



# Dennis Historical Society Newsletter

Volume 31 Number 6

Send letters & stories to Dennis Historical Society, Box 607, S. Dennis 02660 or to pmrhorton@aol.com

July 2008

## Calendar

*Saturday, July 19,  
10:30 a.m.*

### Walk Through the Dennis Village Cemetery

*Meet at the Dennis  
Village Green  
Rain Date Sun. July 20,  
2:00 p.m.*

*Thursday, August 14,  
10:00 a.m.*

### Walk Through Sea Captain's Cemetery

*Guided walk in the  
historic South Dennis  
Cemetery*

*Meet at the South  
Dennis Congregational  
Church  
210 Main St., South  
Dennis*

*Rain Date Friday, August  
15, 10:00 a.m.*

*Saturday, August 16, 10:00  
a.m. - 4:00 p.m.*

### Colonial Open House at the Manse

*1736 Josiah Dennis  
Manse Museum*

*Sunday, August 17, 11:00  
a.m. - 2:00 p.m.*

### Old Fashioned Skill Days at Jericho

*1801 Jericho  
Historical Center  
Old Main Street, West  
Dennis*

## 1930s July 4th in Dennis Port

Some years back the slogan "Have a safe and sane 4th" was prominently displayed in the weeks leading up to July 4th---and with good reason.

When I was growing up on Main Street in Dennis Port everyone had fireworks. There were several stands throughout town that sold them. Three that I remember in Dennis Port were downtown next to Pop's Pie Plant, one at John I. Thompson's store on the corner of Lower County Road and Depot Street and next to what now is the 28 Club. At that time it was an empty building that had previously been Paul Robbins' Service Station.

The stands were small, whitewashed buildings decorated in red, white and blue and covered with posters that advertised various types of explosives---"guaranteed to thrill every red-blooded American man or woman, boy or girl". As I remember the pictures on the posters usually had an Oriental or circus theme. At any rate, they certainly got my attention. I wanted one of everything that was on the posters.

My sister, age 5, and I, at 6, accompanied our father to the fireworks stand, each of us with a \$1.00 bill to spend, and you can imagine the deliberations and mind-changing that took place. I think it was worse than buying penny candy. We were allowed to get Ladyfingers, pinwheels, Roman candles and small skyrocketes. Joe Long, Sr. had the stand by Pop's. He put our purchases into separate bags, adding a free stick of punk to each bag, all the while with a lit cigar in his mouth. Father made the next purchase, buying all the things he wouldn't let us have.

At that time we lived in Nathaniel B. Snow's house that stood where part of Barbo's is now. Main Street was lined with lovely, tall elm trees that formed a canopy over the street. The tree trunks were studded with nails that kids had pounded into the trees over the years to hold the pinwheels. I don't know why we couldn't reuse a nail already in place. For some reason we thought we needed to have a new nail. As I recall we were hard pressed to wait until dusk to set everything off, especially when we could hear other kids around the village who had persuaded their parents to let them get an early start, so under Mother's watchful eye we were allowed to set a few off early.

Every year at least one and sometimes several kids had a big firecracker go off in his hand---and it was always a boy. No doubt showing off to the other kids. My cousin Douglas was one of them. For days they wore their bandaged hand like a badge of honor.

The five-gallon pail, galvanized garbage pail and lid, tin cans and cracks in the telephone poles were fair game for "cherry bombs" and all of the heavier artillery. Some telephone poles needed to be replaced after several years of July 4th assaults. Those fireworks were detonated by the older boys and we were fascinated but scared enough to keep a safe distance.

One other July 4th ritual for my family that took place before the fireworks was to go to Pine Grove in Bass River (now South Shore Drive) for a family picnic organized by my Grandmother Nora Snow Murray. There were stately pine trees with no underbrush that offered shade and overlooked a long, sandy beach and Nantucket

Sound. The Hurricane of 1944 took out much of the grove. Today it's the site of wall-to-wall motels and not a stately pine in sight. Some years later the Commonwealth of Massachusetts had the good sense to outlaw fireworks that were sold and handled in such a haphazard manner. No doubt the medical profession had some input to that law. Perhaps if the missing fingers and crippled hands were accounted for it should have happened sooner.

I still love to see a brilliant fireworks display and if the crowds are an indicator, so do many other people. It may lack the "hands on" thrill, but at least the hands stay intact.

### **Other Dennis July 4ths**

Celebrating our country's birth has been a high point for Dennis people since the United States was formed. For the early years we have sketchy reports of long orations and dinners in some places, especially Barnstable, the county seat. As time went on and the population increased every village started their own celebration.

One event that took place for over 100 years was the "Night Before the Fourth Bonfire". Even if the village did nothing else they always had a bonfire. In time festivities became more sophisticated. The Register reported on July 2, 1846..."The approaching anniversary of our National independence will be celebrated by appropriate festivities in most of the towns on the Cape, including the firing of cannon, the ringing of bells, orations, processions, public dinners, displays of fireworks, concerts and picnic parties in pleasant groves". The present day celebration of the founding of our country pales by comparison.

