



Dennis Historical Society Newsletter December 2017

Volume 40, No8

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**Board Meeting Tuesday, December 12, 2 pm, Jacob Sears Library, 23 Center Street, East Dennis
Members Welcome!**

Please send information & stories for the newsletter to Dave Talbott at the DHS Website email address: info@dennishistoricalsociety.org



New Directors Phil Catchings & Kathy Dorshimer flank Carole Bell

the past year. She paid particular attention to the Rose Victorian volunteers who selflessly worked countless hours to improve, enhance and sustain the Rose Victorian property. Particular recognition was paid to Rebecca Gallerizzo, June Howes, Pat Sakellis and Jean Wickstrom who lead the volunteers by setting an exemplary example. Fondly remembered were Burt Derick and Pete Howes who themselves worked tirelessly in the effort. Diane was followed by reports from Bonnie Hempel, Clerk/Secretary and Larry Symington, Treasurer, which were accepted as read. Dave Talbott gave the report from the Nominating Committee which concluded with a motion calling for approval of the following slate of Officers and Board Members:

2016-2017 EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

PRESIDENT, Diane Rochelle
VICE PRESIDENTS, Dave Talbott, Terri Fox
TREASURER, Larry Symington
ASSISTANT TREASURER, June Howes
CORRESPONDING SECRETARY, Ruth Derick
CLERK/SECRETARY, Bonnie Hempel
TRANSITIONING PRESIDENT, Betsy Harrison

APPOINTED DIRECTORS

HISTORICAL COMMISSION, Bob Poskitt
JERICHO & MEMBERSHIP, Dawn Dellner
JOSIAH DENNIS MANSE, Terri Fox
WDGS, MARITIME MUSEUM, Phyllis Horton
ROSE VICTORIAN, Pat Sakellis
CURATOR/ARCHIVIST, Phyllis Horton

ELECTED DIRECTORS

Phil Catchings, Kathy Dorshimer, Bo Durst
Mary Kuhrtz, Bob Poskitt, Jan Ward
(Candidates for election are italicized)

LIBRARIAN, Ruth Derick
ASSISTANT LIBRARIAN, Paul Lapense
PROGRAMS, Betsy Harrison
PUBLICITY, VACANT
TECHNOLOGY, Jan Ward
DIRECTOR AT LARGE, VACANT

The slate was approved by unanimous vote.

Note the two vacancies! The Board would love to have them filled! Please step up to the plate!

After the voting, a gift from the Board was presented to Jinny Devine thanking her for her years of dedicated service to our Society and the Board. The card which accompanied the present read, in part, *From your terms as our president, serving at all of the museums, setting up and taking down for events, baking, programs, committees, book tables, the list goes on. You have always lead by example, willing to pitch in and do whatever needed to be done to make things a success.*

Long time DHS member, Jane Tatibouet, attending with her daughter, Cecily Nisbit, was recognized as having traveled the farthest to attend the meeting, from Honolulu, Hawaii! Jane will be a regular contributor to our newsletter going forward. Her first article, *A Baker, A Cake and A Column*, will appear in the January 2018, newsletter.

Next, June Howes gave a wonderful tribute to all who had worked so hard to sustain and improve the Rose Victorian. She recounted the history of the Rose; spoke admiringly of Kathy Roche and what she had done for the DHS with her bequest; spoke glowingly and fondly of all the things her husband Pete had done when the property was acquired during his DHS Presidency. When June concluded her remarks, President Diane Rochelle warmly said that "history is not just dates and facts, but history is also memories".

Following dessert, our guest speaker, Jay Stradal, of both the Orleans Historical Society and the Nauset Model Railroad Club, gave an entertaining and informative talk entitled *From Rails to Trails*, a history of railroads on Cape Cod. The PowerPoint presentation emphasized Dennis, and included pictures from the DHS archives. Jay collaborated with our Curator, Phyllis Horton, in preparation for the talk.



Dave Talbott & Jinny Devine



June Howes



Jay Stradal

(All photographs in this issue, courtesy Bob Poskitt)

After an interesting question and answer session, which added to the program because of members' recollections of their experience with railroads on Cape Cod, Diane accepted a motion of adjournment.

That motion concluded a very enjoyable combination of business, our Annual Meeting, and pleasure, a delightful lunch, socialization, and a fascinating presentation of some important Cape Cod History!

Our thanks, especially to Jinny Devine for all the work which went into making this event such a success! Jinny after catching your well earned breath, there's an opening for you on the Board any time you choose to return!

DPT

DHS Board Visits Oldest House in Dennis



On June 13th, before the monthly Board meeting, the Board enjoyed a wonderful tour of Daniel Baker's House built in 1680. Francis Baker settled in Yarmouth/Dennis in 1635, when he arrived from England, choosing to live at the head of the Bass Ponds. He just happened to build adjacent to the William Twining family who had a daughter, Isobel. Nuptials followed in 1641. Francis and Isabel lived long and happy lives at the head of Bass Pond, producing a family of eight, six sons and two daughters.

