



Dennis Historical Society Newsletter

Volume 27, number 6

June 2004

Calendar of Events

Saturday, June 5

10 AM

**Walk in the Indian
Lands with Shannon
Goheen, botanist.**

Meet in the north parking lot at the Town Hall and discover the beauty of our native lady slippers and other spring flowers.

Saturday, June 26

**1-4 PM at the
Manse**

Josiah Dennis Manse Museum Opening Reception. Special exhibit: "And The Friendship Lives On" The Golden Age of Ornamental Penmanship 1840-1895. Signature quilts and autograph albums. Refreshments.

Sunday, June 27

**1-4 PM at Jericho,
Old Main Street
West Dennis**

Opening Tea at the 1801 Jericho House and Barn Museum. Join the Jericho Committee for a tour of this wonderful old house. Refreshments

DHS School Program in its 29th Year!

For 29 years the third grade students at the Ezra H. Baker School have visited the Josiah Dennis Manse to take part in the DHS School Program. After a few years of just a walk-through tour, we developed hands-on activities to give the children a better idea of how people lived and worked in the 1700s and added a visit to the Maritime Wing to introduce them to the importance of the maritime history of Dennis. Each year we receive wonderful thank you letters from the children. Here's a sample of just a few:

May 6, 2004

Dear Volunteers,

Thank you for the tour of the Manse. I really enjoyed it! Now I see what people mean when they say it's hard to write with quill pens! The weaving must have gotten pretty boring after a while, though. I never knew how much work! Making butter I imagine must get pretty boring. Tiring, too! I'd absolutely hate that bed! Well, maybe I'd like feathers. But I wouldn't like ropes. You taught me a lot of things today, so thanks, and I enjoyed it a lot!
Mercy (Shannon C.)

These are bits from several other letters:

What surprised me was how small their clothes and shoes were back then. Bathsheba (Shelby S.)

The Maritime room is my favorite room because I like ships a lot and I saw a harpoon. It was the best time I ever had. Fondly, Obed (Connor M.)

In the school house I learned that if you were bad you will get wacked with a hard stick and have to wear a dunce cap on top of your head and sit in the corner. (Cody C.)

I can't believe kids after school had to do work until bedtime. (Cyrus)

I really really enjoyed when I got to put the soft sheep wool on the loom and took the back piece and combed the wool into place. (Chelsea T.)

In the keeping room we got to shake the cream until it turned into butter. Then we got to eat the butter on bread. It was so good I said, "I want some more, please!" (Nikki)

I loved my name. It was the best! (Barnabas)

I'd like to thank all of the volunteers whose dedication made this year's program such a success: Margie Wheeler, Kathleen SanClemente, Jean Goheen, Susan Kelley, Sandy Wilkins, Mary Raycraft, Terri Fox, Chris Talbott, Jane Bacon, Camille Murphy, Jim Coogan, Maureen Joyce, Judy Dubin and Lura Crowell.

Nancy Howes, School Program Director

Life in South Dennis Before WWII

by Eugenia French

Eugenia's "Homestead" in Mayfair was once "the old Gifford place" but it burned down. A new house was later built on the site by the Hundleys. Continued from the May issue.

The Homestead was built on a slight hill and beyond it was a barn (a house stands there almost on the same spot now). There was an orchard with a variety of fruit trees—apples, a huge crabapple tree, pears and peaches and a raspberry patch. In the meadow between the house and the marshes of Kelley's Bay were some fine high bush blueberries, a bush unheard of in many parts of our country. To the east of the house was a little fresh water brook, Cyrenius Brook. In dry spells it dwindled to a trickle but always it was there. On my last visit to the area I searched and found it. There was enough water in it to make it home for a muskrat who slipped away into high ferns.

This little brook played an important part to the area. Across the road from our house was a cranberry bog. It is almost unbelievable to see trees there now. Years ago there was a smaller bog across the road and further back another bog. Between the two bogs used to be a cedar swamp. In those days we had to supply the poles for our line. I was not sorry to see the swamp cleared and a bog with its new slips of cranberry vines planted there to combine the bogs as one. Someone had jokingly teased us that bears lived in the darkness of the swamp and that the big dark holes under fallen tree roots were their dens. No bears existed there but my childlike fears were very real.

Well, this little brook began in a mud hole behind the back bog. The brook flowed through the main ditch of the bog. Each fall the water would be flooded over the bog by closing a gate at the place where it flowed under the road. The bog took on the appearance of a pond. We learned to ice skate on the bog during the months it was frozen. In warmer weather we sometimes played in the sand pits of which there were several on each side. In the summer of 1975 I was able to find the remains of three of these on the east side of the bog. In the early fall there was a period of great activity when the pickers and the piles of boxes arrived. Each spring the bog was drained. As we'd return from school we knew the water was leaving the bog before we saw it. The stillness of the air was broken by the noisy rushing of that water flowing towards Kelley's Bay.

