

DENNIS HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER
FEBRUARY 1980

MID-WINTER FESTIVITY

To fend off "The Februarys" D.H.S. is planning another Mid-Winter Festivity to be held this year at The Columns, West Dennis, on February 16 with social hour at 12:30 and luncheon at 1. The menu was published last month. We will have some pictures of West Dennis in the old days, Pauline Derick will tell us something about Obed L. Baker's beautiful house, and Jack Clarke from Cape Cod Planning and Economic Development will give a very brief talk about the advantages and possibilities of recycling old buildings for new uses. Cost of luncheon is \$5.50. Mail your check for a reservation to Mr. Joshua Crowell, P.O. Box 936, Dennis, Ma. 02638, indicating your choice of Seafood Crepe or Chicken Supreme. This is always a most pleasant interruption of the Winter Blues.

SCUTTLE WATCH AUTOGRAPH PARTY

We are happy to announce that the Jericho Committee and the Dennis Historical Society are sponsoring a tea to announce the re-publication of Scuttle Watch, at which time our beloved historian, author and friend, Marion Crowell Ryder will be the guest of honor. It will be held on Sunday, February 3 from 3-5 P.M. at Jericho. The lace table cloth, china cups and silver tea service are coming out to make this a most important occasion. Chairmen of the event are Mr. and Mrs. Gilbert Reynolds and Mr. and Mrs. W. Jeremiah Burke and hostesses will be young ladies from the Wixon School. Mrs. Ryder will be dressed in the costume of yesterday and will sign copies of her book, which may be brought in or purchased at the tea for \$4.95. Special invitations have been issued to librarians, teachers and school children, and here is a special invitation to you to join us as well.

A HOUSE -- PLUS

Dennis is blessed with many fine examples of a style of architecture known throughout the country as the Cape Cod house or cottage. Modern architects have taken some liberties with this style - which actually might be called three styles, known popularly as the half-house, three-quarter house and full Cape. A more historical classification can be found in the writings of Shebna Rich of Truro (1824-1907) who refers to the largest type as a double house, making the smallest simply a "house" and the middle size a "house-and-a-half." All models are a story and a half in height, all have an interior chimney. The small "house" measures about 20 feet across the front, the door generally at the left (or west) side, the chimney and stairway behind it and two windows, each with nine-over-six "lights" in the east front parlor. The "house-and-a-half" adds about 8 feet in width, one small bed chamber to the west of the front door, with one window. The "double house" is from 34 to 40 feet across, and has four front nine-over-six windows. It has been popularly believed, and often stated, that one of the advantages of the Cape Cod house was that it was readily expandable, the single house sometimes growing into a double house. There are some old Cape houses where it can be observed that this has in fact occurred. But in most cases the three exist as separate entities. Our Christmas Tea, which was held at Jericho, a fine double house built in 1801, prompted Mr. and Mrs. Robert Fisher to invite some of us to see their tiny single house in South Dennis. Mrs. Fisher gave us a guided tour of their charming home, largely unaltered since it was built about 1771. It is southfacing, "without regard to the street or road," with its front door and chimney off-center at the west exterior wall, and all of the classic interior features of windows and floor plan. But the most exciting part of this house is an architectural clue which it provides. In the keeping room between the great chimneyplace and the west wall a cupboard door about 18" wide reaches from floor to ceiling. We were invited to step into this space between the chimney and the outside wall, and there instead of finding the solid chimney, we saw a complete, unused (and unusable) fireplace. Apparently when John Baker built this little house in 1771, he intended to expand it to a double house when family and fortune grew. So he instructed the housewright who built it to put the third fireplace ready in the chimney, to avoid alterations later. But his dreams for his little house never materialized, and there today, 200 plus years later, we have silent confirmation of the tradition of the expandable Cape Cod house.

MINI-COURSE ON THE HISTORY OF DENNIS

In cooperation with the DY community school programs, D.H.S. is proposing to present a mini-course giving an overview of the history of the town, from the pre-historic period to the present. The courses as planned will be presented in four sessions, on Wednesdays, March 12, 19, 26 and April 2 from 2:30 to 4 P.M. at the Nathaniel H. Wixon School. As visualized, each afternoon will include guest speakers, exhibits, craft demonstrations and audio-visual presentations. It is designed as a family type course, and special activities will be held simultaneously of appeal to children, so that families can learn local history together. All are welcome to attend any or all of the sessions, and details will be made available as soon as approval is received. We are excited about the opportunity to expand our educational program in this direction and hope it will prove successful.

