



### THE ASPARAGUS TRADE

Just recently DHS board member Seth Crowell, and dog Skippy, arrived at the back door with a freshly cut, tender, succulent bunch of asparagus. This gift started memories of the asparagus trade of years ago. In the late 1890's, early 1900's growing asparagus was a prolific and profitable venture on the Cape. The spritely green spears were favored by rich and poor alike, and the Cape Cod soil seemed especially adapted to growing an abundant crop.

In Dennis Port my great grandfather Elisha Farren Robbins who lived on Sea Street had an asparagus garden that ran from Sea to Depot Streets along Mill Street--a good sized garden by any standards. DHS has an antique post card showing Grandfather Elisha in his asparagus garden. The picture was taken from the belfry of the Dennis Port Schoolhouse. His primary buyers were the Hotel Belmont in West Harwich, the Melrose Hotel in Harwich Port, and the Mattaquasson in Chatham who seemed ready to take all he could provide, plus some local customers who would buy from his wagon or come to the house for a bunch or two. There were other Dennis Port growers who supplied guest houses, hotels, and local customers.

In South Dennis Clarence Nickerson seems to have cornered the market. He raised asparagus and sold it along with other fruits and vegetables from his truck on a route from Chatham to Hyannis. Freeman G. Thacher was one of his drivers and his route included Joe's Twin Villas in Osterville. Nancy Thacher Reid says she has a "volunteer" which comes up every year in her hedge and she believes it spread from Clarence's asparagus beds. Nancy watches over her "crop" like a mother hen waiting for those first green shoots to appear.

The Nobscussett Hotel in Dennis was the largest consumer on the north side of town but the Dennis Village and East Dennis growers had another outlet for their produce--The Asparagus Express.

Without question the sandy plains of Eastham were the Asparagus Capital of the Cape. (They also qualified as tops in the turnip business in the fall.) Long time Eastham Town Clerk and asparagus grower Leslie Chase started taking his asparagus to Boston with the hope of securing the best price for his crop. When word got around to other growers they asked him to take theirs along also. Within a short while Mr. Chase had developed a motor route from Eastham to Boston picking up asparagus in each town along old Route 6. He had two Brockway trucks, one larger than the other. The size of the cutting in Eastham would determine which truck Mr. Chase would send to Boston, the large one, small one, or sometimes both. The drivers would leave Eastham with timed stops along the way so they could arrive at the Faneuil Hall Market at 2:00 A.M. when the buyers would start coming in.

Cutting asparagus was mainly a men and boys job. Women would trim the stalks, tie them into bunches and pack them in 36-bunch boxes. Later a 24-bunch crate was developed that was easier to pack and ship.

One of the Dennis growers was Gerard Chapman who would have his asparagus waiting when the driver pulled up, then anxiously await the Farmers Market Report that was printed in the noon edition of the Boston Herald. This arrived on the late afternoon train and was available by evening mail time. The Asparagus Express ran six nights a week--every night but Saturday.

I am indebted to Art Nickerson of Eastham for confirming some of this information. Art is a long time grower of both asparagus and turnips in Eastham and he says, "Some folks now adays put asparagus in a coffee pot and cook it standing up. That's all foolishness! All you have to do is cut 'em up and cook 'em in a kittle"--and that's how he does it in Eastham!

Regardless of how you cook it fresh asparagus is in a class by itself. Our ancestors certainly knew when they were onto something good. Thanks, Seth. Now we'll wait for the new peas and then---fresh corn!!

### THIRD GRADERS VISIT THE MANSE

In May the seven third grade classes of the Ezra H. Baker School visited the Josiah Dennis Manse to learn of life in the 1700's. They were dressed in the proper style and given names of that era, much to their delight. As they toured each room they were shown how people lived and worked when the Reverend Dennis and his family lived here. They made butter, learned about cooking, gathering and preserving food, making soap and candles, spinning and weaving, and all the other chores they would have done then. They wrote with quill pens and went to class in the 1700 one-room school house, learned how the Indians lived and taught the first settlers survival skills.

