



Dennis Historical Society Newsletter

Volume 38, No 11

Send letters & stories to Dennis Historical Society, Box 607, S. Dennis 02660 or to pjhowes@verizon.net

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The next Board Meeting: is Tuesday, December 8 @ 2:00 P.M., Jacob Sears Library 23 Center St., East Dennis

A Mariner's Christmas

The following edited letters between Obed Weldon and his wife will conclude in the next issue. The Civil War had ended in April, and the country had entered a lengthy period of general deflation.

South Dennis

Dec 24.

Dear Father,

I thought I would write you a few lines this evening, to morrow is Christmas, and we are going to hang our stocking. ...I have been to school two weeks to Miss Mary Bangs, the school is full. I have got over as far as Simple Interest, in my Arithmetic. we heard you were going to the West Indies. we were sorry to hear it, for we are very lonely at home.

Please answer this letter.

Grace

Sabbath eve

Dec. 24, '65.

My Dear Husband,

I must say I do feel very lonely since I have heard that you had Chartered for the West Indies.

We Sit here evening after evening and not a person comes in to break the charm... But I think people need to have trouble, to know how to sympathize with those who have seen sorrow, yet I will not murmur, and think if I can that all things are for the best. but it does seem to night when the children were so happy while hanging their stockings as if I must see our dear little Anna^[1] and hear her sweet voice once more, but no, she is at rest with the Father, and the cold December sods lie on her grave. Oh let us live so as to meet her in heaven, the lost Lamb of our place.

“There is no flock however watched and tended
But one dead lamb is there.

There is no fireside however defended
But has one vacant chair.”

.... Little Sarah has not got well of her cold yet and is quite Deaf, looks pale and thin. perhaps you will like to know how “toty” is? well I think she is a great deal better than she used to be, and does better, that is comforting.

and now I must bid you good night. keep up
good cheer if you can
thine,
Sarah.

Philadelphia

December 25th 1865

My Dear Wife

I wish you a merry Christmas and all the Children to this morning we were all ready to Sail yesterday it Snowed and rained all day and this morning it is one of those dense foggs or mists we have after we have cold weather I got a Steam Boat to take me out in the Stream and I thought I would anchor but when getting in the Stream I found there was so much Ice a drifting I thought it prudent not to anchor but hired the boat to tow me down to Chester, which is about fifteen miles below the city ... So ends this day.

It has now been about one month since I come on Board of this vessel and I have been paying out money about all the time I shipped one Sailor and advanced him fifteen dollars and he has run off and I have nothing but his Old Chest left ... every thing goes against me I expected to have been in Boston ere this when I Left home with a good freight but Instead of Makeing fore or five Hundred dollars I find myself minus the amount ... I can recall many a pleasant hour and day but they are of the past and that Is a great comfort to the mind when absent from home however we are to live for the future and not the past and may our days while here be happy and usefull in prepareing for the future It is now Just one year ago Since I left here to go to the South ... I try to banish from my mind all the Scenes at the time but cannot then my Vessel was deep Loaded but now She only in Ballast and one extreme is almost as bad as the other.

...and now I will close this day Journal by wishing you all good Knight.

Wednesday Morning the fogg that we have been haveing this morning has partly broken away ...as I write it has commenced to rain and the Sky and Clouds are heavy and are pictured with very pretty Rainbows I have now been here two days and the prospects are now that I Shall have to Lay another yet and what a month of time I have Spent complete anxiety for Something all the time and when I am through forgetting one another comes and Such is life for those who follow going to Sea However we must not put our hands to the Plow and Look Back But we must press forward to the mark of the High calling and make our Election Sure

¹ Anna Miller Whelden was born 4 June 1858 and died of dysentery 25 Aug 1864, aged 6y 2m 21d.

