

OLD FASHIONED BIRTHDAY PARTY PLANNED

This month our town is 187 years old. On June 17, 1793 the General Court of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts passed an act incorporating the East Parish of Yarmouth, and on June 18 Gov. John Hancock signed the act and Dennis became a town. The two parishes had been functioning separately for some time and unlike some other Cape towns, the division was friendly and peaceful. D.H.S. will celebrate the anniversary with an old fashioned birthday luncheon to be held on Sunday, June 22 at the South Dennis Congregational Church Parish House. The schedule for the day is as follows:

12:00 P.M. Social Hour 1:00 P.M. Luncheon 2:00 P.M. Entertainment

At 3:00 P.M. there will be a boat trip on Bass River, of which D.H.S. members can take advantage at special group rates. Menu for the luncheon is Cranberry Juice, Fish or Clam Chowder, Salad Bar with assorted salads, rolls and Strawberry Shortcake, a real Cape Cod meal. Our entertainment will be mostly just for fun, with a musical presentation on the History of American Music by Mr. Norman Gray and Dorothy Thayer. Mr. Gray is known to many as a member of the Cape Cod Symphony Orchestra and Mrs. Thayer, his daughter, has also appeared in serious concert work here on the Cape as part of a quartet which presents programs featuring eight-hand piano works. Mr. Gray will perform on his banjo this time, as he did with the CCSO when they recently performed "Rhapsody in Blue", and Mrs. Thayer will illustrate the talk with piano music. In addition to all this, Mr. John Miller of WQRC will present some readings from Dennis' past, which we know you will all find interesting. Reservations must be made for the luncheon by sending a check in the amount of \$4.00 per person with a self-addressed, stamped envelope to: Mr. Joshua Crowell, Box 963, Dennis, MA 02638. Seating is limited, so send today.

SUMMER IS HERE

By now I hope that most of you have decided which side of Route 28 you plan to spend the summer on, and have made plans accordingly! I hope your plans include a visit to each of our lovely Historic Centers. The Season begins with the annual Silver Tea at Jericho House on June 27, to which all are invited. Thereafter the Jericho House and Barn Museum will be open on Wednesdays, Fridays and Saturdays from 2-5 and the Josiah Dennis Manse from 2-4 on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Each house has an appropriate collection for its era. The Barn Museum has added the Driftwood Zoo, collected by the late Sherman Woodward of South Dennis, a unique exhibit of whimsical people and animals fashioned from flotsam and jetsam collected on Cape Cod beaches. The Manse holds the desk used by Josiah Dennis in the library which contains the D.H.S. collection of books and manuscripts about the town's history. Don't miss either of these stops this summer (even if it means crossing Route 28).

D.H.S. TAKES TO ITS TWO WHEELERS

It was that one warm day in May that makes spring so well worth waiting for on Cape Cod. A group of history loving cyclists gathered at Sea Street Beach in Dennisport and pedalled their way through the history of that interesting village. Thanks are due to Virginia Gifford, Pauline Derick, Pauline Kennedy and Gail Hart for making the afternoon so interesting that none of us wanted to go home. The next tour will be on Saturday, June 28 through the westernmost part of the old East Parish, meeting at Carleton Hall at 1:00 P.M. Non-bicyclists are welcomed to follow us in cars. For information call Virginia Gifford at 398-2160.

STREETS OF OUR TOWN

I have recently acquired an early map of Dennis, "laid down" as it says, in May, 1795 by Elisha Bassett. It shows no homes, only ponds, windmills, meeting houses, and but three roads. They are Harwich Lower Road, which seems to follow Scargo Hill Road; Harwich Upper Road, which appears to be exactly the path of Setucket Road; and Chatham Road. The latter retains its name today, although the route is somewhat displaced, it now being in three sections, which do not lead directly to Chatham. The names of the first two roads were appropriate from the incorporation of Harwich in 1694 until 1803, when Brewster was set off as a separate town. But why a pathway called Chatham Road, when that town is so far to the east of us? Well, as you all know, Yarmouth was clearly the mother town of Dennis, but you may not know that from 1656 until 1674 Yarmouth was also "Step-Mother" to Chatham. In the year 1656, William Nickerson left the town of Yarmouth and walked to Monomoy as it was then called, perhaps following the route of Old Chatham Road. In a private dealing with the Sachem Mataquason, he purchased 4,000 Acres of land and prepared to established a settlement. Three of his daughters and their husbands, and five of his sons joined him, son Nicholas only remaining in Yarmouth. There followed for Patriarch Nickerson and his family nearly 20 years of battle with Plimouth Colony, during which he was fined, disenfranchised, and even put in jail for dealing with the Indians directly, buying land already the property of the colony, insulting the minister, Mr. Thornton, and other offenses against the pride of Plimouth. His land was taken and put "within the liberties of Yarmouth" until the colony at last settled for a considerable sum and let the Nickerson's inhabit their land. So Old Chatham Road was no doubt passed and repassed by constables, deputies and Nickersons, in the running battle of Monomoy, which in 1674 was made a part of Eastham, and in 1712 was at last incorporated as the town of Chatham. Thus Old Chatham Road clearly has the claim to antiquity and can be documented to bear one of the earliest names still used for one of the Streets of Our Town.

