



# Dennis Historical Society

## Newsletter

### May 2017

#### Volume 40. No3

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**Board Meeting Tuesday, June 13, 2 pm, West Dennis Graded School, 67 School St, W Dennis, members welcome**

Please send information & stories for the newsletter to DHS, PO Box 607, S Dennis, MA 02660 or Diane Rochelle, email: [whiskeyboo@comcast.net](mailto:whiskeyboo@comcast.net)

### Dennis....A Maritime Town

From the very beginning in 1639 our residents have turned to the sea to make a living. The first settlers were English farmers who planned to raise crops and animals to sell to the next wave of settlers, but a civil war in England brought immigration to a halt.

The bountiful sea around us was an easy second choice for our founding fathers. Cape Cod Bay was full of whales—today's gathering of 40% of the world's population of right whales is a mere handful of what was there 375 years ago. The Native Americans were harvesting the ones that became stranded on the flats and also went out a short way in their dugout canoes to chase a few of them ashore.

The newcomers with their knowledge of boat building and iron tools were able to bring whaling into the 17<sup>th</sup> Century and each new generation improved the business. In 1690 Ichabod Paddock of East Dennis was asked to come to Nantucket to teach them the art of off-shore whaling—and they honed that art into a fortune.

Within a few generations Dennis soil was used up and the majority of men were involved in some aspect of maritime business—building boats, using them for trade, fishing, or providing the numerous items a boat would need to function. With north and south side of town being “on the water” and Bass River being the largest salt water river on the East Coast we had every opportunity to become a maritime town. Hundreds of our mariners went to Boston, Providence or New York to sign on to a crew. They were easily hired. Samuel Morrison wrote that “Cape Cod was the nursery of hundreds of mariners who would be hired just by saying they were raised on Cape Cod but they had to sail out of ports other than their own”, which was true. The only deep water port on the Cape was Provincetown.

Current research has discovered six shipyards with support businesses, 650+ sea captains (and counting) and an intrepid group of women who went with their husbands, having and raising their children on three to four year voyages. We had known for years of the sea captains tales of derring-do, but only recently with access to their wives diaries, we now know how those brave-hearted women left their secure little Dennis home to accompany their husband on trips around the world on the high seas.

Some of their stories are being told this summer at the Dennis Maritime Museum at the 1867 West Dennis Graded School in West Dennis starting May 20, 1-4 PM to celebrate Cape Cod Maritime Month and continuing on Wednesday and Friday from 1 – 4 PM until the end of September. Their stories are amazing!

Dennis still maintains a strong connection with salt water through Sesuit Harbor, Bass River and Swan River with boating for work and pleasure, aqua cultural research and production, shellfish grants and especially by the thousands of visitors and locals who spend countless hours on our beautiful beaches.



Phyllis Horton, DHS Curator

## A Traveling Church

Henry Kelley II called me a while back to ask if I'd ever heard of a building erected in one place, then moved to be the upper story of another building. The answer was "sort of". I told him about the little Baptist Church in North Harwich. He suggested I write this story.

Yarmouth/Dennis was settled in 1639 with the Congregational Church being the only religion. In time Quakers arrived and were grudgingly allowed to stay. The orthodox church was the "true church" with the church and town being one entity. The church was supported by taxes from the town and the Quakers were the only ones exempted from paying the tax. This was true when the East Parish of Yarmouth (now Dennis) was formed in 1721, but change was coming throughout the Commonwealth. New religions were appearing. The Baptists established a church in the Gage/Chase neighborhood on the northeast side of Swan Pond. In 1757 they built a small church in what is now the North Harwich Cemetery and then enlarged it in 1792. They received permission of the Massachusetts General Court in 1798 to incorporate. The Baptists petitioned the Dennis Town Clerk for exemption from paying the tax to support the orthodox church and it received permission.

