

Dennis Historical Society Newsletter

Volume 26 Number 7

July 2003

Calendar of Events

Monday, July 7, 6:30 PM Old Fashioned Pie Sale on the Green

This popular event has people standing in line for a taste of goodies "better than Mom's!" Bring a chair and stay for the concert on the Dennis Village Green Corner of Old Bass River and Rt. 6A.

Wednesday, July 9 Board meets W. Dennis Graded School 7:00 PM

**Wednesday, July 16,
9:30 AM**

Bike Tour of Historic East Dennis

Join Mary Kuhrtz for a spin around this interesting village. Helmets required for children, requested for adults. Meet at E. Dennis Community Church, 16 Center Street E. Dennis.

**Saturday, July 19
10 AM to 4 PM**

Massachusetts Quilts West Dennis Graded School, 67 School St.

The Project will document and evaluate DHS quilt collection and will appraise privately owned quilts at \$10 each. Reservations required.

Call (508) 394-0017

Forty Years And More...

The Dennis Historical Society will celebrate its fortieth anniversary this year with a toast to the past and a look to the future. Nancy Reid wrote in her History on page 733:

Interest in the history of the mid-Cape towns had been growing since Yarmouth had formed the nonprofit Historical Society of Old Yarmouth in 1953. As "Old Yarmouth" had also included Dennis, our town's residents were invited to become members. Many did, and frequently that Society met in Dennis, and their meetings were well attended. But there was no organization whose sole purpose was to collect information and artifacts illustrating this town's interesting past.

Having had their consciences awakened to the need for united effort to gather and disseminate the town's history, several citizens encouraged support for a local historical society separate from that of our sister town of Yarmouth. An organizational meeting was held at Carleton Hall in July of 1963, at which time the Dennis Historical Society was organized, with Dean S. Sears (1901-1985) as president, William Kelley (1894-1965), first vice president, Mrs. Peter Crowell, second vice president, Daniel Chase (1890-1971), third vice president, Mrs. Orion Derick, secretary, and Joshua Crowell, treasurer. Note that Joshua Crowell (1912-1997) was Treasurer for the Society for 34 years!

Records indicate that the first Board meeting was held in Marion Crowell Ryder's house on Church Street in West Dennis. (See *This Old House* in the April 2003 Newsletter.) The first goal of the Society was to support the Jericho Committee and to accept gifts to be put on display there. In the sixties there was an survey of old houses in the town for which DHS provided a date board at the homeowners' request. This project continues today. When the Josiah Dennis Manse came up for sale, Society members spearheaded the effort to acquire it, and with renewed interest in Josiah Dennis himself, saw to it that a suitable granite monument was placed in the Dennis Village Cemetery.

The DHS published Neva O'Neil's *Master Mariners of Dennis* and Nancy Reid's *Dennis, Cape Cod From Firstcomers to Newcomers 1639-1993*. The Society helped to reprint Jack Sheedy's *Dennis Journal*, and now has published Gerry Watters' *Privateers, Pirates and Beyond: Memoirs of Lucy Lord Howes Hooper*. This year President Ray Urquhart, Burt Derick, Phyllis Horton and Richard Howes volunteered many hours to produce our new

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Forty Years and More...

(Continued from page 1)

Heritage Brochure with generous donations from the Cape Cod Cooperative Bank and the Dennis Chamber of Commerce.

Under Ray's guidance we have a new long-range planning committee; Board members are studying the by-laws, working on a new annual report, and even a web site. With the addition of the West Dennis Graded School Committee's new representative to the Board, Marilyn McCormick, we look ahead to an exciting Board meeting on July 9th at 7 PM to celebrate 40 years of dedication to the preservation of the history of Dennis. As always interested members are welcome.