CALENDAR

- June 14 -- Flag Day
June 17 and 18 -- 187th Anniversary of the Incorporation of the Town of Dennis
June 18 -- Concord-Lexington Bus Tour - \$18.00 includes Lunch - Departs 8:40 A.M. from Wixon Middle School - Contact Paula Bacon at 394-5739 for reservations
June 18 -- Executive Board Meeting - home of President Hart at 7:30 P.M.
June 22 -- Birthday Luncheon - South Dennis Congregational Church Parish House
12 P.M. Social Hour - 1 P.M. Luncheon and Entertainment - 3 P.M. Boat Ride on Bass River - See article for more information
June 27 -- Silver Tea - Jericho House - 2-5
July 23 -- 7:30 P.M. - Carleton Hall - Talk by Mrs. Hugh Ferguson
August 23 - Sept. 1 -- Dennis Festival Days

"SOUTH DENNIS - LAND OF PURE DELIGHT"

So says a post card depicting the High Bank Bridge and Toll House circa 1900. Mr. Edmond Nickerson gave us an afternoon of pure delight as he recounted the interesting history of Liberty Hall to a capacity audience which gathered at that spot to focus attention on the local historic district soon to be nominated to the National Register of Historic Places as an historic neighborhood. Nancy Reid told of the research which is being done in preparation for this nomination and Pauline Derick gave some background into the development of the village. Over cranberry juice and cookies some interesting stories were collected to add to our growing wealth of information regarding the early houses and the families who built them. Preceding the meeting a game time for young people was held on the green outside of the Hall, once the site of the district's School House. The games were led by Nancy Symington and were greatly enjoyed, emphasizing the hope of the trustees of the Hall that it may be restored to its place as the social center of South Dennis. To this end, Mr. Nickerson has written an illustrated book about the Hall and its place in the life of the town. D.H.S. is anxious to help publish it and a committee is being formed to solicit sponsors. Proceeds from its sale will benefit the Hall. More on this as plans progress.

MEET THE REVEREND MR. JOSIAH DENNIS

The third grade school children from Ezra Baker School were greeted on their field trips to the Manse this month by The Reverend Mr. Josiah Dennis, played on each of the six days by Mr. Joseph Solarz. "Rev. Dennis" welcomed the children to his home built for him in 1736 while he was serving as the first settled minister of the East Parish of Yarmouth, and he told the children many interesting stories. (Some of which Mrs. Anson Howes allowed as how she had never heard before!) Howsoever, the children were enchanted and I'm sure many will long remember their visit because of this greeting. In much the same way did the original Mr. Dennis impress the people of his parish. He was born in Ireland about 1696 and grew up in Ipswich, Massachusetts. His father was a cabinet maker and young Josiah apprenticed with his father until, probably at the urging of his pastor, Rev. Samuel Wigglesworth, he decided to become a minister and enrolled at Harvard College. Mr. Dennis was somewhat older than his classmates, but nevertheless he completed his studies in three years, graduating in the class of 1723. (Not, it is said, very near to the top of his class.) After some occasional preaching, he was called to serve the East Parish on June 24, 1725, and after some delay, did come here and began his ministry of over 36 years. From this distance it is hard to draw a portrait of the man for whom our town is named. But all indications are that he was a kindly, sensitive gentleman whose lack of sophistication was more than compensated by his interest and hard work on behalf of his people. He was a man who had his share of life's vicissitudes, losing his first love, his first wife and several of his young children. The parish could not support him grandly, but he seems to have served them grandly, with devotion mixed with a good sense of humor. His carefully kept records of parish life provide a great deal of geneological information. Mr. Dennis died in 1763, 30 years before the parish became a town. It is said that his successor, Reverend Nathan Stone suggested that the new town should bear his name. Those who remembered Mr. Dennis from the days they were young men in his parish church promptly agreed and the town has memorialized its first pastor and good friend, the Reverend Josiah Dennis for all of its 187 years.

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

Postal Permit No. 2 South Dennis Mass. 02660