Fourth of July celebrations in West Dennis took on a whole new flavor in the late 1880s. In 1887 the Casey Bros. Shoe Manufacturing Co. opened in West Dennis. A number of experienced young shoe makers were brought in from Brockton because of a shortage of local workers. Those young men from the city were hard workers but used to letting off steam on the weekends and special holidays, especially July 4th. West Dennis was not very happy to have that kind of behavior in their village and they appealed to the town to do something. The 1888 Annual Town Meeting voted to build a "lock-up" to restrain those who took their recreation a little too seriously. That one-cell lock-up was built where the south parking lot of our present day Town Hall stands. It served as a place to hold the celebrants until Monday morning when Mr. Casey bailed them out to go to work. This arrangement lasted until the shoe factory closed in 1894. That lock-up was used to store town records for a number of years while the Town Clerk conducted town business out of his residence as had been done since we became a town. In 1926 an addition was put on the building and it became the first Dennis Town Hall.

By July 4, 1896 the Register reported: "The antiques and horrors are to be out in full force on the morning of July 4th." This event was much like Halloween and happened in most villages. People dressed in antique clothing or made grotesque costumes and paraded around the village accompanied by musicians, who were also dressed in outlandish garb. When those activities were over they assembled somewhere for speeches and a picnic, ending with fireworks at night.

For many years a windmill stood on the north side of Chase Avenue in Dennis Port just east of Depot Street. It stood vacant for many years after it stopped grinding salt or grain. During the late 1800s and early 1900s it served as a dressing room for boys who went swimming at Depot Street Beach. The late Edward P. Chase, born in Dennis Port in 1900 and a long time DHS member, remembered changing into his swim suit and also that a group of older boys burned it down one year on the night before the 4th. He knew who did it but would never tell. Perhaps that's just as well. Some things need to fade into the mists of time.

Over the years Dennis has honored our founding in many different ways. Please take a moment to be grateful for all we have and maybe think of ways to make it even better. Happy “safe and sane 4th” to you all.

**From our Membership Chairman Mary Kuhrtz:**

Welcome aboard to new members Kevin and Linda Keegan of Silver Spring, MD and Lee F. Gruzen of New York, NY. We're glad you've joined us.

**The Lost and Found Department:**

DHS is missing photograph album #3. It was last seen at the Josiah Dennis Manse and we would like to have it back. It was created and carefully tended by Nancy Howes. If you have it or know where it might be please call her at 508-385-3528.

**To Tickle Your Funny Bone**

Two women trying to impress each other with their ancestry, engaged in the following conversation. First woman—“My ancestry goes all the way back to Alexander the Great. How far back does your family go?” To which the second woman replied, “I don't know. All our records were lost in the Flood.”

--- Phyllis Horton

**Walking Tour of Historic Quivet Neck**

Historian and long time resident of Quivet Neck, Brendan Joyce, led an informative and interesting tour of this truly special area of our town.

A group of nearly 50 people gathered June 14<sup>th</sup>, which was a perfect strolling day. They found the straw-hat factory, the ‘Irish cottage’ and homes built by ship captains to name a few items of interest. The flora and fauna, which lends a lovely backdrop to the area, helps you appreciate why the residents cherish their neighborhood as they do.

Thank you, Brendan, for keeping history alive.



June Howes photo

**A HISTORY of the RED COTTAGE**

*South Dennis, Massachusetts  
The Land, Its Buildings & People  
by  
Edmond Rhodes Nickerson*

Ever wondered about the history of this little restaurant as you patiently wait for a table to enjoy your morning cup of coffee or a tasty lunch? As the title notes, this brief history reviews early owners of the land, original Cape Cod 3/4 house (since moved elsewhere) and the evolution of a small grocery store into today's popular breakfast and lunch eatery. Maps and several pictures of homes and owners add greatly to this nugget of local history. Copies are available exclusively at the Red Cottage Restaurant.

--- Joan Nickerson

**Dennis Historical Society  
P.O. Box 607  
South Dennis, MA 02990-0607**

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**Non-profit  
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Permit No. 2  
South Dennis,**

**Annual Pie Sale Monday, July 7th  
6:00 p.m. Dennis Village Green**

The Manse Bakers & friends will create pies that might even be better than Mom's.

All proceeds go to the fund to repair & preserve the 1736 Josiah Dennis Manse Museum.

If you like to bake and wish to help the Manse repair fund, please call Mary Kuhrtz @ 508-385-4978 or June Howes @ 508-385-9308 for details.]



*Happy Forth of July to Everyone  
Happy 215<sup>th</sup> Birthday to the Town of Dennis*