Harriet Jane Sears Nickerson, Blue Water Wife

Phyllis Horton

It is doubtful young Harriet Sears gave much thought to what was ahead for her when she married Captain Dennis Small Nickerson in 1876 and started her honeymoon with him on a voyage around the world. It is certain there were wonderful sights to see and experience, and maybe even some trying and frightening times. One of the exciting times would have been when she discovered she was pregnant with their first child. It was decided she should be home when it was time for the baby to be born. Daughter Hattie was born in 1871 in the security of her parents home in South Dennis, followed in 1876 by Mercie. It is not recorded how many times Harriet went to sea with Dennis or if she took her children, but we do know that she was pregnant on a voyage to China. Dennis was in command of his father Joshua's bark the *Julia A. Brown*. When her time had arrived Captain Nickerson was the only one to assist Hattie as she delivered his son in the confines of the small cabin. They named him Walter Seaborn Nickerson and surely Harriet was delighted to hold her son close to her as the ship raced over the seas. However, all was not well. Walter died when they were in the China Sea, less than a year after his birth. Harriet's heart must have been broken, and the Captain's, too, although he had the affairs of the ship to care for which would have taken his mind up to some degree. After a while Harriet discovered, perhaps with some trepidation, she was pregnant again. Just two weeks out of New York the Captain assisted Harriet as she had her second son, named Claude Seaborn. The voyage lasted three years and a day and the trip home from China took 100 days. Captain Joshua Nickerson met the ship in New York to handle discharge of the cargo and to greet Dennis and Harriet and meet his new grandson.

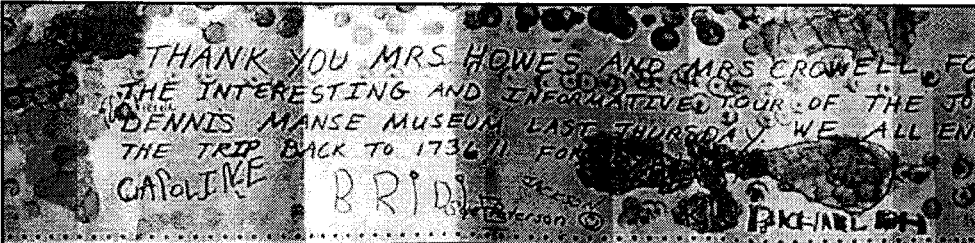


Hattie J. Nickerson
1844-1930



Photo unabled, possibly
Capt. Dennis Nickerson?

Harriet decided to remain at home thereafter in the relative comfort of her father's home in Searsville, a section of South Dennis. After ten years of marriage, she found herself expecting another child in June of 1886. Dennis was still in command of the *Julia A. Brown* when during a violent storm she broke up off Monomoy on January 9, 1886 with the loss of all hands. Mixed emotions must have attended the birth of Denetta who, sadly, lived for only 11 months and 13 days, leaving behind an even more heartbroken family. Harriet never remarried but devoted her life to raising her children and caring for her aging parents. She passed away in Somerville on November 13, 1930 at age 85 at the home of her daughter, Mercie. Harriet was brought home for burial and she lies in the South Dennis Congregational Church Cemetery next to a grave stone that reads "Capt. Dennis S. Nickerson 1844-1886 lost at sea". Harriet joined a long list of Cape Cod women who went to a lonely grave because the sea had claimed her husband.



School Visits

We had a visit from the youngest school group ever to visit the Manse and were delighted with their attention and questions. The teachers

and parents deserve a lot of credit for their patience with the children and with us as we tried to scale down the program for 3 and 4 year olds. Thanks to the **Bring 'Em Young Preschool** we had a lot of fun!

From Ezra Baker School

Dear Ladies and Gentleman of the Jericho House,

Thank you very much for our tour of the Jericho House and the barn. We enjoyed viewing the driftwood zoo because we used our imagination. The pieces looked realistic. The bellows hanging from the ceiling were humongous.

It was fascinating seeing the difference in just 100 years between the Manse and this house. This house was fancier. The front parlor, the lamps, clothing and furniture were extravagant. The toys were better in the 1800s than the 1700s.