Decbr 27th this morning the fogg Some what Clear we got under way and the first time we Stood across the river the Pilot ran her ashore and and I will not attempt to describe my feelings I felt so bad I could not Sleep nor eat so ends this 27th day of December of troubles. Morning of the 28th once more afloat and Sailing down the river feeling as happy as can be I now Sit and pen you a few more lines hoping you are enjoying the best of health and fine thoughts while I am passing down the river with a fair wind and thick and rainy anxious to be a going on Journey and return as soon as possible. ... I Shall be under the necessity of closing this Short Epistle and hand it to the pilot to mail for me... now comes the good by to all for the present hoping you will all find a happy new year please except my best and only Love ... Make yourself as happy and comfortable as you can

Yours
Obed

Derick Burton Nathaniel. "Dennis Source Records Volume 2: Obed Whelden Collection", pp301 et seq.

I Suffer fools gladly; for I have always been on good terms with myself

Inward Hol, Morley, Christopher, Doubleday Page & Company, 1923

Counting My Blessings

On a crisp, bright blue November morning eight members of the DHS Executive Board charged into Gage's Lane in Dennis Port armed with rakes and pruners ready to do battle with the faded remnants of summer. They attacked diligently and in 1 ½ hour the old homestead looked ready for inspection. I will be forever grateful for their kind efforts.

On September 29th I fell at my daughter's home in Maryland rearranging the configuration of my right femur. I now have enough hardware to set off all the bells and whistles at any airport. My dear friend Ruth Derick (DHS Librarian) was with me planning to visit her sister, also in Maryland, and she earned a large gold star with her care and concern.

My heartfelt thanks for all the cards, especially the ones everyone signed at the Annual Meeting, notes and phone calls, including one from Pete and June Howes in Bordeaux, France who said they were toasting to my speedy recovery with the local produce.

It is so good to be home blessed with all the dear friends I am so lucky to have.

Thank you.

Phyllis Horton



Photo L-R: Larry Symington, Dave Talbott, Phyllis Horton, Betsy Harrison, Bonnie Hempel, June Howes, Pat Corcoran, Ruth Derick. Terri Fox had to leave before the photo-op.

Richard Sylver kindly provided this next article for our readers. It is divided between this month and the next issue.

Captain Daniel Robbins of Dennis²

At Fourteen a Sailor, at Ninety a Farmer, the Cap'n Has Had a Long and Varied Career

"I hove my pillowcase full of clothes out of the chamber window and jumped out after it." That is how Captain Daniel Robbins of Dennis begins the story of his life. He goes on to explain why he did it. "I was running away—running away to sea. My folks didn't want me to go. All my brothers had gone to sea. I was the youngest, and they wanted to keep me at home. So I had to go the best way I could."



CAPTAIN DANIEL ROBBINS
At 14 He Ran Away to Sea; at 90 He Tells the Tale.

This happened in the middle of the night, when he was fourteen years old. A friend of his—"a lot older man - was going to ship from Boston, and had promised to

² Crosby, Katharine, Cape Cod Magazine, March 15, 1927

pick him up and take him along, if he was out on the main road when he drove by. Young Daniel was there, pillowcase of clothes over his shoulder and love of the sea in every inch of him. They went off to Boston together, and he didn't see the Cape again for *going* on two years.

The two boys—the friend was only about twenty himself, but that of course seemed "a lot older" to the youngster—shipped on a bark bound for "N'Orleans." Daniel was rated as an ordinary seaman, thanks to experience on his brothers' boats, where, among other useful accomplishments, he had learned to steer. His actual duties for most of the voyage were those of a cabin boy, serving the meals in the officers' cabin and helping out in the galley. But he was soon taking his trick at the wheel with the rest, and lending a hand with the sails.

"I was light weight, so they used to send me up high," he remembers; "all the topsails were stationary, and you had to go aloft to set them."

"Did she carry t'gallants'Is?" I asked.

"T'gallants'Is? Yes! Riles, too. Yes, and skys'Is!"

