



VOLUME THIRTEEN

With this volume we begin our thirteenth volume of this newsletter. Also, beginning with this volume, I am being relieved of some of the work of putting the newsletter together each month. I will continue to contribute historical articles as I enjoy doing that very much. But I have seriously embarked on the job of putting all the years of research together to write a history of the Town of Dennis. I want to thank you all for your patience with me, and for the many kind comments we get about our newsletter.

MID-WINTER FESTIVITY TIME

We will meet at Christine's Restaurant in West Dennis on February 10th for our Mid-Winter Festivity. The social hour is at 12 Noon and luncheon at 1:00 P.M. The menu will include your choice of Yankee Pot Roast or Broiled Schrod. And following lunch the Rev. Mr. Joshua Crowell of Essex, CT and Dennis, MA will share with us some of the choice stories about local folks that he has collected over the years. Bearing in mind that the best stories told by locals are usually about someone who did not come, you'd better plan to be there! The entire program will cost \$11.00 per person and reservations must be made! See coupon below.

IF THIS HOUSE COULD TALK Part II-House of 1721

We have learned a little about the family of Elisha Hedge, who lived in the "House of 1721" while it stood on Church Street in Yarmouth Port. Another generation of the Hedge family would live in the old homestead. Dr. James Hedge was one of the sons of Elisha who grew to manhood and fulfilled his father's and mother's dreams. He had been sent to live with and learn from Dr. Samuel Savage, a somewhat eccentric but very highly esteemed physician who had an extensive practice in Barnstable village. James tried to become a part of several communities before he realized that his future lay at home. For his day, Dr. Hedge was very prevention-oriented. Appaled by the outbreak of Small Pox in 1796, he gained the public's confidence and opened an Innoculation Hospital out on Great Island. Here those who had never had small pox were intentionally inoculated with enough innoculant to produce a mild attack of the pox. The patient would recover at the hospital, thus gaining immunity to the disease. I have found no list of those brave enough to undergo this risky treatment, not any figures which show what rate of success Dr. Hedge experienced. The fact that the hospital operated throughout the years of that particular epidemic 1797 to 1801, seems proof of at least some success. After 1801, by the way, the safer Jenner vaccine was in use for those who wished to prevent the disease which had certainly been a dreaded scourge of Colonial days.

Dr. Hedge had by his two wives, 16 children. Even his medical skill could not prevent the death of 7 of them while very young. Still he remained a positive, active community member, from his stately house on Church Street. His oldest daughter, named Josephine, unmarried, was the child who took care of her parents and inherited the homestead upon their deaths. In 1860 she sold the house to James Gordon Hallet, who probably was ready to retire from his busy and successful life as a farmer and salt manufacturer. In 1921 the house was sold to Helen Juliet S. Williams who had the old Hedge Homestead moved to its present location on Chase Avenue, Dennis Port. It is now an attractive Bed and Breakfast Inn, run by Mr. and Mrs. Kremp, and visitors are duly impressed by all the living that has gone on within its walls. Despite the many sad events the old walls can recall, her inhabitants past and present have found that the rooms can and do also echo the joys of living.

AMONG OUR RECENT ACQUISITIONS

It is the purpose of the Dennis Historical not only to teach but also to preserve the history of this town. Acquiring artifacts which document that history is hampered by the fact that we do not have a building of our own. However, through the full cooperation of the committees that manage the Town's historical centers, many of our collected items are stored in these two buildings. We do continue to acquire things which fill out our knowledge of the past and among recent acquisitions is a collection of papers which we call the Obed Baker II collection. It consists mostly of deeds, divisions of property, a few letters and maps, all of which tell us old place names, something of the lives of many families who lived in South Dennis in a period from 1790 to 1860. This collection will be indexed and available for study in the library of the Josiah Dennis Manse.

BIRTHDAY LUNCHEON RESERVATIONS February 10 Christine's in West Dennis
Please make reservations for _____ people. I enclose a check for \$ _____ (\$11.00 per person)
Choice of entree: _____ Yankee Pot Roast _____ Broiled Schrod
Enclose a self-addressed stamped envelope and send to : Mr. Joshua Crowell
Box 963
Dennis, MA 02638

CALENDAR

Jan. 4 7:30 P.M. Board meets with Gertrude Lailey
Feb. 1 10:00 A.M. Meeting of Cape and Islands Historical Association. Subject:
Volunteerism....Docent training for educational programs, house tours,
etc. Call 888-0251 for information... ask for Lynne Horton.
Feb. 10 12 Noon Mid-Winter Festivity Christine's Restaurant Reservations needed

A CURIOUS COLONIAL COURTING CUSTOM

OR, MY NEW YEARS RESOLUTION

Lest you draw the incorrect conclusion that my present significant other and I are experiencing problems, let me reassure you that nothing could be further from the truth. My New Year's Resolution (please note that word is in the singular), has nothing to do with courting. I'll get to the resolution in just a minute. I thought that, in the middle of the coldest winter in the 118 years that the weather bureau has kept records you might enjoy learning about one way our ancestors managed to keep warm on long winter's nights. Perhaps you have heard of the ancient custom of bundling. It is reliably reported that this practice, which seems somewhat contrary to the moral character we associate with the puritan as we view him from our century, was common here on the Cape not only in the colonial period, but into the nineteenth century as well. The practice involves a young man, a young lady, and some quilts. As the explanation goes, privacy was hard to come by in early days, especially in the winter. The entire family must huddle about the fire in the keeping room or go to bed under a pile of quilts in order to keep warm. How, then, was a young man to woo the lady of his choice, become acquainted with her and make plans for their future together? I cannot report to you what naive person devised bundling as a solution to courtship in the cold. As I understand the custom, the young lady would excuse herself, retire to a bed chamber where she would dress herself in a special night dress with legs, over which she would place her ordinary clothes. In a short time, her young man would excuse himself from the group by the fire and join her under the quilts for an hour or so of quiet conversation, or whatever. Parents could monitor the lovers through little windows at the top of the bed chamber door. (Did you ever wonder what those little windows were for?) Maybe parents were comfortable with this method of courtship,--certainly the young people were--but the clergy were definitely opposed. They blamed this "absurd practice" on the French--in those days everything was blamed on the French--who had introduced it to the innocent New England boys who served against them in the many wars in Canada. They preached long sermons on the "natural consequences" of this "scandalous" custom, some Cape Cod ministers even refusing to baptize those "natural consequences" who arrived to bless their parent's homes "in less than the usual time for women after marriage". Oh, the times, oh, the customs! I know that the curious custom of bundling was still practiced here on the Cape as late as 1801 and the source of my knowledge has also prompted my resolution. It is a diary, kept by Capt. Zachary Lamson, master of a small trading schooner from Beverly. He was unfortunately ship-wrecked off Orleans in 1801, and remained there for some months, supervising the salvage of his cargo and vessel. In his diary he writes that he has been invited by a young woman he has met to come to her home, where he will be entertained by "the free mode of courtship called bundling", under her mother's supervision. Somewhat regretfully, he finds his responsibility to the salvage operation precludes such innocent endeavors. He does not say how fared the members of his crew. This has been a very round about way to tell you that my 1990 resolution is to keep a diary. The jottings of ordinary people show so much about life styles, changing fashions, and the things that were and still are important to daily life. Maybe some of you will join me, and we can all leave our diaries to D.H.S. for future researchers of local history! P.S. Does any one have an old diary that I can read?

Dennis Historical Society
P.O. Box 607
South Dennis, MA 02660

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