



DHS MEMORIES

Our annual June birthday luncheon at Lighthouse Inn found many DHS charter members renewing old acquaintances. They were presented with corsages and boutonneires and our sincere thanks for their work in getting us started. Joshua Crowell spoke about DHS Founding Days, Margaret Barker told us about Jericho, and Edith (Forsythia) Wood told some great stories detailing the acquisition of the Josiah Dennis Manse. (You should have been there, folks!!) Our lucky doorprize winners were Dorothy Maloney, Richard Hall, and Alice Hildebrant. Many thanks to Lighthouse Inn for their great hospitality, a beautiful birthday cake, and their donation of 2 luncheons for our doorprize. Also, thanks to Gertrude Lailey and Dee Moore for making the lovely corsages.

PROCLAIM LIBERTY THROUGHOUT ALL THE LAND

Most of you will recognize these words as being the inscription on the Liberty Bell in Philadelphia. Some of you may even be able to tell me the book where that quotation can be found. We learn as children about the Liberty Bell, how it was rung in Philadelphia to let the citizens of that city know that the meeting which brought forth our Declaration of Independence had come to a conclusion. But, none of us alive today can remember the days when bells were the most common way for neighbors to communicate. Today we Fax, or phone when it is urgent that others receive news quickly. We watch the events of the world, happening before our very eyes, on the evening TV news programs. Even worse, weather men tell us what to expect weatherwise, and forecasters tell us to beware of downward swings, revolutions in far-off lands and future economic and fashion trends long before the events take place. 'Twas not so in olden days. Believe it or not, there was a day when, if you wished to communicate with another person you either had to speak with him face to face, or write to him. Period. No answering machines, telegrams, or cellular phones! However, even in those Dark Ages there were times when messages needed to be delivered to the public, and our pioneer ancestors devised ways to do this. The most common way to disseminate news in colonial and early American days was with a bell. It was a lucky village which could afford a Great Bell, whose ring could be heard for 3 miles, or if wind and high pressure were present, as far as 6 and even under prime conditions, 9 miles away. The ringing of bells sent forth many messages. If the town owned a bell, it rung out at 6 A.M., noon time, and curfew at 9 P.M. Usually the bell was in the meeting house, and these bells were used to let the villagers know of the deaths of their neighbors; some communities having a code which tolled out the sex, and age of the deceased. Bells were rung at the beginning and end of meetings, at times of thanksgiving, and to sound an alarm when danger was present. An old sampler verse explains the messages which the bells gave out:

When we lament a departed soul, we toll.
When joy and mirth are on the wing, we sing.
To call the fold to church in time, we chime.
When threatened harm, we alarm.

Most of this background on bells I have learned from a small volume in the Josiah Dennis Manse Library, called *The Sound Of Bells*, by Eric Sloane. All of us are very much indebted to Mr. Sloane for the time he spent in researching and writing about Americans, and I am indebted to him for this particular volume. Now comes the job of finding out about our local Great Bells, when they were acquired, and what was used for communication prior to their acquisition.

Early settlers relied on drums, beaten at the center of town, to announce to the countryside that there was news which they should know. Here, in our town, the whale watchers rigged up a huge metal gong which they struck whenever a whale was spotted in the bay, summoning the men from the fields to join in the chase. Sometimes, as at the Ferry Landing in West Dennis, a conch shell was fashioned in such a way that a deep sound was produced when it was blown into, thus summoning the ferryman when someone desired to cross the river. The best knowledge I have been able to accumulate indicates that the first bells in this town were the school bells. With a district school in every neighborhood, the school bell was available to anyone who wished to sound an alarm. They were used to summon help for fires, they called the children to school, and were rung on days of thanksgiving and joy, such as the news of the repeal of the Stamp Act. I have yet to find any hard proof of a Great Bell in town until the 19th century. If anyone of you who have done church histories has come across references to bells before that time, I'd love to know about it. The first of what might be called Great Bells were connected to the academies in town, in the early 1800's. The South Dennis Academy is said to have had a bell which came from a Catholic Nuns Convent in Boston. I sincerely hope it was not one of those which were destroyed by prejudiced arsonists! I also have found inferences that the Academy at Carleton Hall owned a large bell. Of the present church bells I have this information. The bell at West Dennis was cast in 1854 by Henry N. Hooper and Co., Boston and was hung in the tower of that church in 1856. The South Dennis bell was cast in Cambridge by Mr. George H. Holbrooke in 1856 and hung in the church tower "soon afterwards". And the bell in Dennis Union Church was purchased with funds raised by the Bell Circle in 1878, and installed with the clock in that year. Of the bell at East Dennis I have no knowledge, but I hope some of you have, and will let me know. The purpose of speaking about bells this month was to point out that traditionally bells were sounded on occasions of joy. Wouldn't it be appropriate if our bells could be used once more for this purpose, proclaiming Independence Day throughout all the land, on the Fourth of July in 1991?