He had good cause to remember that. It was on his last long voyage—but I am getting ahead of my story. The bark lay over in New Orleans to refit; after two months the restless lad got tired of waiting for her and shipped in the *square-rigger Caroline and Mary Clark*, loaded with iron in her lower hold and with coke between-decks, and bound for the far-away port of Archangel.

That was a trip for you! 72⁰ north latitude, icebergs in July, and a sun that never set, day nor night. For the most venturesome tourists these days, in their fine big ships, the North Cape is the place where one turns round and heads for home. But the North Cape was a mere incident for the *Caroline and Mary Clark* and the little boy making sail on the skys'l yard. Up and on and around they went, and left their load at Archangel, and took on another quite different—hemp and flaxseed—for New Orleans.

His pal had stayed behind, but when the boy got back he found him waiting for him. The older chap was, it appeared, homesick. He wanted to go back home to Cape Cod.

"I didn't know it at the time, but what he really wanted," the Captain confided, "was to get married. There was a girl he was engaged to—but he didn't dare go home without me. He was afraid folks would think he had kidnapped me. So I had to go home with him."

"Stay long?"

"Three days," said the Captain.

There was still a good bit of the world he hadn't seen, you understand. It was no time to settle down to fishing. His next voyage took him over to Rotterdam, and then through the Mediterranean, to a place

pronounced in old Cape fashion, Tryeast. "

The Captain had his wife and their little girl along. I was a regular seaman by this time. I used to like to steer, because at dinner time the little girl would come up the companionway from the cabin and give me a piece of cake. She and I was great chums, and she used to stay round and talk. "The Captain's wife owned half the ship, and usually the captain and the mates owned shares in the vessels they sailed on. I heard a lot of talk about their interests, and about how much the officers on other ships owned in them, and all, and it made me want to work up to where I could own my own vessel. The Captain said if I would stay by him he would make a man of me some day. But I figured it would be a long time before I got anywhere on a big vessel, because I didn't have anyone to push me. Seemed to me it would be better for me to start in small and work up, seeing that I'd have to do it all myself."

Owing to the illness of the Captain's wife, the Captain left the ship at one of the ports and took her back to the States. A young captain, the old one's brother-in-law, took nominal command, but in reality the old mate "was a kind of a nurse for him," so they got along all right. But no cargo could be shipped at Trieste because "England and Russia was at war.

Back they came, to Boston, this time, and were three days beating back and forth off Boston Light, trying to make the harbor. "

It was cold—it was awful cold. We were all iced up, rigging, spars, every- thing. I had a wooden club tied round my neck."

"What was that for, Cap'n?"

"Break the ice off the sheets with, so's we could tack ship. You couldn't handle the ropes till you'd smashed the ice off."

"Tell her," said the Captain's daughter, "about the time you went aloft."

"That was the time," he said, "we'd just made the harbor, after all that tacking. Captain says, 'Boy, you climb up and run the pennant halliards, and set the colors.' That meant going way up to the top of the main mast, that was all ice, and the rigging iced up, too. But I went, of course. I'll never forget it. That was seventy-five years ago, too. They sent me because I was light. A heavier man couldn't have done it. Part of the way I had to shin up over the icy mast. "My hands lost all feeling. The only way I could tell I was holding on to anything was to look and see if I was. I couldn't feel a thing. Well, I got up there, way up to the top of the mast, and I got the halliards rove. Then I tied the ends to my hands, so they wouldn't slip and all my work have to be done over again, and dumb down. Part ways down, I fell. It was easier to fall than to climb any more. I let go and fell to the deck. No, it didn't kill me. I'm here yet!"

~~~~~Continued next month~~~~~

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ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

Sunday, December 13, Noon to 3:30 P.M.

## Dennis Historical Society Christmas Open House

*Costumed docents will greet you  
throughout the festively decorated  
historic home of Rev. Josiah  
Dennis. Enjoy holiday  
refreshments with us  
1736 Josiah Dennis Manse  
Museum  
77 Nobscussett Road  
Dennis Village*

