



HOW DID A BRITISH COIN COME TO DENNIS?

This winter the Scargo Cafe on Rt. 6A in Dennis Village 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 while folks were 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 1860's. The scenario that seemed most reasonable to us is that it probably came from a crew member of the British Man-o-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 which 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! About 50 crewmen drowned trying to get from the marooned 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 East Dennis to present day Scargo Hill Road, then around the south side of the hill and down into Dennis Village. The piece of 6A between Scargo Hill Road and Sesuit Neck Road was not in place then. It's easy to imagine that Maj. Chapman rested his men and prisoners in a field in the center of the village for noontime tea or bivouacked there overnight. It's also easy to imagine that everyone in the village turned out to take a look at the British seamen. After their sojourn in the East Precinct Maj. Chapman probably marched them west and turned them over to Col. Enoch Hallet in Old Yarmouth for passage to the Barnstable line. If the coin was dropped by an ordinary seaman I'm sure he was quite dismayed on discovering his loss. That would have been good bribe money to a guard on the march or 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 Capt. Curry had requisitioned over the years. The cannon were retrieved by the officials and sent to Boston for coastal protection. The remnants of the ship was set ablaze as a final act by the locals and it burned down to the part that was buried in the sand. In June of 1973 the shifting sands uncovered the Somerset's remains and shortly afterwards covered them up again. The Scargo Cafe excavation uncovered the British coin and it will be proudly displayed in the restaurant.

THANKS FROM THE BAG LADY

The Mid-Winter Festivity was a heart-warming, foot-stomping grand time. Rev. Edward Walker said grace and Christine served up her usual good fare. The Jovial Jazz group tuned up and turned everyone on with a sing-along. Some of our members have terrific voices! In honor of St. Valentine's Day Maureen Joyce serenaded her sweetheart, Brendon (of DHS Audio-Visual team). President Lu Crowell burned up the floor (and loads of calories) doing the polka with her brother, John Williams. Lu also surprised Ye Olde Ed with a corsage, a Certificate of Appreciation, and a briefcase large enough to hold half of Fort Knox. The briefcase was presented because I always arrive at board meetings with a shopping bag full of things that need to be brought to the board's attention. At the February meeting my Filene's bag split down the side and I left the Joyce's with an armful of books and a new name--"The DHS Bag Lady". My sincere thanks to all of DHS. I treasure my certificate and am making good use of my briefcase. The new menu program book was on display. Elaine Andersen and Maureen Joyce donated the Bicentennial menu to help fill one of our pages. Thank you, ladies!

OUR NUMBERS ARE GROWING

Here's a friendly welcome to our new members: Eldon E. Davidson, Mr. and Mrs. John Schofield, Mr. and Mrs. Joseph P. Williams, Mrs. Ronald E. Keeler, Sr., The Rev. Thomas F. Casey, Eleanor C. Broidrick, Sharon Snow Whittemore, Mr. Leslie E. Worden, Mr. and Mrs. Burton Derick, and Jane Stevens. So glad to have you all on board!

THE FENCE FUND

Contributions are continuing to come in with a pleasing balance of \$1115.00. There is still a long way to go but this is encouraging. Our latest donors are:

Mr. and Mrs. Richard Hall Virginia Van Vorst Mr. and Mrs. William Mailhot
Joshua Crowell in memory of Capt. Howard and Amelia Nickerson Kelley
William C. and Gladys M. Kelley
Phyllis Horton in loving memory of Edith Murray Robbins
Priscilla Perry Sprunt in loving memory of Ernestine and Leon Perry

CALENDAR

Mar. 8 7:30 P.M. DHS Board meets at Josh Crowell's.
Mar. 17 Wishing yez all a grand St. Patrick's Day!

LUTHER HALL

Scargo Cafe of British coin fame is a lovely mid-1800's house built after the Civil War by Luther Hall. Luther was born Nov. 5, 1842 in Dennis, son of Thomas and Hepsy (Hall) Hall. Luther was a Civil War veteran and his discharge paper is in the DHS Library at the Josiah Dennis Manse. Luther was discharged out of Capt. John Kent's Co. E 5th Reg. of MA Volunteers at the age of 19 at Wenham, MA because he had served his enlistment period. We even know what he looked like! He was 5'7½", light complexion, hazel eyes, dark brown hair, and his occupation when enrolled was as a clerk. Shortly thereafter he re-enlisted in the same regiment for 100 days. Later he was commissioned a Captain of militia by Gov. Andrews.

When Luther finished his soldering he returned home and worked as a clerk in Howes Chapman's store (where the Mobil Station is now). He must have really impressed Mr. Chapman because he either bought or was given the house lot next door, built his house in 1868, and married the boss' daughter, Minerva, in 1869. Sometime later he took over the store which he owned until 1885. He was also the Post Master until 1886. He sold the store to E. C. Matthews who moved it across the street and is in present use as a flower shop. When he retired as a store keeper he went into full time cranberry growing and also was a cranberry commission merchant. He was superintendent of Dennis schools for a number of years, and in 1890 was the agent in charge of the Nobscussett Hotel. Capt. Luther Hall died on April 29, 1900 having packed a lot of living into 58 years and leaving a lovely house along the Old King's Highway.

GERARD CHAPMAN

The other notable owner of the Luther Hall House was Gerard Chapman, a nephew of Minerva Chapman Hall. Gerard was, among other occupations, a store clerk, a cranberry grower and agent for the extensive Hall family bogs. He served the town on the Dennis School Committee from 1916-1934 and as Dennis Town Clerk and Treasurer from 1940-1961. When he became Town Clerk he found a need for something to carry town meeting paraphernalia to the meetings. He obviously discussed this need with C. Lovell Goodspeed--grocer and post master--because Mr. Goodspeed either sold or gave Gerard a market delivery basket which is still in use today. Town Clerk Elinor Slade arrives at every town meeting with that basket over her arm, and Mr. Goodspeed's name is still legible on the handle. (Wouldn't it be great if all town equipment could last that long?!)

There have been a number of "Gerard stories" over the years. He possessed rather a quick temper and also had a slight stammer, both of which have been improved upon as the stories have been retold.

When Gerard was a young man he boarded with Mrs. Cyrus Hall on Nobscusset Road and worked as a clerk for E. C. Matthews & Co. store and post office. One of his duties was to open early and have the outgoing mail ready to be picked up by Richard Hefler's Stage at 6:00 A.M. One morning Gerard's alarm clock failed to go off at the designated hour and he overslept. When he awoke and realized the situation he grabbed the clock and threw it out the window--which was not open--saying, "Y-y-y-you'll never cause me to be l-l-late again!" However, the mail did go out. When the stage driver (probably Harvey Howes) pulled up to an empty post office and assessed the situation he went next door, awoke Lovell Goodspeed, Mr. Matthews' partner, and the mail was on it's way somewhere near the appointed hour.

While Gerard was on the school committee it became his duty to fire Miss Bertha Hamblin who had come here from Marstons Mills to teach grammar school. It seems that Miss Hamblin was a remarkably bad teacher. Poor Gerard could not find the courage to fire her--instead he married her, thereby effectively removing her from the Dennis school system!

The last Gerard story took place when he was the Dennis Town Clerk and Treasurer. He kept meticulous records of every penny taken in or spent by the town. At the close of office hours on a particularly long, quiet day Gerard wrote with a flourish across the page, "Not a damn cent!"

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
--

