



RESERVATIONS ARE NECESSARY!

For the Mid-Winter Luncheon, that is. It will be held on Saturday, February 11, at Christine's in West Dennis. Additional information is in last month's newsletter. If you haven't made a reservation you had better call Joshua Crowell, 385-3689, right this minute. I'll wait for you.

PERILS OF THE SEA

December 25, 1853. It was a dark day, as December days are wont to be. From the scuttle on the roof of Capt. Levi Crowell's old home on Church Street in West Dennis a sight which had become fairly familiar to south side residents could be seen. About 35 sailing vessels, most of them schooners, were at anchor in the deep hole off the mouth of Bass River. They were waiting for a fair wind that would carry them around Cape Cod to Boston. It being Christmas, many families were hoping that their husbands or fathers would come ashore for the holiday dinner. But most of the Captains felt it was better to be at the ready, in case the wind should come up. Capt. Alexander Baker did row his schooner's boat to shore for a brief meeting with his family on the beach. "Don't cry, now, Cynthy, I'll be back before you miss me," he shouted cheerfully to his little daughter as he rowed back to the J. K. Randall. The fleet remained anchored all night but at dawn it seemed as if the wind would co-operate. It began to blow from the west, a nice, steady breeze that seemed brisk enough to carry the waiting vessels through the Pollock Rip, and around the dangerous shoals off Monomoy. One by one the schooners set sail, weighed anchor, and slowly moved across the Sound. What a thrilling sight for the young boys, for the sailing vessels would be their future homes. But the women watched the great white wings of the schooners catch the wind with an all too familiar tightness in their throats. Please God, bring them safely home!

The wind stayed fresh and from the west all day and that meant that most of the vessels were through the Pollock Rip Channel by dark. Nothing to do for the villagers now but to carry on the routine tasks until word was received that their menfolk had arrived at Boston port. After supper the older retired mariners gathered at the Post Office as usual. Of course, their talk included speculation on the progress of the sailors. They'll be just fine, if the weather holds. But Grandfather Baker thought he had perceived a slight drop on his barometer--however slight, it was a tendency to be observed carefully. It was dark and cold when the mail was finally distributed and the men went home to their snug Cape cottages. "Good night, Zadoc". Good night, Hiram, give my regards to the missus". Arriving home Capt. Baker took another look at his weather glass. No doubt about it, the glass was falling. Bad weather could very well catch up with the fleet.

Restless sleepers would remember that the snow began to fall about midnight. Even those who slept deeply would probably have noticed that the gentle westerly breeze became a whistling wind out of the northwest. Cape Codders awoke that morning to a full blown blizzard. Each Cape cottage became an isolated island of refuge from a madly swirling world of winter weather. Now that tightness at the throat that the women had felt became a clutch of fear. What was happening to the men they loved? All they could do was wait in hope. Along the backside of the Cape and on the Bay side shore, it was not long before the terrible story began to unfold. Through the whirling snow schooners in distress were glimpsed, but the pounding sea would not allow assistance to be given. Soon the men from the village began a patrol on Nobscusset Beach to try to save those who escaped drowning or freezing as their vessels were pounded to pieces by the surf. On the beach were the schooners Homer, Willow, and the Commodore Kearney. The few who survived were hustled to the warm kitchens of the village to the tender care of other mariner's families. What of the other thirty or more vessels? Days would go by before word could get through from off Cape. The Sch. Francis, battered into a sinking condition, had miraculously encountered the bark D. Godfrey and the crew was safe. The Sch. Lowell had limped into port at Cohasset, but her Captain, William Dyer of Dennis had been swept overboard. Down Cape, Oren Sears of East Dennis had been found on the beach, nearly frozen, the fate of his vessel and crew unknown. Sch. Tioga, Capt. Levi Crowell, pounded ashore at Wellfleet, the vessel a loss, the crew safe. Unheard from--Schooners Sharon, Capt. Nickerson; Usher, Capt. Crowell; Nancy Bishop, Capt. Henry Kelley; Silas Hand, Capt. Zenas Kelley; and Capt. Alexander Baker's J. K. Randall. The crews of these coasting schooners included brothers, sons, and cousins of the captain's family. The village waited and hoped but, as February dawned, hope began to fade. The Barnstable Patriot reported it the most disastrous winter in memory. Families planned memorial services for the missing. Life goes on. February 14, 1854. Barnstable Patriot--"The enterprising young men of South and West Dennis are to be congratulated on their new fleet of Splendid Schooners."