CALENDAR

Josiah Dennis Manse.....Open every Tuesday and Thursday in July and August, 2-4 P.M.
Jericho House and Barn Museum...Open every Wednesday and Friday, July and August 2-4:30 P.M.
Dennis Festival Days.....August 17 to 25. Watch for news of DHS happenings...A bike tour of
Dennis Port Aug. 19 at 10 A.M....Narrated slide show, "A View From The Outermost
House" at Carleton Hall, Aug. 19, 7:30 P.M....Bus tour of the 5 villages, Aug. 23,
9:30 A.M. Plus special events at our two old houses. Do plan to take part in it
all!

CAPT. LEVI CROWELL, JR.

Robert L. Crowell, our member from Vermont, whose West Dennis roots go back forever, has very generously given DHS 104 copies of Levi Crowell Jr's biography--a fascinating story of a native son of West Dennis, born October 26, 1827, who packed a lot of living into 89 years, including becoming a Sea Captain at age 23, many voyages to foreign ports, being a Civil War prisoner, and numerous other interesting achievements. The hard cover book is being offered at \$15.00, plus .75 tax, first to DHS members, then to the general public. The proceeds of this book will be put towards publishing Nancy Thacher Reid's History of Dennis in 1993. Also, Mr. Crowell has once again given us a most generous monetary donation towards Nancy's book. Thank you so much, Mr. C.!!

You may purchase your copy on July 25 at Josiah Dennis Manse from 2-4 P.M. or July 26 at Jericho House from 2-4:30 P.M., or as long as supplies last.

FIELD TRIPS CONCLUDED

June is the month of roses, weddings, and graduations, as well as that very important Father's Day, and the anniversary of the incorporation of the town. But for DHS members, June is the month of Historical Field Trips for our school children. 168 third graders have visited the Manse, 163 fourth graders have visited Jericho and over 150 fifth graders have taken a bus tour to historic sites in town, and have viewed our slide show, "Dennis", courtesy of Josh Crowell and Wilson Scofield. There are so many people to thank that we have to be a little general. Lilla Smith and the Jericho Committee are responsible for the success of the trips to that historic center. A special word of thanks needs to go to the Stitch and Chatter quilters for their assistance there. Also thanks to Nick Rogers of East Dennis, Ben Thacher, and our A-V committee, Bill Scofield, chairman, for their work in preparing a slide show on the maritime history of the town for the fourth graders. At the Manse, with the usual fine cooperation of that committee, Phyllis Horton, chairman and Nancy Howes, Vice-chairman, Mig Maher organized the necessary crews (including Mr. Solarz, as Josiah Dennis), to man the house and school house for seven days. I wish we had room to thank each of the volunteers who helped, but please accept the gratitude of the Board and the children. You all know who you are, from ice cream makers to dressers to school marms and hostesses. Educating the children of this town to be interested in the town's history is one of the most important things we do. And thanks should be added to our sister organization, Harwich Historical, for loaning us their "Black Box" so that we could have slide shows at both the Manse and Jericho on the same days. Take a deep breath now, all, and get ready for next year!

Dennis Historical Society
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