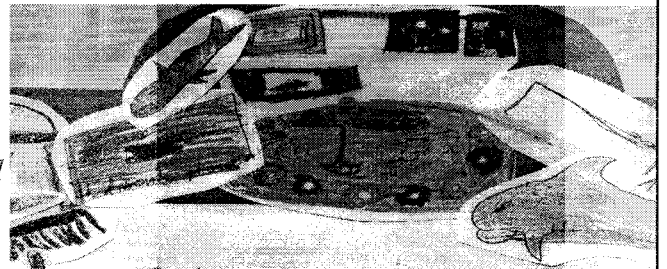
Traveling in the 1800s was a lot harder than now. Imagine all you had to do to prepare to go anywhere. It's easier using our tools. The phonograph was cool! We like our medicines. We wouldn't want to use skunk oil. The tobacco was disgusting.

We wished we had a longer time so we could have played the games. The hoop and stick was what we wanted to try most.

The cookies were delicious and the lemonade was thirst quenching. Thank you very much.

Your friends,

Mrs. Hoppen's Class at Ezra H. Baker



A Welcome Gift It's been a while since we took note of many donations and gifts from our supporters. A lovely letter from **Lora L. Nowotne** of Chestertown, Maryland reminded us of the ten pages of memories she sent us along with a letter dated April 4, 2003 and addressed to the Members of the Historical Society. Here is an excerpt from her letter with our thanks.

When one reaches a certain age and begins to reflect upon events of the past, perhaps someone in the years to come may be interested, amused, and who knows, inspired by someone reading about history that took place long ago. Being of a sound mind, and having reached the age of eighty and beyond, I would like to put into writing some of what I recall as a child and youth, growing up in West Dennis, on Cape Cod. There were four families, each with more than two or three children, growing up on "Wrinkle Point"land that jutted out into marshland and into the entrance of Bass River. There were no homes, only tall pines. In these woods, with narrow sandy ruts for roads, and on Bass River, these children became pirates who made rafts of logs and had mothers who made "sails" from old sheets that they might sail and find their treasures on the water. They hunted Indians and played Cops and Robbers in the tall pines....later years were spent playing ball and doing all the "kid" things children did long ago. They did not have toys, depression years didn't allow it, but all of these kids stuck together for all of their school years,and became a part of the only graduating class to maintain a scholarship for a graduating senior now, and in the years to come, from DY High School in South Yarmouth, MA. (More to come!)

Dennis Historical Society

P.O. Box 607

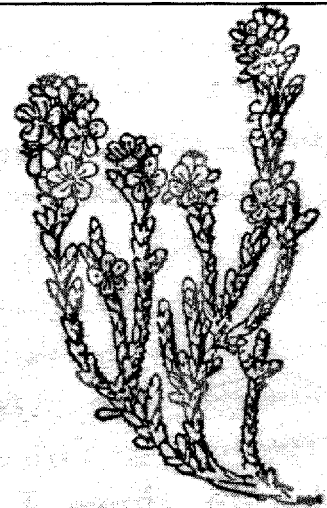
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The Way We Were

When Henry David Thoreau was viewing Cape Cod from a stagecoach he mentioned that “The sand along the roadside was partially covered with bunches of a moss-like plant, *Hudsonia tomentosa*, which a woman on the stage called ‘poverty grass,’ because it grew where nothing else would.” (p.32 *Cape Cod*) Another Henry, this time a Kelley, said it brought to mind that his father (Louis “Johnny” Kelley), in his youth, could pick up a little pocket change by collecting poverty grass in a sack for an elderly widow who used it as kindling for her stove. “Stomp it down good, Boy!” was the order. Before he could collect his money Louis had to show that the whole sack was full and well compressed. It took a long time to fill that bag! How much did he earn for his work? Five whole cents! (No wonder they called it Poverty Grass!) Nevertheless, even later than Thoreau’s travels, when the woods had been chopped down, Poverty Grass kept the light sandy soil from blowing away.



POVERTY GRASS