



MID-WINTER FESTIVITY DEADLINE

You should have already made reservations if you plan to be at the luncheon at Christine's in West Dennis on Feb. 13. If you haven't, don't write, call Josh and Elinor at 385-3689 right away. We are celebrating Lincoln's birthday with a talk by Alan Cavanagh which he calls, "Abraham Lincoln: A Good Guy or a Bad Guy?" Alan is a life member of D.H.S., a former Social Studies teacher, a good historian, and has a great sense of humor. You'll enjoy him. Door prizes, as usual, and among those businesses which have provided them are: Chase House of Flowers, Dennis Village Mercantile, Scargo Stoneware Pottery and Purity Supreme. You must be present to win!

COLOR FEBRUARY RED, WHITE, AND BLUE

It's our shortest month and usually our coldest, but February must rank as a month whose theme is patriotism. It contains the birthdays of two of America's greatest men, and it is time for this nation to remember all of the men who have taken up this ultimate challenge of leadership. The facts and folklore about Washington and Lincoln are well-known, (although Alan's talk at the luncheon may reveal something you never knew about Lincoln). What about the rest of the 39 men who have been our presidents? Test your knowledge. 1. There are actually four presidents who were born in February. Name the other two. 2. Four presidential birthdays occur in 3 other months, January, March, and April. One month has no birthdays of Presidents and one has 6. Name them. 3. A U.S. President actually made an official public appearance here in Dennis. Can you remember who, and when? Answers next time, or if you just can't wait, they'll be announced at the luncheon.

DENNIS GOES TO THE WHITE HOUSE

Despite the appearance of a U.S. President here alluded to above, Dennis cannot claim to be a mecca for chief executives. But don't blame them. They would have come, if they had known what a nice town it is. Our town has not been totally unknown to the inhabitants of the presidential mansion, nevertheless. At least two of our citizens have made personal calls on the chief executive. Capt. William Garfield was a cousin of Pres. James Arthur Garfield. Shortly after Garfield's inauguration, Capt. William found himself on a coasting voyage in the South and detoured via the Potomac to bring his complements to his cousin. It must have been an interesting meeting, as the crusty sea captain, accustomed to command, sat with the newly installed President, exchanging family gossip over a cup of tea. It would be only a few months before the Garfield family in West Dennis would wait anxiously as Pres. Garfield hovered near death, the victim of an assassin's bullet. When he died on Sept. 19, 1881, their's was a special sense of loss.

There was another Dennis caller to the White House whose visit brought greetings from Cape Cod to Washington. David B. Phillips also lived in West Dennis, but in 1925. He was of a generation now vanished, perhaps the last one, of true Cape Cod "characters". Noted for their independence, honesty, and hard work, these men were the product of tough economic times. Mr. Phillips was a friendly, outgoing jack-of-all-trades, who could earn his living at whatever job came to his hand. But he was exasperating to the summer folks who hired him. For, typical of his breed, on the full moon sea clam tide, David would leave his job unfinished and hitch a ride to the north side, to fetch a pailful of clams for a pie. If scallop raking was good, you'd find him down at the cove with his waders, gathering a nice mess for a stew. And should the tide be low at mid-day, that lunch break would extend for as long as it took to dig a dreaner of soft shells. You probably never met David Phillips, but you may have seen his picture. He was a good-looking, ruddy-faced, fisherman, with a full beard and twinkling Cape Cod blue eyes. A post card producer recognized him as what folks imagined was a typical Cape Codder. He convinced David to pose in his yellow slicker, and this picture became one of the Cape's best selling post cards in the '20's. Well, anyway, David Phillips decided to visit Washington, and call on Pres. Coolidge in 1925. So he dug a dreaner of steamers, and picked a bunch of poseys and took the train south. This is a meeting I wish I had witnessed--the taciturn president and the garrulous fisherman head to head in the oval office. David had something interesting to talk about for the rest of his days as he waited with the other men of West Dennis for the evening mail. (Post script. David's daughter, the late Maude Gillette, who will be remembered by West Dennis residents as a character in her own right, had a picture of her father with Pres. Coolidge. Has anyone any idea where that picture is today?)

