



Dennis Historical Society Newsletter

Volume 39, No 2

Send letters & stories to Dennis Historical Society, Box 607, S. Dennis 02660 or to pjhowes@verizon.net

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The next Board Meeting is Tuesday, March 8 @ 2:00 P.M., 2nd floor, Dennis Memorial Library, Old Bass River Road, Dennis Village

From Cabin Boy to Soldier, the American Odyssey of Frederick Bergmann

*Charles Edwin Handren and Joan McRae Stoa,
with Burton N. Derrick of the Dennis Historical Society*

While researching the life of his third Great Aunt Minerva Handren Sears, Charles became captivated by a little German boy who became part of not only the Sears family but of American history.

Frederick Bergmann (b. 1843) was approximately nine years old when he first met Captain Joshua Sears. Captain Sears was a frequent visitor in the Bergmann home during his regular trips to Bremenhaven, Germany, where Frederick's father, Heinrich was Joshua's business associate. Bremenhaven was a regular port of call for Captain Sears, and with each visit, Fred became more enamored of Joshua's merchant ship, the Orissa, and life at sea. In August of 1858, at age fifteen, Fred was finally old enough to join the Orissa's crew as a cabin boy under the watchful eye of his father's friend. Eventually, Captain Sears became his guardian and welcomed the boy into his own family. Fred's journey took him from exotic ports of call in the Far East, to a carefree boy's life in a picturesque town on the New England seacoast, and into some of the earliest engagements of the American Civil War.

Joshua's most impressive command was the three-masted bark *Wild Hunter*, built in East Dennis in 1855 by the Shiverick family of ship builders. Today, a detailed illustration of the ship is on display at the 1736 Josiah Dennis Manse. Barques, or the American usage "bark," were considered the "workhorses" of mid-nineteenth century commerce, carrying goods all over the world during lengthy and often arduous voyages. Known for his skill as a captain, the orderliness of his ships and conscientious preservation of any property in his care, Joshua Sears was an exacting leader. On his watch, a cabin boy like Fred would have been responsible for a variety of demanding tasks on board ship, ranging from clearing away the captain's

dinner service and waiting on the older seaman, to swabbing the decks, scrambling up into the rigging to trim the sails, and even standing watch in all kinds of weather. It was a hard life. Cabin boys were essentially apprentice seamen; those with aptitude could and did aspire to more responsible shipboard positions as adults. When we first hear about Fred in a letter from Joshua to Minerva dated August 5, 1858, some of the romance that initially took him to sea had apparently worn a little thin (sic):

"I have got the little German Boy that I Spoke off But the Poor fellow is homesick and wishes himself back again. I Expect you will have a letter soon from his Sister Henrietta. She [said] that she should write you. If she does you must answer it. She is a very fine Girl 17 years old Well Educated but very Poor. No disgrace but very inconvenient. More on my arrival. Affectionately yours, Joshua"

Novice seamen, or "greenhorns," like Fred were often the victim of hazing by experienced deck hands, as appears to have happened in an incident described by Joshua to Minerva in a letter dated August 10, 1858 (sic):

"This morning I was inform'd that one of my young men in the Forecastle had lost all his clothes. I immediately roused Every body & Every thing out of the Forecastle Overhaul 'd Every chest & hag but of Course could find Nothing for the thief Would have been a fool to put them in his chest however I was in hopes to find some little thing just Enough to Condemn the man or men. If I had I will bet a Goose they would remember'd the Capt of Wilder Hunter all their lives. I would given them Marks that they could show their friends the day before they died! After searching in the Forecastle We Overhaul 'd the rest part of the ship. Under the Top Gall Forecastle we found the great part of them Stowed away under the Blocks & old rigging, the thieves intending to take it on Shore the first night in and raise some Money on them. There yet remains a young German fitted out with clothes by his Father & Mother Most of made by his Mother. He felt Very bad I tell you."

