

RESCUING A RESCUE BOAT

Our ancestors lived, and many of them died, with the reality expressed in an ancient prayer: "Lord, have mercy upon me, for your sea is so great, and my boat is so small!" When Cape Codders turned from their efforts to live from the land to the more bountiful harvests to be gleaned from the sea, they were realistic about the dangers that were inherent in their new calling. In 1797 the first lighthouse was built at the Truro Highlands, but eleven years earlier, recognizing the dangers which mariners faced as they sailed around the Cape's backside, the Massachusetts Humane Society organized to encourage volunteers to keep dories at the ready to help those unfortunate seamen whose vessels were caught in the relentless power of the sea in its destructive mood. On March 23 at 7:30 at Carleton Hall, we will hear Mr. William Quinn, author and lecturer on sea disasters around Cape Cod. He will speak about a particular dory, her adventures in life saving, and the effort of Orleans citizens to rescue her from an obscure demise.

WOMEN WHO WENT TO SEA--A SEQUEL

The story of Lucy Howes has another chapter, one which I'm sure you'll read with interest. The First Mate who was able to work the disabled Lubra back to Hong Kong with only the help of young Lucy was another Dennis man named Henry Hall. When Captain Howes purchased the Bark, Lubra, he looked around for the ablest crew he could sign aboard. Henry was his choice for First Mate. He had gone to sea at an early age, as did so many Dennis lads, and in a short time he had worked his way from common sailor to officer. His skill in saving the vessel Lubra shows that Captain Howes' confidence in him was not misplaced. When the pirates first attacked the vessel, all hands did their best to defend her, but it was soon apparent that their efforts were in vain. Young Henry took refuge in a barrel, and several times the marauders thrust sabers through the staves, which wounded him severely. Nevertheless, when the Chinese abandoned the vessel, Mate Hall navigated her back into Hong Kong. He earned the eternal gratitude of Mrs. Howes and her daughter, not only for preserving their lives, but for salvaging the remains of the vessel. And Henry Hall was also to earn the gratitude of the entire maritime world, for he was called to testify at the trial of the pirates and his eye-witness testimony proved of great value. Henry returned to live in Dennis, where he married and had three children before he died in his thirties, his constitution no doubt weakened by the pirates' wounds. One interesting fact I have yet to divulge: young Henry Hall was but fifteen years of age at the time of his terrifying and heroic experience. (My thanks to members of the Hall family for information and documentation of this interesting story.)

HIGH SCHOOL EDUCATION

We have so far traced the history of education of children in our town through several stages--the movable squadron schools, the development of the district system, and the revolutionary concept of a graded school. Still we have not reached the level of education which today most of us regard as the absolute minimum--a high school education. The first public high school established in the U.S. was English High School in Boston, founded in 1821. Soon thereafter the Massachusetts legislature required that towns with 500 families must offer certain advanced classes, notable U.S. History, geometry and bookkeeping. The academies seemed to have provided this type of education here on the Cape in the mid-1800's, but the town met the state's requirement by providing some of these courses in the various schools. The earliest mention of high school classes is found in the school committee's report of 1857. However, it was not until 1890 that the first report of an official 4-grade high school was made. Grades 9 - 12 were offered in the newly equipped High School rooms at the Dennisport Graded School, all Dennis students were eligible and transportation was offered to students from the North Side. One teacher seems to have covered all four grades in one room of the school, but at least the first step had been made. In 1891 the annual town meeting voted to build a High School on the North Side, and it opened the following fall with D. M. Nickerson as principal. That building still exists, now being the home of Alfred Bohlin on Route 6A in East Dennis. A similar high school was built in South Dennis on a plot of land given to the town for that purpose by C. M. and E. H. Baker, now a part of the Ezra H. Baker School parking lot. That school burned in 1898 and High School on the South Side was kept in each village, until finally settled in the South Dennis School where all Dennis classes graduated until 1930, when Dennis students attended Yarmouth High School as tuition pupils, until 1954 when the towns regionalized and the Dennis-Yarmouth Regional High School was built.

CALENDAR

- March 17 Evacuation Day, 1776 Remember the password!
March 19 Balloon Day at the Ezra H. Baker School
March 23 7:30 p.m. Carleton Hall: Mr. William Quinn, author and lecturer,
"Rescue 36500" slides and talk
April 21 7:30 p.m. "A Walk up Herring River" John White, West Dennis
Community Building
May A program on rare books and books about Cape Cod, Mr. Ben Muse
of Parnassus Bookstore
June 1-5 The Ezra H. Baker School field trips. Please volunteer early
to avoid disappointment, as our volunteers have as much fun
as do the students.

EVACUATION DAY OR ST. PATRICK'S

As a student of American History, I have always been somewhat disturbed that the anniversary of the evacuation of Boston by the British is better known as St. Patrick's Day, even though some of my best friends are Irish. So I am happy to report that I have some salve for the purist conscience. On March 17, 1776, Gen. Washington designated the password for the day to be "St. Patrick," so the Patriots and Irishmen alike can feel free to celebrate in good Boston tradition. Have a nice day.

THE STREETS OF OUR TOWN

As a contribution to the ongoing discussion about a lack of Cape Cod Springtimes, I have a brief statement to quote. My source states that the Cape has not three, not even four seasons, but five! They are called Spring, Summer, Autumn, Winter, and March--and the longest of these is March! Today, I can believe it. According to my favorite meteorologist, spring is but three weeks away, but it seems lightyears from now according to the weather report for this week. And yet, hope springs eternal. Here it is barely the first day of the Cape's longest season, and do you know where my husband is? He is in the back yard, under the canvas that covers our family's wooden boat, scraping, sanding, priming,--doing all of those hopeful things that convince us that soon the Sea Reid (so-called) will be back in her native habitat, Bass River. We keep our boat at Mayfair, and in my daydreaming about cruising up and down this most beautiful of rivers, I began to wonder why the area where we keep and launch our boat is called by that name. Mayfair is a section of London, noted for distinguished homes and fine shops. What can this possibly have to do with the upper reaches of Bass River, on the peninsula bordered by Kelley's Bay and the narrows leading to Follins Pond? No old deeds bear this name, no old maps have this designation. Inquiries to historians about the town produced no answers, except the belief that the designation is a modern one. So I started from today and moved backward. The earliest recorded use of the name that I discovered was in 1924, when a developer who had bought the 52 acres of land bordering the River had given the name of Mayfair to the development he proposed. An interesting developer's brochure dated 1927 describes the land as being the romantic site of the honeymoon cottage of two English lovers, Francis Baker and Isabel Twining in 1641. I can't imagine that young Isabel would have considered the rough homestead which they carved out of the wilderness in any such romantic light. The brochure goes on to describe the select homesites with 30-foot frontage, which when developed will make the area compare in glamour to Mayfair in London. I left my research with a feeling of gratitude that the original plans did not fully materialize, for he proposed over 250 house lots, with no green spaces or open land, in this small area. Today, a portion of this land is preserved as conservation land through the gift of Mrs. Ernest Pareseau. My gratitude will add a new dimension to that euphoric feeling as we follow the Sea Reid to her spring launching over Mayfair Road, one of the Streets of our town.

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