



Dennis Historical Society Newsletter

Volume 28 Number 2

February 2005

Calendar of Events

Board meetings are open
to all interested members
of the DHS. Next meeting
Wednesday, February 9
7:00 PM

Josiah Dennis Manse

Mid-Winter Festivity
Pot Luck Supper
Saturday, February 12
5:30 PM

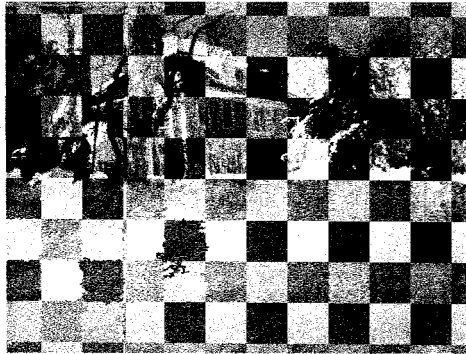
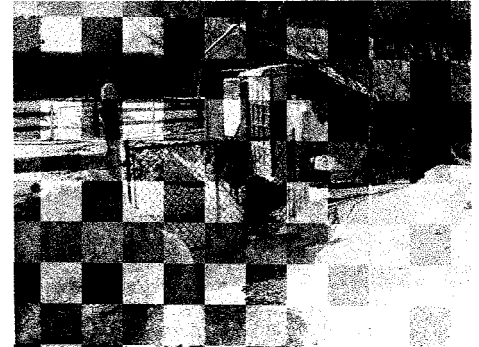
Bring your favorite culi-
nary masterpiece and join
your DHS friends for an
evening of good food fol-
lowed by musical enter-
tainment by **Carol Abel**,
Director
Mid-Cape Chorus
**West Dennis Graded
School**

School Street, W. Dennis
(Note: Beverages and rolls
will be provided. A salad,
main dish or a dessert is
the "price of admission.")
Come and banish the mid-
winter blues.

Save the Date:
Wednesday, March 23
7:30 PM
for the program
The Quaker Settlement
in Dennis by
Historian **Jim Gould**

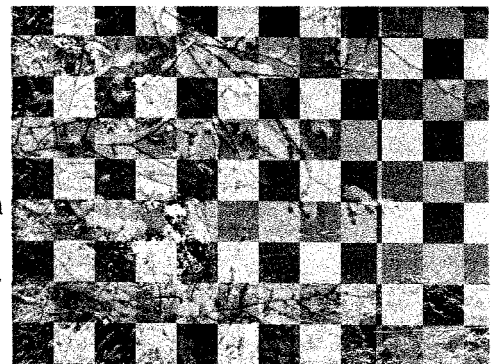
Sorry, Dennis is Closed!

The snow fell, the wind howled and the (first?) Blizzard of '05 is now history. At the height of the storm the town "gates" were closed to travelers as the Dennis roads became impassable. Most of the problems were due to drifting snow which quickly covered roads that had already been cleared several times. Town crews fought in vain to keep the main roads open, and many who were trying to get to work were turned back as they neared the Dennis line.



Even after the snow stopped there were many who couldn't even begin to dig themselves out. The driveway to the house in this picture is between the trees and the house; the road is seen only in the small triangle at the lower right hand corner. The snow bank was higher than the town loader as it cut a path down the road.

Neighbors helped out stranded neighbors and the reopening of Dennis began. Icicles hung down from roofs to first floor windows, two-lane roads were one lane with wheel ruts, but with the return of sunshine and the arrival of the town trucks spirits were high. If you could see the colors in these pictures, you would recognize the golden witch hazel flowers blooming on the branches under the snow!



Louis Dean's Radio Store (The Dennisport Years)

by Betty Dean Holmes, 2004

In the December issue of the Newsletter we told you how the sale of two Christmas radios sparked Louis Dean's interest in expanding his part-time job selling new-fangled radios and repairing them. Here's more of what happened.

Louis and Esther looked for a place to open a radio store. On Main Street, right in the center of downtown Dennisport, there was a four-bedroom house with attached store for sale. The store was big and right near the edge of the street, for as yet Dennisport had narrow dirt sidewalks. The store had a ten foot ceiling, an oiled floor, and large windows for displaying merchandise. The six-room house had a small fenced front yard and a bigger back yard. Perfect. They borrowed from the bank and bought it.

Louis fenced in the back yard and soon built a garage for his 1926 Ford car. Then he decided the store needed a more impressive entrance. He moved the entire store back from the street about fifteen feet and poured a cement apron in front of it. It was easy to move the store as it had no electrics, no plumbing.

In order to set up a new radio business, Louis and Esther sold the telephone stocks they had acquired while working as the night telephone operators in Harwich. This gave them the cash they needed to buy the merchandise for their store.

Inside the store Louis built two small rooms. The room at the front of the store was rented to a man who ran a popcorn store. The wonderful popcorn aroma filled the entire store. The other room became the radio repair shop. Louis built a rack to hold the vacuum tubes and parts for repairs. Behind the repair area he built a room to store and recharge the storage batteries needed for the radios, as the first radios used storage batteries for power. The battery room had a solid door and big lock. Battery acid made it a dangerous place for children. There was a large stockroom at the back of the store for the cartons and crates of new radios. The store soon sold electrical supplies, radios, records, sheet music, and a few small musical instruments such as ukuleles, harmonicas, and ocarinas. Prior to Dean's Radio Store selling sheet music, musicians traveled to New Bedford or Boston for music supplies.

Louis continued to carpenter during the day. He rigged a bell to ring whenever a customer entered the store. Esther could then walk through their bedroom, down two steps, and be in the store, carrying Sally on her hip, whenever customers entered.