Four Baker sons chose to move a few miles south to the Bass River Cove area, now known as Bakertown, where South Dennis and West Dennis meet, when they settled down. Son Daniel married Elizabeth Chase in May 1674, and built his home in 1680, on present day Center Street. Their descendants inherited the homestead for centuries, until it became the home of Ezra Henry Baker (1859-1932), a prominent Boston banker and ninth generation descendant of Francis and Isabel.

In 1930, the Dennis Port Graded School burned to the ground. Those students were dispersed between West Dennis Graded School, South Dennis Graded School and Totten Hall, now Liberty Hall in South Dennis.

Dennis voters were in a dilemma, whether to rebuild the Dennis Port School or to build a new grade school for all Dennis students, grades 1 through 8. Long, heated discussions were held for weeks at every Post Office, Lodge meeting, or sewing circle. One side declaring, "Well, every village should have its own school. If it was good enough for Father and me, it's good enough for my kids!" The other side said, "It's time to move into the future, by having a school consolidating the whole town, so they are all taught at the same level", Lifelong friendships became rather strained in some quarters. One factor which, no doubt, had a large impact on some decisions, was that Ezra Henry Baker offered to donate his homestead lot of sixteen acres to the town on which to build the school. A Special Town Meeting to determine the outcome was held at 2 pm, April 5, 1930, at the Cape Playhouse, it being one of the few places in town that could accommodate the expected number of voters. 513 registered voters attended, filling the Playhouse to capacity. After four hours and fifty-five minutes of "considerations" the vote was taken with a majority accepting Ezra Baker's generous offer and choosing to build a new consolidated school, but it was close. Succeeding generations have been grateful that it passed! The new school was named the Dennis Consolidated School. In 1949, the Annual Town Meeting voted to rename it the Ezra Henry Baker School, a fitting change for a generous gift.

Ezra's homestead was on part of the property, so it was moved around the corner to 54 Pine Street, where it is today. The house and carriage house have been sparingly renovated through the generations, as has every other ancient Cape Cod house. The current owners and caretakers are Mr. and Mrs. Greg Urgonski .

Thanks to the Urgonskis for their special care of this 337 year old Dennis jewel. Their dedication is appreciated.

Phyllis Robbins Horton

Bayberry Candles on New Year's Day

There is a tradition in my family, and perhaps in other old time Cape families, to burn a bayberry candle on New Year's Day.

When I was a senior at Yarmouth's John Simkins School (Dennis had no high school in those years), I caught the West Yarmouth bus to the Barnstable town line, then walked to the Colonial Candle Co., opposite Bradford's Hardware in Hyannis, to Mrs. Walter (Mabel) Baker's home. She was the founder of Colonial Candle Co.

A senior at Barnstable High School joined me. We sat across from each other at Mrs. Baker's kitchen table with a tray of hot wax between us and painted Christmas trees on the side of column candles with the hot wax.

Directly across from me on her kitchen wall was an embroidered sampler with the verse: "On New Year's Day, Bayberry candles burned to the socket, Bring health to the home and money to the pocket." Every box of her bayberry candles had a paper inside with that same verse on it. A company that purchased Colonial Candles now promotes them at Christmas time with a different verse.

My great grandmother, Phebe Chase Murray, said the same verse when she burned hers on New Year's Day. She also went out of her front door, leaving it open, then ran around to the back door, coming in rapidly and closing it with a bang. She then hurried to close the front door. The idea being that she took all her troubles with her and got to the back door before they did. I always thought it was somewhat strange, but didn't want to question my great grandmother. However, in recent years I have learned of other old Cape Codders who did the same thing, some banging pots and pans while going around the house. I have also learned there were many other superstitions that was part of their daily lives. Perhaps that was their diversion, where we now have TV or the Internet.

I have Grandma Phebe's hog scraper candlesticks that she used, and every New Year's Day, I burn bayberry candles to the socket in them, no matter where I am on that day—just to be on the safe side and to honor Gram's tradition.

Happy New Year to you and may 2018 be a wonderful year for all of you, Phyllis

The Hall House on Hall Street

Reader response with new information was terrific! **YES**, the map was incorrect! There was enough new information to do a follow up Article which will be appearing in the February newsletter. (Right map included)

Thank you to all who provided the information!

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Wishing everyone a Joyous Holiday Season!



A Note to the DHS Membership

Our Annual Meeting/Luncheon was held on October 21st. If you did not receive an invitation and would like to receive one next year, please email us at:

info@dennishistoricalsociety.org

Send your name and address and a note requesting that you be added to next year's mailing. Thank you!

The 2017 DHS Annual Appeal

Soon, members will receive their Society's annual appeal letter asking for support for *wish list* items for each of our three museums.

Please give generously! Your tax deductible contribution will greatly assist our museum volunteers in fulfilling our Mission Statement.

**To Preserve, Promote & Present
the history of Dennis, Massachusetts**

Christmas at the Manse

Sunday Dec. 10 from Noon to 3:30 pm

1736 Josiah Dennis Manse Museum

61 Whig Street, Dennis

Enjoy natural holiday decorations and refreshments in our festive colonial home. Part of the Dennis Village Stroll, a trolley whisks you from the Village Green Gazebo to the Manse.



No admission, donations appreciated