My sincere thanks to all who helped to make this program possible: Judy Dubin, Olive Wiper, Maureen Joyce, Betsy Wilcox, Lura Crowell, Dorothy Bell, Joanne Crowell, Sheila Duker, Nancy Reid, Beth Deck, Susan Kelley, Denise Atwood, Jane Bacon, Rachel Baroni, Rosemary Rathburn, Katherine McNamara and Joseph Solarz, who portrays the Reverend Dennis with such style! The third grade teachers all tell us this is their best field trip of the year!---Nancy S. Howes Director of the School Program.

## CALENDAR

June	9	11:30	A.M.	DHS celebrates the 203rd founding of the Town of Dennis at Lighthouse Inn.
June	12	7:30	P.M.	DHS Board Meeting at the Manse.
June	22	12-4	P.M.	Heritage Cape Cod. Garden and House Tour to benefit the West Dennis Garden Club Scholarship Fund ending at Jericho. Call 394-6114 for information.
		1-4	P.M.	Colonial Games at the Manse. Costumed guides demonstrate early American games for all ages. Audience participation.

### MEMORIAL DAY PARADE

The parade in Dennis Port marking Memorial Day and honoring our nation's military men and women stepped off in true military fashion precisely at 0930 hours under the direction of Chief Master Sgt. Walter Von Hone (USA Ret.) Walter now has a number of great parades to his credit including the Dennis Bicentennial Parade which is still a marvel in the minds of all who were involved with that endeavor. He engineered a four mile parade over a two and a half mile route with a precision that would have earned honors on D-Day. So, our annual Memorial Day Parade is a snap for Walter! Hundreds of people lined the .6 mile route to salute our country's flag and cheer on the many marchers, young and old, fire and police personnel, town officials, veterans organizations, civic and social groups and ending with our own Josh Crowell with his recently restored 1930 Dodge pick up truck driven by cousin Seth Crowell.

Everyone was surprised and pleased with the musical presentations of the Wixon Middle School and Dennis-Yarmouth High School Bands. Those kids are great! Out tax dollars have been well spent in that department.

Many people remarked at how wonderful it was to see our town coming together in civic pride, honoring our country's flag and history and I have to agree wholeheartedly. Walter says he's grateful that the Memorial Day Parade is getting longer with greater participation both from marchers and from the crowd cheering along the route. Keep up the good work, folks. Dennis is still an All-American Town. See you next year at the parade!

### SIX NEW MARKERS

During the Memorial Day ceremonies at the Dennis Port green Nancy Thacher Reid gave a presentation of the ten young Dennis men who lost their lives in World War II. She told of the four men who have markers placed around Dennis in their memory, then went on to name the six men who were being honored on this Memorial Day with markers. They were: Pvt. Kenneth M. Chase and S/Sgt. Wallace C. Doane of Dennis Port, Lt. George B. Wilbur III of South Dennis and PFC Bernard Whitney O'Neil, Pvt. William H. Crowell, and MMOM Sanford Vincent of West Dennis. As she read their names Phyllis Horton gave each family present a single red rose for remembrance to be placed later at the markers.

At the end of the formal ceremonies the families were escorted in caravan to each marker. The private dedications were very touching and marked a closure to the hurt of fifty years ago and a tribute to those six young Dennis men who will live forever in our town's history.

### BIRTHDAY LUNCHEON

Reservations are coming in at a steady pace keeping Josh Crowell on his toes to get all the tickets out in time. The program has been firmed up and we are in for a real treat! The Girl's Glee Club of Wixon Middle School, under the direction of Patricia Anderson, will sing for us--and I understand they have a great presentation. Use last month's reservation form or call Josh at 385-3689 and join us at Lighthouse Inn on Sunday, June 9 at 11:30.

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

Non-Profit Organization U. S. POSTAGE PAID Permit No. 2 So. Dennis, MA 02660
--