PICTURING THE DENNIS OF YEARS AGO

Thanks to many of you, our Post Card collection is growing. Among those who have contributed interesting cards are Grace Nyberg and Henry Kelley II. Now we are asking those of you who have old photographs to allow us to make copies of them for our files. If you own such pictures or glass negatives, will you contact Bill Scofield, 385-3907? He will copy them in his own home, and return them to you immediately.

CALENDAR

- Feb. 6 Massachusetts Ratification of the Constitution, 1788
Feb. 13 Mid-Winter Festivity Christine's, West Dennis
Reservations necessary. See article.
Feb. 23 7:30 P.M. Board meets with Sarah
Mar. 28 7:00 P.M. Wixon School Auditorium "Meet Johnny Kelley" Night

WE, THE PEOPLE OF MASSACHUSETTS, RATIFY THE U.S. CONSTITUTION

When Gov. John Hancock opened the session of the Massachusetts General Court in October 1787, he reminded the representatives that they must plan a convention to consider whether or not Massachusetts would ratify the proposed new federal constitution. Accordingly, one of the first acts of the legislature that fall was to set in motion the mechanisms for that convention. Each community was to select as many delegates as they were allowed representatives, and instruct them to meet at the State House on Washington Street on the second Wednesday in January. The special Town Meeting which was held in Yarmouth selected David Thacher, Esquire, from the West Parish and Capt. Jonathan Howes from the East Parish, now Dennis. Squire Thacher was a cosmopolitan gentleman, well acquainted with Boston. He was first elected to the legislature in 1768 and was to serve continuously for 27 years. Capt. Howes was, perhaps, more provincial, but his record of public service was no less extensive. A captain in the county militia when a youth, he had been a delegate to the County Convention in 1774 which considered the subject of independence. He had also been on the Committee of Correspondence, keeping in touch with deliberations throughout the states, as the crisis with England worsened. Once war was declared, he was responsible for collecting Barnstable County's quota of provisions for Washington's troops, a thankless task which meant balancing compassion for the impoverished families, deprived of their livelihood at sea, and the urgency of provisioning the rag-tag army battling for their independence. Capt. Howes had also served in the legislature from 1779-1782. These, then, were the two men who took the opinion and concerns of our post-Revolution community to this constitutional convention. How I wish that I could read a diary kept by one or both of these gentlemen. Wouldn't you like to know the impressions of a life-long resident of rural Nobscusset as he faced the task of accepting or rejecting a totally new form of government? What did he think of his fellow conventioners? What did he think of Boston? Where did he board, and how did he get there in the first place? What instructions did he bring from home, and how did the long and difficult meeting change his attitude, if at all? For, unlike Delaware, New Jersey, and Georgia; Massachusetts was in no way unanimous in it's approval of the Constitution. There were many opponents, and it was only after a long, cold month of hot debate that the convention finally voted to ratify, and then only by the narrow margin of 187 yeas to 168 nays. Both Squire Thacher and Capt. Howes, by the way, voted yea. And now I must turn to the only contemporary record I have available to describe the public's reaction. The Massachusetts Gazette, obviously a pro-constitutional weekly newspaper, reports that, as soon as the news of ratification was known, bells began to ring throughout the city. On the following day a procession was formed and marched to the State House. There, Gov. Hancock officially announced the ratification from the balcony of that graceful old building, "to the loud huzzas of the crowd". Bells were rung from every steeple as the delegates celebrated with a sumptuous supper in the Senate chamber, preceded by 13 toasts, ranging from compliments to the delegates, to the last, which should touch us all--"May peace, liberty, and safety be the perpetual birthright of an American." On the following day a parade was announced, inviting floats representing all trades and arts. The newspaper requested that "all drummers, fifers, and other musicians in town join the march". What a delightful way to organize a parade! Bicentennial committee of 1993, please take notice. And it didn't rain on their parade, for the Gazette reports that the sun rose on the day of celebration "with uncommon grandeur". Long may that same sun shine!

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