

# Dennis Historical Society Newsletter

Volume 27 Number 2

February 2004

## Calendar of Events

**Board meetings are open** to all interested members of the DHS. It has been our practice to move the fall and winter meetings from Wednesday evenings to Saturday mornings from 10:00 to Noon. Our next meeting will be on **February 14 at the Josiah Dennis Manse.**

**Potluck Luncheon Saturday, February 21 at Noon, West Dennis Graded School. Entertainment to follow.** Bring your favorite main dish, salad or dessert to share. Rolls and beverages provided. Join us and chase away those winter blahs!

**Wanted, Old Photos**  
Burt Derick wants to remind you that our collection of digitized photographs is growing, and copies now fill six large albums and six matching CDs.

If you have pictures of Dennis or family pictures and are willing to loan them for just a few days, Burt will copy them and return them to you.

## Tale of a Broken Heart...a story for Valentine's Day

from *Women Who Went to Sea* by *Phyllis Horton*

Pauline (Baxter) Thacher of South Dennis accompanied her husband, Captain George Engs Thacher, on many voyages. As was the custom, their children also left home and friends with their parents to visit ports, both foreign and domestic, for two reasons. The first was that Mother rested easier on a voyage knowing where her children were and how they were. Generally speaking, if Mother was happy, the Captain was more agreeable and that passed on to the crew. The second reason was the unwritten law that a captain's sons were expected to become mariners, and eventually captains, and the daughters were expected to marry a sea captain. Pauline herself had earned her sea legs early as her father, Captain Elijah Baxter, had taken his family on voyages when she was growing up.

Captain Thacher was a Master Mariner noted for his navigational skills and fast, profitable voyages to European ports and eastern seaports of our country. The young Thachers held pretty much to the tradition. All of the sons, except one who died young, became sea captains, and the twin girls, Amelia and Cecelia, married sea captains.

The youngest daughter, Lena, had charted a different course for herself. Lena was a beautiful girl, but frail, and she fell in love with a boy in her neighborhood. This did not meet with her parents' approval, or probably the whole maritime community of South Dennis either, as he was a common sailor who really had no love for the sea. His real ambition was to take over the family homestead and make his living from the good soil of South Dennis, and he wanted Lena to be his helpmate.

Captain Thacher decided that Pauline and Lena should accompany him on a voyage down the east coast and into the Gulf of Mexico. He was certain that the separation would make Lena forget the young sailor who longed to be a farmer, and there was also the chance she might meet a suitable sea captain at one of their ports of call who could sweep her off her feet. That did not happen. Poor Lena became more unhappy with every nautical mile that separated her from South Dennis and her health began to fail which worried her mother terribly.

When they tied up to the dock at Mobile, Alabama a number of doctors were consulted. Their verdicts were all the same....consumption, known today as tuberculosis. She died in Mobile and her grieving parents brought her nineteen year old body back to be buried in the family lot next to the South Dennis Congregational Church.

Lena's sweetheart grieved for the girl who had wanted to share his life. Although he did eventually marry, he never forgot his first love. Lena's sad tale was passed down to future generations of the Thacher family. Captain George and Pauline were the great grandparents of Nancy Thacher Reid, our Dennis historian. Nancy's Aunt Edith told her the story when she was young, but omitted the consumption part, leading Nancy to believe that the lovely Lena died of a broken heart. It wasn't until Nancy was doing research on the vital records at Dennis Town Hall that she learned the truth. But perhaps the real truth is that while Lena did have consumption, her death was hastened by a broken heart.

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### **Correction, please:**

A sentence on page 1 of January's newsletter in the article about Peter Worden I should have read: "*...most of them going to Virginia with Peter apparently remaining on board ship and returning, I believe, to Barnstaple, a port in western England.*" Thank you, Mr. Leslie Worden.

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We were sad to learn of the death of Barbara McPhee, long time member of DHS. Our condolences to Nancy Adams and her family.

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## **Memories of my days in Dennis**

*by Roland Kelley*

My name is Roland Kelley and I am descended from David O'Killia who came from Ireland around 1652 and settled near Kelley Bay in Dennis— which was then part of Yarmouth. (*Henry Kelley II and I have the same lineage for the first five generations. I am the eleventh generation in my line and I believe Henry is tenth generation in his line.*) I was born in Dennis in 1931 to Roland and Eleanor (Ellis) Kelley. Unfortunately, my mother died when I was less than two years old, and because my father needed someone to care for me while he worked, I went to live with his parents, Winfred and Stella Kelley of School Street in West Dennis. I remained with them when my father remarried a couple of years later. We were living then in a big house on the corner of Fisk and Main Street (replaced today by a restaurant) while my grandparents were building a house on Pond Street.

There was no kindergarten in those days, so I started first grade at the age of five. I had whooping cough and was sick mornings (at least until the bus left) so I spent two years in the first grade and one in the second at what is now the Ezra Baker School. The school bus picked me up at the corner of Pond Street and Loring Avenue, and even when my grandmother was really sick she would walk me to the bus stop. Some days she lost her breakfast along the way and I worried that she would have to walk herself back home all alone. Classmates I remember were Jimmy Todd, Norman Babineau, Franklin Johnson, Douglas Hallet, Sherwood Cahoon, Curtis Sears, Sissy Baker and Marion Foss. Mrs. McHenry was my first grade teacher and Miss Walker was my second grade teacher. Mr. McLin was the principal.