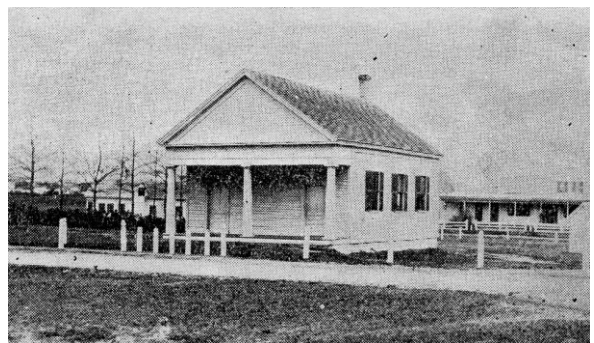
The little church grew with most of its parishioners residing in Crocker's Neck (now Dennis Port) or West Harwich. For convenience they moved the church to West Harwich on the corner of Depot Road and Route 28. So strong were the feelings for the old church, that a number of people buried at the old church yard were disinterred and reburied at the new location (including my great-great grandparents Owen and Betsey Chase.) In a very short time the church was bursting at the seams so they built a new church on the east side of the small one. That building is now the upstairs part of the West Harwich/Dennis Port Baptist Church. As the church expanded it was raised and a new section was added underneath to house the Sunday School, meeting areas and a kitchen for serving church suppers.

The little church was sold to a group who moved it to Dennis Port where it was named The First Independent Free Church of Holiness but was called Holy Chapel. Over time it became the home for several religious groups with the Nazarenes being the last one. During that time the front porch was enclosed and a steeple was added. The congregation was small but determined.

In 1964 the Nazarenes decided to build a larger brick church to better serve their mission. When it was finished the little church was torn down having sheltered countless people through several denominations for over 100 years.

It seems likely that every board could have a story to tell. I only know of one—Ca 1904. A group of young people of various denominations attended Sunday evening services –it being the only activity in the village. A guest preacher was preaching his utmost and the clock was nearing 9:30 PM. The young group, knowing they had to be up in the morning for school, rose as one and started for the door. The guest preacher shouted, "There's a bunch of young people headed for hell." Lottie Capron, well known for her saucy tongue, answered, "Would you like to send word to your grandmother?" This story was from my mother-in-law, Millie Gage Horton, who was part of that group. Lottie grew to marry and have a fine family and she was well respected in her community but her reputation lasted longer than she did.

Phyllis Horton, DHS Curator



## **“The Walls of Jericho” *By Elizabeth Reynard***

**Cape Cod Compass  
Magazine**



Jericho is a small house close to the street on the corner of Trotting Park Road and Main Street in the Town of Dennis. It belongs to the time when Cape roads were friendly secure places, good to be on, good to be near. ....

And I believe Jericho loves us. We can almost feel the response under our hands as layers of paint or crumbling plaster give way to leave wide pine boards and paneling and beautiful old mantels.

It took more than home talent, however, to redesign the central chimney, for it must arch over the upper hall and stairway to gather into its central peak the flues from widely separated Front Parlor, Parlor Bedroom and Greatroom. ....

There came a day when the fires were lit on all three hearths. In the Front Parlor they blazed smartly, gaily; in the Greatroom, they shone calm and glowing; in the Parlor bedroom they were neat and bright. Virginia Gildersleeve lit the fires on one of the few days when she was able to reach Jericho, for much of the time she is house-bound with a bad heart. Ernest and Iky, Angus and Gesine, Chester Nickerson, Everett and Paul Bacon, even our old friend Eleanor Grady left us alone in that first hour of firelight. It had been many years since live flames had leaped on Jericho's hearth.

Faces of course peered curiously out of the barn windows, and I sensed a stirring behind the cedars. Necks were craned, eager eyes watched for the first sign of smoke billowing out of the chimney. “Thar she blows!” yelled Captain Nickerson just as if Jericho were a whale. ....

“It is altogether beautiful,” said Virginia Gildersleeve. “I could live here always in peace and dignity. Somehow, it is even spacious. There is an air of poise, tranquility, permanence. Wren was a great man.”



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**Tour the Cobb House**

**Saturday May 13 at 10 am at 739 Lower Rd, Brewster**  
Enjoy a private tour of the newly restored Capt. Elijah Cobb house, home of the Brewster Historical Society, with author Sally Gunning. \$5 donation, limited to 25 guests, RSVP by email to [info@dennishistoricalsociety.org](mailto:info@dennishistoricalsociety.org).



**Blue Water Wives & Mothers**  
**Saturday, May 20, 1 to 4 pm**  
**Dennis Maritime Museum**  
**at 1867 West Dennis Graded School**  
**67 School St, W Dennis**

Celebrate the 24<sup>th</sup> Annual Cape Cod maritime Month with hair-raising, heart-rending tales of perseverance at great odds. Dennis wives were hearty souls. Free admission.