It wasn't long before Mr. Lawrence Colby asked Louis if he would take in exposed film to be developed and suggested they might sell Kodak film and a few cameras. Colby had a photo developing service in his photography shops in both Harwichport and Hyannis. Colby picked up the film every night and returned the developed snapshots within a few days. A good service for summer people.

The radio business grew steadily and when Charles Finley, electrician, his wife and little daughter, Ann, moved next door, Louis phased out the electrical supply business. This gave him more room for displaying the new wooden cabinet console radios and record players. New neighbor Charlie would now sell the electrical supplies. The repair business expanded and the popcorn shop was taken over to enlarge the area for repairs.

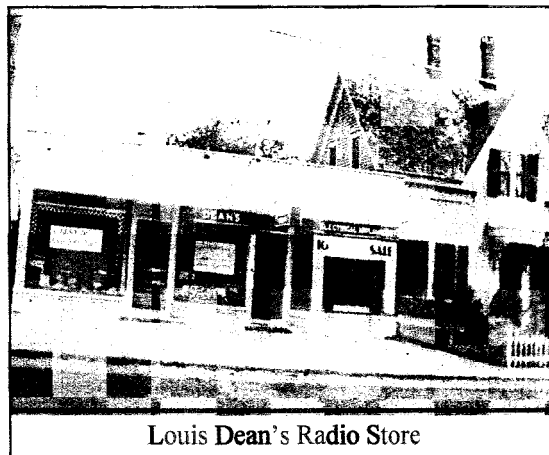
Summer vacationers wanted to know where to borrow books as there was no library in town. The little Chase Library was over the town line in West Harwich. Esther and Louis put in a lending library in a corner of the store. Books rented for a penny a day. The lending library became a small but steady income producer.

Louis continued to sell radios in the evening. He would leave a table model radio with a family for a week and the radios sold themselves.After having the wonderful entertainment of the radio in their home for a week, the customer would cheerfully sign a contract to buy "on time" paying for the radio with fifty cents a week. Esther became the bookkeeper.Louis and Esther's business continued to grow.

The family continued to grow, too. Priscilla came along in 1927, being born the day Lindbergh landed in Paris. Betty came along in 1928 and Louis, Jr. in 1930. The growing family soon required a housekeeper as Esther worked tending the growing business. Louis gave up his carpentry to focus on selling and servicing radios.

In 1934 Louis and Esther believed they should open a second store in the larger town of Hyannis. They rented a double-sized store right next to Colby's Photo Shop at 9 & 11 Sherman Square. This soon became a busier store than the original one in Dennisport.

The Dennisport years were the best! They were our childhood years.



Louis Dean's Radio Store

Another Louis Heard From

Last month we noted that DHS had received a donation in memory of Louis (Johnny) Kelley, Henry Kelley's father. Some people in town knew Louis as Johnny which was really a nickname. When Louis was born it was understood that he would be the last child as his father already had two children by his first wife and six surviving by his second wife. ("Johnny was indeed the youngest!) Louis' mother attended the Dennis Union Church and was much impressed with minister Louis Olin. She said to her husband that if the baby was a boy he would be named Louis Olin Kelley. The father-to-be who "hadn't much religion" said, "No way!" He'd always wanted a son Johnny. But when his birth was recorded the doctor used the name his mother had chosen. So, though his mother's friends called him Louis, his father's friends called him Johnny.

Whether Louis or Johnny, you could always count on him for an interesting story. Here's one: *Allie Ellis* (who lived where Captain Frosty's is located today) was the last Dennis resident to use a horse and buggy for transportation. While attending Town Meeting he often stepped outside for a little "refreshment" as alcohol was not allowed within. As the evening went on some of the men took notice of his condition, and while he was inside they switched Allie's wagon wheels, placing the large rear wheels on the front and the small front wheels onto the rear. It is said that when he got home his wife, Ella B., asked how the meeting went. "OK, OK," he slurred, "but I can't figure out why the drive was uphill all the way home!"

Here's another: *There was a Dennis Village man named Ben Hall on Corporation Road who went off to a city to work in a factory. On returning to Dennis he did odd jobs for "widow women". He'd split kindling, set up a stove, work in the garden, kill chickens and dress them off. One evening when he went to pick up his mail at the Post Office he pulled himself up to his full height and made a pronouncement to those gathered there. "I've been doing odd jobs for a while now, running here and there for five or ten cents a job. From now on I'll do no job for less than 25 cents!"* Is this the first Dennis minimum wage?

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The Way We Were

Do you recognize this building? According to Nancy Reid's history, p. 620-21, *It was built in 1838, the second building to house the First Church of Dennis, which was at that time Unitarian in philosophy. As the Unitarians waned, they rented their building for lectures and meetings. Many a day the rafters of this building rang with the orations of ardent Abolitionists such as Parker Pillsbury and Stephen Symonds Foster. In 1872 it was sold by auction, moved a short distance to the west, and used by Thomas S. Howes as a livery stable. It was later the celebrated tin shop of Edward Freeman Hall. About 1901 it was moved to the farm of Charles Smith Goodspeed and was used as his barn. Now it was to become the nucleus of what would become America's best-known summer theater.*

A young Raymond Moore had a ...*dream of a theater which would bring classical stage offerings to the Cape..... Mr. Moore bought an empty field off the Main Street of the village (now Route 6A) and located a used building with a history. It was the old barn on the farm of Charles Smith Goodspeed (1850-1929).....*

When Moore had it moved in 1927, it was flaked, that is taken down in sections, moved to its new site and rebuilt. The job was done by I. Grafton Howes and the building was reconstructed with a sizable addition for the stage and scenery, according to a plan of Cleon Throckmorton.



Building the Cape Playhouse—photo thanks to Joshua Crowell