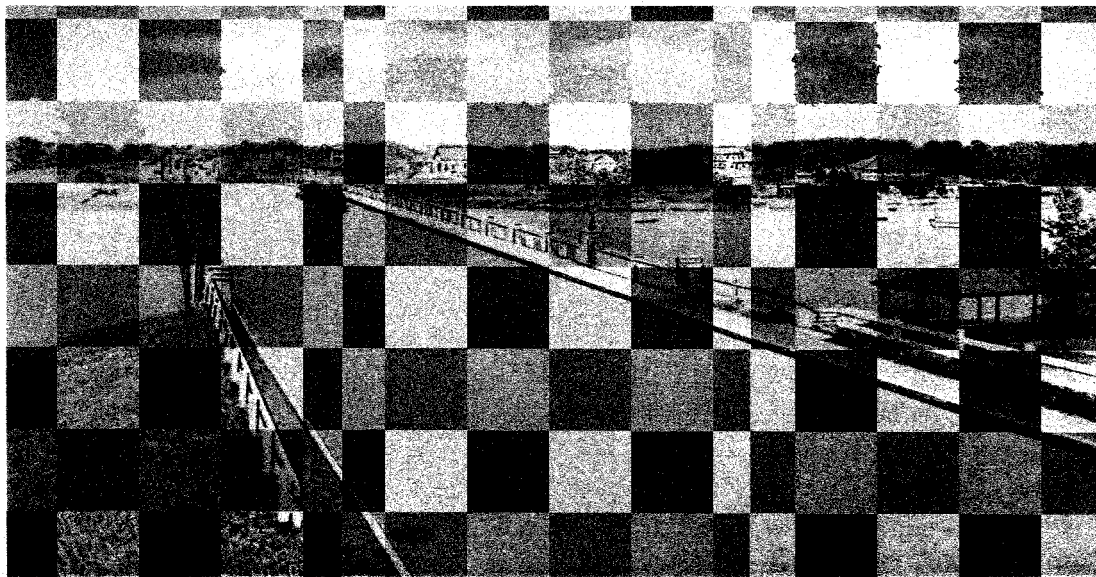
Kelley Pond was behind our house on Pond Street. When cottages were built around the pond there were rowboats for the tenants which I would climb into and push out into the pond as far as the rope would allow. Using a fishnet I caught herring and perch. One time when I was actually using a fish line I buried a fishhook in my thumb and I found out it goes in a lot easier than it comes out!

With few kids close by I spent most of my time playing alone. Fortunately, I had a great imagination so this was not a problem. I fought all the Indians in the woods between Pond and Fisk Streets on my way to visit the Merrills who lived across from the cemetery. Years later Mrs. Merrill remembered that Gramma told me if candy was offered I could take only one piece—and that's all I would take. Sometimes I guess I listened, but sometimes I didn't. We had two rocking chairs that I used a lot. I would rock so vigorously that I was warned I might rock over backwards. I didn't pay attention and of course I went over. At least that once was enough to teach me a lesson.

One day I told Gramma there was a sick dog out front near the road. She called the police and when they came they determined the dog had distemper. They shot the dog right in front of me, put it on the running board and drove away. I can still recall that terrible scene vividly today. Police Chief Lester O'Neil's redheaded daughter lived just up the street from me on the corner of Doric Avenue and Pond Street. I remember being over that way and running across a Doric Avenue property when I hit a wire strung between posts that knocked me flat.

Another day I picked up two quarts of milk at Pickering's Store on School Street. While walking home with the two glass bottles I was swinging them from front to back. The bottles came in contact and that was the end of both bottles and milk. This was the late thirties and money was still tight from the Depression so this was a costly mistake. The fact that I still remember the incident must mean that I still feel guilty. I have no memory of being punished.

Gramma Kelley took me for walks over to see Great Gramma Kelley on North Main Street in South Yarmouth. While the current Bass River Bridge was being built in 1935 there was a temporary footbridge that ran from Ferry Street that we used. On the South Yarmouth side of the river there was a covered picnic area with tables where on occasion we would have picnic lunches. These special times seem even more special as the years go by. My grandmother died the year I was eight and my father's sister and her husband, who lived in Chatham, raised me until I enlisted in the Air Force at age nineteen. Though I was young when I left Dennis, I still have many happy memories of my early years there.



102. BASS RIVER BRIDGE BETWEEN SOUTH YARMOUTH AND WEST DENNIS, MASS. CAPE COD. 1174

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## THE WAY WE WERE

Roland Kelley sent us some of his family pictures. This one depicts his father, Roland B. Kelley, at a young age, sitting on the lap of his maternal grandfather, Samuel Ryan. His father, Winfred R. Kelley, is standing behind him and his grandfather, Roland D. Kelley is on the left.

Both Roland D. Kelley and Winfred R. Kelley are buried in the cemetery at Fisk and Pond Streets. Samuel Ryan is buried off Cape and Roland B. Kelley is buried in Chatham. Winfred A. Kelley, brother to young Roland B., is also buried in West Dennis.

The 1891 Waltham railroad watch which was owned by Roland D. Kelley has been passed down in the family to our author, the present day Roland Kelley.

