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Dennis Historical Society Newsletter

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Send letters & stories to Dennis Historical Society, Box 607, S. Dennis 02660 or pmrhorton@aol.com
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July 2011

How Did A British Coin Come To Dennis?

This is a rerun of a piece I wrote for the March 1995 newsletter. It bears repeating as it relates to an artifact Burt Derick found in a file cabinet in Jericho Barn.

This winter the Scargo Café on Rt. 6A in Dennis has been putting an addition onto their restaurant. Recently one of the workmen dug up a 1775 British coin in the yard. This caused a bit of a stir in the village as people speculated on how it might have come there. Theories abounded! It brought to mind how it would have been discussed 60 years ago at the old Dennis Post Office by folks gathered around waiting for the mail to be sorted. I'm sure it might have been lively at times. They had the advantage of knowing more of the local history, or variations thereof, than many residents do today. A newspaper article remarked that a British soldier or official might have dropped the coin while traveling along the Old King's Highway, now 6A.

The Dennis Historical Commission also speculated, during their February meeting about how the coin arrived here. One of the less romantic theories is that it could have come in a load of fill when Luther Hall built his house in the late 1860s. The scenario that seemed most reasonable to us is that it may have come from a crew member of the British Man-of-War *Somerset* that went aground during a storm and wrecked on Peaked Hill Bars in Provincetown on November 2, 1778. The *Somerset* was a 64-gun frigate that saw duty in the colonies for most of her days. She visited Provincetown often where her Captain Curry sent provisioning parties ashore. His payment for the provisions was to send the ship's Chaplain ashore on Sunday to preach to the Provincetown colonists—probably to urge them on in providing more goods for the ship!

As the storm abated about 50 men drowned trying to get from the ship to the beach. The remaining 480 men were captured and marched, town-by-town, to Boston escorted by each town's militia. When they arrived at the Harwich (now Brewster)/ Yarmouth (now Dennis) town line they were met by Major Micah Chapman and his hardy band of militiamen. The line of march was through present day East Dennis to Scargo Hill Road, then around the south side of the hill and down into North Dennis. The piece of 6A between Scargo Hill Road and Sesuit Neck Road was still part of the Sesuit marsh.

It's easy to imagine that Major Chapman rested his men and prisoners in a field in the center of the village for noontime tea or bivouacked overnight. It's also easy to imagine that everyone in the village turned out to take a look at the British seamen. Almost every Cape town and their fishing boats had been harassed by the *Somerset* for several years.

After their sojourn in the East Precinct Major Chapman would have marched them west and turned them over to Col. Enoch Hallet of Old Yarmouth for passage to the Barnstable line.

It seems doubtful if the coin was dropped by an ordinary seaman. They were usually paid when their service was over. More likely it belonged to one of the officers who could have used it as bribe money in the Boston prison.

It may not have happened that way at all, but it sounds good

The *Somerset* should have been a prize of the Colonies, but the good people of Provincetown got there first and stripped away everything of value—a delayed payment for what Captain Curry had requisitioned over the years. The cannons were retrieved by the officials and sent to Boston for

coastal protection. The remnants of the ship were set ablaze as a final act by the locals and it burned down to the part that was busied in the sand. In 1973 the shifting sands uncovered the *Somerset's* remains and shortly thereafter covered them up again. The Scargo Café plans to proudly display the British coin for all to see.

Burt's great discovery was among some of the Fairbank ephemera stored in the barn. It is a 7" wide x 4 ¾ in. yellowed piece of paper pasted onto a piece of corrugated cardboard. (Every curator is allowed to scream out in frustration!) It reads:

“Confine Archibald McCarter
& John McGarland as Prisners
to the United States of America
formerly belonging to the Ship
Summersett Thos Prince Lutnt
Dorchester Hgt Nov 18
1778
To Officer of the main Guard Boston”

Phyllis Horton

Manna From Heaven

My aunt, Adelia (Wixon) West, fondly called "Aunt Babe" since she was a child, is approaching her 90th birthday. She was born in Dennis Port, the daughter of Nathaniel Wixon & Marion (Baker), and is named for her paternal grandmother. She has been a very religious person all her life, and has looked to heaven many times for the blessings that it could bring.

A week or so ago (early June), just after she and her daughter, Eleanor Koehler, who has been staying with her, arose one morning, they heard a thump on the front of the house. It was a sunny morning, and could not imagine what the noise might be. Some minutes later, after dressing, Eleanor decided to go out and get the newspaper from the paperbox, and check out the mysterious sound. After retrieving the paper, Eleanor discovered a fish on the lawn. She scooped it onto the paper and brought it into the house.