A VIEW OF THE CANAL

Ranger Mario DiGregerio of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers told a large audience of the history of the building of the Cape Cod Canal, the widest sea level canal in the world, through which 12,000 vessels pass annually, at the January meeting of D.H.S. Originally a toll canal, it proved financially disastrous to its builder, August Belmont. In 1928 it was purchased by the U.S. Government and is now controlled by the U.S. Corps of Engineers. Thanks to Byron Pierce for arranging this great program for us.

CALENDAR

Feb. 3 -- 3-5 -- Jericho House -- Tea for Mrs. Ryder -- Scuttle Watch will be autographed
Feb. 16 -- 12:30 -- The Columns, West Dennis -- Mid-Winter Festivity -- Reservations needed
Feb. 6 and 7 -- Bus Tours, New Bedford
Feb. 21 -- Executive Board Meeting -- home of President Hart
March 12, 19, 26
 and April 2 -- Mini-course, History of Dennis -- 2:30 to 4 P.M. -- Wixon School
March 18 -- 7:30 -- V.I.C. Hall -- "The Hands of Time" -- Kirkwood Brown
May 1 -- Bus Tour -- Mystic Seaport

SPEAKING OF TIME

Clocks were an expensive luxury when they first became a household item on Cape Cod. The church clocks, in prominent places throughout the villages did well enough for most time-keeping. But as prosperity increased so did ornamentation of the home, and lovely timepieces became much sought after. Kirk Brown will tell us about clocks at our March meeting, and speaking of time, please note the time and place have been changed. It will be at 7:30 P.M. at V.I.C. Hall, Dennisport, March 18.

THE STREETS OF OUR TOWN

The dark days of winter will soon give way to longer, lighter days and smaller electric bills, which were not a problem to the old-comers. Earliest settlers went to bed and arose with the sun, and so had little need for artificial light, or clocks either for that matter. The additional light that was needed came most often from the fire. Some thrifty housewives saved animal fats for dipping tallow candles. Bees wax and bayberries also were used, but any of you who have tried the latter would agree there would not be time enough to make many candles by this tedious process. More commonly, evening light was provided when necessary by burning small splits of pine in a pan or on the hearth of the keeping room. Because of the high resin content, this gave forth a bright enough light so as to be able to accomplish what few tasks remained to be done after sunset. The wood was called candlewood, and a street running south from Upper County Road in Dennisport has that name. The use of the candlewood for light was just one of the many useful things that the Indians taught the English settlers, and I'm sure they were grateful. So you in turn should be grateful too, to the inventor of electric lights, as you pass Candlewood Lane, one of the streets of our town.

WEATHERWISE AND OTHERWISE

Wall Street Journal, 1945 - "What this nation needs is a return to the practice of wearing long ones in the wintertime. A generation and more ago, men, women, boys and girls put on long ones in October and wore long ones until spring."

The above was written in another era of fuel shortage. At that time the cause was World War II. Today I can report that these cumbersome but cozy "long ones" are making a spectacular comeback. The Sears-Roebuck catalog for 1902 advertises a warm union suit for men for \$1.50. At Christmas time I priced just such a pair for \$17.95! I thought I could find something interesting to tell you about the origin of the term "union suit." In my mind I had a vague Yankee notion that it had something to do with winning the Civil War. But it seems that the union suit is of later origin, about 1888, and it derives its name from the fact that shirt and drawers are united in one piece. Better take advantage of the end of the season sales and get some long ones for every man, woman, boy and girl in your family. The fuel shortage is here to stay, and maybe what this nation needs is not so much a 5¢ cigar as a good \$1.50 union suit!

NEW BEDFORD, SALEM AND MYSTIC DAY TOURS

Do you need a change of scenery during the long winter? A series of tours of early sea ports has evolved. New Bedford with its whaling museum, Glass Museum and Seaman's Bethel is being visited again on Wed., Feb. 6 and Thurs., Feb. 7. The cost for transportation, admissions and guide service is \$10. Salem will be toured on March 5, with an emphasis on the China trade and Salem's importance as an early port. The Salem trip costs \$15 with lunch an optional \$5 more. Mystic Seaport is the May 1st destination with brunch along the way. More details or reservations available from Paula Bacon at 394-5739. Call early as the trips fill quickly.

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