Not far from the brook in the meadow was another fascinating spot. It was hard to find with the low bushes and tall grasses. The search was worth it because here was a "bubbling spring". Several times I helped an interested person find it. This spot of pure nature seems to be lost to progress.

Not far beyond the barn was the first road into Mayfair. For years there was a rather large billboard-type sign saying "Mayfair". Many years ago someone had a dream of a fine development but bad times came to the country, followed by World War II when there was no building. The originator would have been pleased to see how his idea finally caught on. He certainly was far-sighted.

For all the years I lived beside Mayfair land (for our land adjoined it) there were six summer houses there. Starting along the "narrows" was the Murphy house, sometimes called the rental house. Next was the home of Dr. and Mrs. G. Markham and sons Gilbert and Emerson. Across the sandy road from them was the Bixby's cottage. Then there was a space of pines. Further along, now on the Follins Pond side, were the other three: Callahan's, Lockey's and Donovan's. Later on Lockey's house burned and another was built on the same site.

A short distance behind the large sign and into the woods in a little hollow was a hand pump. It was seldom used but came in handy at times. I was amazed to see this pump still there in 1975, now in the backyard of Mr. and Mrs. Valenta on Follins Pond Road.

(to be continued)

The Indian Lands

Excerpts from the poem by Walter S. Morley

This poem was dedicated to Esther W. Howes ... "teacher, historian, and friend, whose contribution to the education of a generation of children and whose interest in the history of Dennis qualify her for the respect and admiration of her neighbors." ... Esther was one of the leaders who was instrumental in starting our DHS School Program. (Following in her footsteps, her daughter-in-law, Nancy Howes, is in charge of the school program at the Manse today.)

I

The Indian Lands on calm Bass River's shore
 Are empty now; the natives come no more,
 As they once did, to weather winter's cold
 'Midst trees in forests, dense then—we are told—
 With hardwoods which o'erspread the breadth and span
 Of this Cape Cod 'til needs of later man
 For houses, ships, and fuel took greater sway.
 His axes rang; the forest fell away.
 Now, as we walk where birch and walnut stood
 Our feet fall softly in a pitch-pine wood.



Shannon, June 2000

IX

Perhaps, before they moved to **summer camps**, The People paused **between the springtime damps**
 And longed-for heat of **summer to embrace**. Just briefly, **all the beauty of this place**.
 If so, the shining river **held their eye**, A brilliant blue **beneath a blue May sky**,
 Or stretching southward like a molten run Of shim'ring silver in a high hot sun.
 (Perhaps some watchers on a day long gone Were startled when they chanced to look upon—
 From shadows at the foot of new-leaved trees, Full-sailed before a vagrant southwest breeze—
 A serpent craft, afloat as in a dream, And trembled as it disappeared upstream.)
 As nature's folk and lovers of the land 'Tis likely that they found the time to stand
 In admiration of the lovely bloom Of flowers with the haunting, soft perfume
 Of locust blossom, delicate wild rose, Which pleased much the grateful, searching nose.
 It's sure that as they traversed grassy bars Their eyes were caught by earthly yellow stars,
 The weed of rattlesnake. Along the trail Amid tall grasses, violet and frail,
 The toadflax grew on sandy earth. In shade, Beyond the ferns, sequestered in a glade,
 The orchid of the north swayed silently: The lady slipper. Did they, breathlessly,
 Proclaim their deep delight with wordless sigh When, unawares, its sweet lip did espy?
 And were they careful to avoid the grief Brought on by touch of poison ivy leaf?



Shannon, June 2000

X

The Indian Lands on calm Bass River's shore
 Are empty now; the native comes no more.
 The time is decade-marked since nature's child
 Dwelt in this place and drew life from the wild.
 Now, others come to dream, perchance to steal
 A vision, rising from the awe they feel,
 Enchanted by the spirit of this ground;
 Ennobled by the peace they here have found.

We hope you will be able to join botanist Shannon Goheen on Saturday, May 5 at 10:00 AM to recapture some of the magic surrounding the Indian Lands near Bass river. We will meet at the north parking lot at the Town Hall.

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THE WAY WE WERE

In keeping with our focus on South Dennis, Mayfair and the Indian Lands we are including this picture postcard with its message to Mrs. Clara Newell, So Royalton, Vermont. *(from DHS collection)*

So Dennis Mass,

Nov 17, 1909

Friend Mrs Newell,

Will send you these cards hope you will like them This is one of the Streets in So Dennis but I don't live on to (sic) street I live in the woods by the railroad so I can see the cars every time they go. It is Plesent in the summer when everything is green Can't rite no more this time Good night

From Emma F. Crosby Box 3

So Dennis Mass

