying, "When we heave in our anchor for the last time and sail under sealed orders, if we can leave as clear a record behind as most of the West Dennis Sea Captains, everything will be O.K."

Lora L. Nowotne

A Nineteenth Century Christmas (from December 1979 Newsletter)

The first comers to our beloved peninsula did not celebrate Christmas. Religion was a serious business and left no room for merriment. The only holy days in the church calendar were occasional days of fasting and penance and even more occasionally, Thanksgiving. But as other cultures were woven into the fabric of Colonial life, the celebration of Christmas became more common in New England. From the Dutch came Santa Claus, From the Hessian soldiers who served as mercenaries in the Revolution came the Christmas Tree, from the Episcopalian Virginians the English tradition of Yule log, holly and ivy, and the Wassail Bowl. By 1854 Christmas traditions were so much part of the New England life that a clipper ship owned by Joseph Nickerson and Co. was christened "Santa Claus", and had a figurehead representing the old gentleman complete with his legendary pipe. (Capt. Bailey Foster of Brewster was for sometime Master of this vessel, which was designed by Donald McKay.)

Manse Project Update

While folks were dreaming of stuffed turkeys, the Manse was completely unstuffed just before Thanksgiving. Books went to the West Dennis Library; boxes and displays went to the West Dennis Graded School; boxes from the West Dennis Graded School moved to the Jericho Barn, along with items from the Manse; and the little schoolhouse next to the Manse was 'stuffed' with all sorts of things. The artifacts were carefully packed by Eldredge & Bourne, and trundled off to their Orleans warehouse for safekeeping. In the midst of this all, the antique dresses and bed coverings were taken for conservation to Museum Textile Services and two items went to Northeast Document Conservation Center, both in Andover. The very hard work by many folks made this complex exercise an outstanding success!

Christmas Jam (from December 1999 Newsletter)

Doreen Coombs

- 1 (12 oz.) package of fresh cranberries
- 2 (10 oz.) package of frozen strawberries (thawed)
- 4 cups sugar
- 1 (3 oz.) package of certo

Chop cranberries (coarse) in food processor. Combine strawberries, cranberries & sugar, bring to a full boil and cook 1 min. stirring occasionally. Remove from heat & add liquid certo to the mixture. Bring back to a full rolling boil and boil 1 min, stirring occasionally. Remove from heat & skim off foam. Pour into hot sterilized jars – wipe jar rims. Cover with metal lids and process in water bath for 5 minutes. Makes 6 or 7 jars.

Empty House Party

The “Empty House Party” at the Manse held on Nov. 21st and 22nd almost didn’t happen. We have all heard about “Murphy’s Law”, and we thought that perhaps Mr. Murphy had moved into the attic of the Manse. Besides all the known problems there was the unexpected breakdown of the furnace (no air conditioning in August and no heat thereafter!), then the roof started leaking in the rear stairway plus a huge snafu occurred concerning the ‘emptying’ dates.

The moving company was superb and had *almost* everything removed by Nov. 21st for our party. The items shown in the Maritime room in the photo on the left were patiently awaiting transport to the West Dennis Graded School where they will be on display until the Manse reopens.

Each day of the “Party” the old Manse received at least 200 folks passing through, enjoying our homemade goodies, drinking coffee and leaving donations. Over \$1500 went directly into the Manse Repair Fund.

The Dennis Historical Society and the Josiah Dennis Manse Committee wish to thank everyone who helped in any way to make our Empty House Party warm and friendly. You are all invited to attend the Grand Re-opening in 2011 – date to be announced.

Another Shiverick Contact

We have heard from David Shiverick Smith Jr., a descendant of Asa Shiverick (1816-1894). Dave is based in Costa Rica but works in several countries in Latin America. Dave is President of CAVU, a US public charity dedicated to educating and engaging stakeholders about natural resource management. His website, <http://www.cavusite.org/>, is really worth a look, and his company is providing sorely needed expertise. There is probably a point here to be made about the family that built clipper ships now engaging in international affairs. David’s father has a notable career, including assistant secretary of the Air Force under President Eisenhower and Ambassador to Sweden under President Ford. We hope to keep in touch.

New Members

We are pleased to welcome the following folks into the Dennis Historical Society:

Ms. Beverly Thomas	Mr. & Mrs. Richard Wilson
Mr. & Mrs. John Harrison	Mr. & Mrs. Peter Thorp
Mr. & Mrs. David Crowell	



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RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

Dennis Historical Society Christmas Open House at Jericho



Saturday, December 19, 1:00 – 4:00 p.m.

Jericho Historical Center, Old Main & Trotting Park Rd. West Dennis

Refreshments

Seasonal Decorations

Music

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From our December 1989 Newsletter:

*“Jericho looked lovely as we gathered to inaugurate the holiday season on December 3....”*