Fred was the victim of the prank, in all likelihood because he had a close prior relationship to the Captain that the other boys envied. Usually measured and fair-minded, Joshua was nearly moved to violence toward members of his crew for their treatment of one of "my young men." Good captains instructed and mentored the younger crewmen on the long voyages. From this and other letters, we see that Joshua had adopted a protective stance toward Fred that rankled the other boys. In his letters, he singled out Fred for comment to Minerva, indicating that he was not just one of "My Boys," but a youngster who received special attention as the son of a friend and whom he had a particular obligation to keep safe. Four months later, we begin to see that while Joshua had grown very fond of the boy, the arrangement may not, in fact, have been working out entirely as planned. On December 19, 1858 he wrote to Minerva that (sic):

"My boy Fred is a very fine Fellow indeed altho not much of a Sailor yet. Perhaps he will be a good one by & by it does not Come quite so natural to him as it does to some of our Cape Cod Boys"

With so many lives and so much money at stake during one of these voyages, each merchant ship's captain had to rule with unquestioned authority aboard his vessel, and Joshua Sears, in particular, was known for maintaining discipline with a stern, yet even, hand. A year after he seemed essentially to give Fred a pass, he admitted to his wife that the boy may not have been destined for a career at sea. By December 16, 1859, he wrote to Minerva about some disgruntlement among the Cape Cod boys likely caused by his differential treatment of the German youth (sic):

"..by the way, Isaac says that he saw some of my Boys in Calcutta last year and they complain'd bitterly about Me. Sais that I made them toe the mark to Close altogether. Said they thought that home folks ought to be a little more lenient ..."

Apparently the local boys thought that they were entitled to special treatment by virtue of being from the neighborhood. In the privacy of an intimate communication with his wife and confidant, who had been with him on several voyages, Joshua vented his frustration that "home folks" would say otherwise if they had the responsibility of command. In a moment of uncharacteristic self-doubt he ends with *"don't you think so?"*

To Be Concluded Next Month

The next article, written by Wendi (Alleman) Fellner, draws from our archived material on the clipper Amulet with Master Anthony Howes and other sources.

The Story of the Peter and Mary Alleman Family's Immigration to the U.S. And the Solving of a Family Mystery

I don't yet know the exact region from which the family traveled. They came from Switzerland¹, and many from the



Figure 1 Freight Wagon²

Switzerland/Alsace area traveled the same route. (Interesting side note: "Here, no distinction is made between German and Alsatian emigrants, they are all just called Swiss." (quoted in Camille Maire, *L'émigration des Lorrainsen Amérique 1815-1870*, Metz 1980). In 1846, rail was not yet available or affordable and so they most likely made the 3-week journey from their home to the French port of Le Havre by freight wagon². Many times the wagons were open as shown here, but for longer journeys or



Figure 2 The port of Le Havre ca. 1850³

bad weather, they would drape canvas or sail-cloth over arches, appearing much like covered wagons of the wild American west. How long must that journey have been! Although several ports were available to the Swiss/German immigrants, many chose the port of Le Havre, France in upper Normandie due to the availability of empty wagons returning from delivering goods to the east.

Once they arrived in Le Havre, it was common to have to wait several days for their ship to be ready or to procure tickets. Le Havre was just beginning to grow and was not yet a major port at the time our family passed through³. There were gas lamps but no

¹ 1850 US Census, 1860 US Census, 1870 US census, 1880 US Census

² <http://19thcenturyrhinelandlive.blogspot.com/2014/08/from-moselle-to-port-of-le-havre.html>

³ <http://19thcenturyrhinelandlive.blogspot.com/2011/10/look-at-le-havre-less-known-port-for.html>

rail service yet. Because throngs of people would arrive in the city and have to live outdoors until they could book passage with individual captains, in 1837 the French government started requiring passengers to have their tickets in hand before crossing into France. Therefore, our family likely purchased their tickets before leaving Switzerland. Quite possibly they sold everything they owned in order to afford the trip. Even with pre-purchased tickets, travelers usually had to wait a week or two before their ship was ready to leave. The poorest slept in the street or set up make-shift tents at the edge of town. If they could afford it, some stayed in guest houses where conditions were not much different than the steerage facilities that awaited them on the ship. The wealthier travelers could stay in inns while they waited.

The Alleman family departed Le Havre on Monday, 11 May 1846 aboard the clipper sail ship *Amulet*. I haven't been able to find much out about the ship other than it was owned by Prince Sears Crowell, esq. (his first name was Prince, he wasn't a prince) and the ship's Master was Anthony Howes⁴. All passengers traveled in steerage and were required to bring their own provisions for the journey. (Can you imagine having to carry 6 weeks of food for 9 people with you?) Other travelers of the time suggested bringing two potato sacks that hold about 2 bushel baskets of food – per person, I presume. Suggested items were: oatmeal and wheat flour, potatoes for vegetables, ham, butter, brandy, spices, coffee, and sugar. Some were lucky to have fair weather, but when encountering storms, the ships were tossed about violently. All trunks had to be lashed down and the people and beds slid about. Sometimes this lasted for days. “High waves often dashed our ship. The slant of our ship often made it impossible to stand without hanging onto something. At times gusts of wind almost threatened to overturn our ship, but like a floating egg, it would always right itself.”⁵