CALENDAR

Feb. 11 12 Noon Christine's, West Dennis Annual Mid-Winter Luncheon
See article on reverse. RESERVATIONS ARE NECESSARY.
Feb. 20 7:30 P.M. Board meeting Home of Ann Stout
Coming in April Jacob Sears Memorial Library, East Dennis Time to be announced

STORIES OF OUR FOUNDERS

Gabriel Whelden

Most of you, if asked to name the founders of Old Yarmouth, of which this town was once a part, would no doubt answer: Anthony Thacher, John Crowe, and Thomas Howes. (Wouldn't you?) And as far as it goes, that answer is true. These three men were named proprietors of the new town in 1639, and were responsible for settling new families within it's boundaries. But there were many other men and their families who joined forces to establish a town here and you should know about them all. When Thacher, Crowe, and Howes came to settle the town there were several homesteads already here. Peter Worden seems to have come on his own. Gregory Armstrong and Gabriel Whelden had asked for and received permission from Plymouth, in September of 1638. Of Armstrong and Worden, more later. Today's story is about the Wheldens. Gabriel was a farmer. He and his wife and children settled on a tract of land at what is called "The Head of the Pond", near the present Setucket Road-Mayfair area. I do not know from whence they came. Gabriel was not much in public life. He did take his turn as Highway Surveyor. That seems to have meant that he and his sons would keep the pathway through the area cleared. He was involved in a minor disagreement with his neighbors over a jointly-owned boat, and he also appears to have complained to Plymouth about his boundaries, but otherwise he lived a quiet life. We also have little information about his sons, except that Henry was called to serve in the expedition against the Narragansetts. The names of both Henry and John's wives are not recorded, nor are the births of their children, which leaves a frustrating gap for genealogists. But it is in the lives of his daughters that we find a touch of colonial romance and a personal insight on family life. Daughter Catherine must have been about 20 years old when they settled in Yarmouth. In October of 1639 she was married to Giles Hopkins, in what was probably the first marriage between Yarmouth citizens. If marriages were celebrated here as they were in Plymouth, it was probably a very welcome social event for the women of the town. Ruth appears to have been younger and, for her, the course of love did not run as smoothly. On the books of the Old Colony was a law which forbade a young man from attempting to win the affection of a young woman without her father's consent. Early in 1646 Richard Taylor applied for that permission from Mr. Whelden, but he was refused. Gabriel's reasons cannot be known, but what man among you hasn't felt at some time or other that no man was good enough for your little girl? At any rate, Richard persisted, and so did Gabriel. At last, in frustration, Richard appealed to the Deputies and Governor at Plymouth, and they persuaded Mr. Whelden to relent. Apparently Ruth did not share her father's reservations, for in October, 1646, they were married and lived happily ever after, I presume. Gabriel was not long a citizen of Yarmouth. In 1648 he and his wife moved on to Lynn and then to Malden. But the children remained, and his descendants are citizens of our fair town to this day.

LOOKING FORWARD TO SPRING

A Sunday afternoon program is planned for April 9th at Jacob sears Memorial Library in East Dennis. A representative of the National Seashore will be present and the subject will be "Shipwrecks Around Cape Cod". Our National Seashore friends are very knowledgable and we're sure to enjoy the program. Hope you will reserve the date.

NEWSLETTER INDEXING

Volunteers are at work, under the able direction of Mr. Harold Merriam, in the arduous job of indexing our newsletter. Thanks to Isabel Flynn, Nancy Howes, and Harold for joining us in this task. You will be interested to know that the State House Library will soon have a complete set of our newsletters in their local history section.

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