Aunt Babe was also surprised to find a fish. No one could imagine how it got there. Aunt Babe did a detailed examination and found it was about a 10-inch scup (called porgies by non-Capies), a very nice size. Further examination showed that the gills were bright red, there was no cloudiness in the eyes - in other words, the fish was FRESH!! Not being one to let a chance like this pass by, Aunt Babe instructed Eleanor to scale the thing, how to clean it, and Aunt Babe was determined to have it for lunch -- saying, "I've been waiting all spring for a fresh scup, and this chance is not going to pass!"

During the cleaning process, they discovered talon marks in the scup. No doubt an osprey had lost control of it while flying over the house, and this was the source of the delivery.

Aunt Babe demolished her fresh fish at lunchtime, stating it was one of the best scup she had ever eaten. Truly "Manna from Heaven." For those of you who have never eaten scup, it is a very bony fish, but has some of the sweetest, white flesh of any of the fish - well worth fighting through the bones for a taste.

Her granddaughter, Christine Koehler, visiting from Atlanta, Georgia, spent all afternoon waiting on the lawn for the osprey to deliver a blueberry pie, but, alas! It did not happen.

Burt Derick

Grand Re-Opening of the 1736 Josiah Dennis Manse Museum

Approximately 450 people attended the Grand Re-Opening Ceremony of the reconstruction of the 1736 Josiah Dennis Manse Museum. The celebration was really a blast – several blasts in fact, from the period cannon of the NE Artillery plus musket volleys by the Yarmouth Minutemen. The DY Band provided the musical background between the cannon firing and the commencement of the ceremony. Rev. Joshua Crowell delivered a meaningful benediction, and the affair was presided over by Paul McCormick, Dennis Selectmen Chair.



Senator Dan Wolf and Representative Cleon Turner presented a Resolution from the Massachusetts House of Representatives “*Congratulating The Josiah Dennis Manse Committee On The Completion Of The Josiah Dennis Manse Renovation*”. Following the ceremonial ribbon cutting, the Manse was open to visitors, and the line stretched out of the front door and down the brick pathway for a long time.



Dave Talbott – Cannoneer!!!

Six florists donated flowers, representing all five villages of Dennis, and the Manse was truly dressed in her finery. Eleven Dennis Restaurants and Manse volunteers provided a remarkable spread of food for the assembled guests.

The citizens came in great numbers to see *their* museum. They brought letters for First Day cancellations or had the program stamped and signed by artist Howard Bonington.

Indeed, what is old is new again!

Facebook

First we had e-mail, then we had a web page, and now in 2011 the Dennis Historical Society has a Facebook page. Terri Fox has volunteered to be its administrator. Please check it out and “friend” it. Thanks, Terri!

DENNIS HISTORICAL SOCIETY BOARD MEETING

Note: All members are invited to attend monthly DHS Board Meetings. The next meeting is at 3 pm on Thursday, July 14 at the West Dennis Graded School, School St., West Dennis. We have moved to meeting on the second Thursday of each month.

Dennis Historical Society
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~ COMING ATTRACTIONS ~

Friday, July 15, 11:00 a.m.

Tour the Ancient West Dennis Cemetery

Walk through the late 19th century section. Hear stories of Bass River Light, ferries, bridges, the race track, and local characters.

Meet at the West Dennis Cemetery

Fisk Street, West Dennis

Rain Date Sunday, July 17, 2:00 p.m.

Friday, August 12th, 11:00 a.m.

Walk Through the Swan Lake Cemetery

The resting place of Cape Cod's only Medal of Honor winner, many local sea captains and early residents.

\$3 donation to the Swan Lake Cemetery Assoc. suggested to support maintenance.

Meet at the Swan Lake Cemetery

Depot Street, Dennis Port

Rain date: Sunday, August 14th, 2:00 p.m.

Terri Fox will lead both tours

Museum Descriptions and new hours

1736 Josiah Dennis Manse Museum

77 Nobscussett Road, Dennis

June 28 – Aug. 30: Tues. 10 a.m. – 1p.m.,

Thurs. 1-4 p.m.

Saturday 1-4 pm: July 9, 23, Aug.6,

Sept. 3,17

1801 Jericho Historical Center

90 Old Main Street West Dennis

July 3rd - August 28th Sunday 2 – 4 pm

1867 West Dennis Graded School House

67 School St., West Dennis

July 6th – August 24th Wednesdays 1-3 PM