After 45 days of travel (45 days in these conditions!), our family arrived in New Orleans, Louisiana on Thursday, 25 Jun 1846. The ship carried 245 steering passengers and was towed into port by the Towboat Panther. It arrived “in ballast”, indicating the crew had placed extra weight in the bottom of the boat in order to stay upright through an extreme storm⁶. From the arrangement of the passenger list, it appears

that the men and women traveled separately, or at least disembarked separately. Our family that made the crossing⁷ (my comments in brackets):

Elizabeth Alleman (age 57, b. 1789): [possibly mother of Peter or Mary?]
Mary Alleman (age 34, b. 1812): [wife of Peter]
Marg Alleman (age 9, b. 1937): [daughter of Peter and Mary]
Ursula Alleman (age 4, b. 1942): [daughter of Peter and Mary]
David Alleman (age 77, b. 1769): [possibly grandfather of Peter or Mary?]
Pierre [Peter] Alleman (age 35, b. 1811): [husband of Mary]
Samuel Alleman (age 13, b. 1833): [son of Peter and Mary]
Johannes [George] Alleman (age 10, b. 1836): [son of Peter and Mary]
Pierre [Peter] Alleman (age 8, b. 1838): [son of Peter and Mary]

These Allemans were listed together within these two groups, but there were other Allemans on the manifest that traveled on the same ship. They appear to be separate families though. The other Allemans were:

Mary Alleman (age 30, b. 1816)
Elizabeth Alleman (age 4, b. 1842)
Anne Alleman (age 1, b. 1845)
Jean Alleman (male, age 24, b. 1822)
George Alleman (age 5, b. 1941)

Both groups of our Allemans were followed in the list by surnames of Jelly/Telly so perhaps these were friends that traveled with them. All travelers were listed as farmers, belonging to Germany, intending to inhabit the United States. Although there is a column to indicate a particular passenger had died upon the route, there were no marks in that column. I'm not sure if these passengers were extremely lucky, or if this was the result of lazy or shady conveyors who didn't want to draw attention to the rough conditions.

To Be Concluded Next Month

⁴ <http://archive.dennishistsoc.org/handle/10766/559>

⁵ <http://19thcenturyrhinelandlive.blogspot.com/2011/10/look-at-le-havre-less-known-port-for.html>

⁶ Amulet ship arrival in New Orleans. 25Jun1846, pg 3. The Times-Picayune newspaper, Newspapers.com.

⁷ New Orleans arrival, ship Amulet. 25Jun1846. New Orleans, Passenger List Quarterly Abstracts, 1820-1875. Ancestry.com [database on-line]. Original data: Quarterly Abstracts of Passenger Lists of Vessels Arriving at New Orleans, Louisiana, 1820-1875. M272, 17 rolls. Records of the U.S. Customs Service, Record Group 36. National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C.

Dennis Historical Society
P.O. Box 607
South Dennis, MA 02660-0607



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Thursday, March 31, 7:00 P.M.

“Meet Mehitable”

Mehitable will give a talk about the Puritans, specifically, how the Puritans dressed, what they found when they arrived, their biggest challenges, how they interacted and the impact of religion on their lives.

Featuring **Alice Plouchard Stelzer** whose book *Female Adventurers: The Women Who Helped Colonize Massachusetts and Connecticut* will be available for purchase.

Co-sponsored with the Dennis Memorial Library
\$5.00 Donation
Dennis Memorial Library,
1020 Old Bass River Road, Dennis Village

*****MEMBERSHIP REMINDER*****

DUES renewals will be mailed to you this month, and will soon be in your mailbox.

DHS fiscal year is now January 1 to December 31, and the dues renewals have been adjusted accordingly. In addition to paying by check (preferred), you will now be able to pay through PayPal on the DHS Website.

Saturday, April 23, 2:00 P.M.

Cape Cod - Collected

Jack Sheedy

Tales from his books with
Jim Coogan & Other Sources

\$5.00 Donation

Dennis Memorial Library,
1020 Old Bass River Road, Dennis Village

Friday, May 21, 1:00-4:00 P.M.

“Dennis-The Sea Captain’s Town”

Hear Some Of Their Amazing Stories

1800’s Schoolroom at

Dennis Maritime Museum

West Dennis Graded School

Open For The Season

67 School Street, West Dennis