

# Dennis Historical Society Newsletter



Vol. 22 No. 5

May 1999

## Museum Information

1736 Josiah  
Dennis Manse  
Museum  
77 NobsCUSsett Rd  
Dennis

Open June 22 -  
September 30:

Tuesdays  
10:00 AM to Noon

Thursdays

2 PM - 4 PM,

Saturdays.

September 4, 11, 18  
& 25

2 PM - 4 PM

Admission: Free,

Donations Accepted

Group tours available

508-385-3528

1801 Jericho

Historical Center

Old Main St.

West Dennis

Open June 23 -

September 24

Wednesdays

2 PM - 4 PM

Fridays

10 AM - Noon

Sundays.

September 5, 12 & 19

2 PM - 4 PM

Admission: Free

Donations Accepted

Group tours available

## Benjamin Franklin Baker, USN, MoH

Last year, in May, the Cape Cod Times ran an article about Sgt. Marcus Haskell, born in Chelsea, buried in Centerville, who won the Medal of Honor for heroism in the Civil War. It stated that Sgt. Haskell was the only MoH winner buried on the Cape. Later in the year another writer set the record straight with a brief article on Benjamin Baker of Dennis Port.

To elaborate a bit on that- Dennis does indeed have a claim to military fame buried in Swan Lake Cemetery. Dennis Port - and what's more, he was a native Cape Codder born and raised in Dennis Port.

*"... the Nashville captured four Spanish vessels and participated in an action that won Medals of Honor for a group of heroes, including Ben Baker of Dennis Port."*

Benjamin Franklin Baker was born March 12, 1857 to Joseph K. Baker, Sr. and his second wife, Tamar Phinney Small, in the family home that is now Karl's Landmark Restaurant. (Old Time Dennis Porters will remember it as Carl and Linda Maloney's.)

Joseph K. Baker was principal owner of Joseph K. Baker & Sons at the Shad Hole in Dennis Port (now Sea Street Beach). His sons, Joseph Jr. and Orlando, worked with him at the wharf. It is not known if young Benjamin worked at the wharf, but he did start going on fishing trips early and moved up to merchant vessels in his late teens/early twenties.

At age 22, Ben married Susanna W. Small, a Dennis Port girl, and they moved to

Pennsylvania where he was employed as an engineer on a steam vessel. Two years later, Susanna presented Ben with a daughter whom they named Azula.



**BENJAMIN F. BAKER,**

Cockswain, U.S.S. Nashville. Born at Dennis Port, Mass., March 12, 1857.

Three years later,

on a voyage to China. Ben left the merchant ship he was on and there enlisted in the United States Navy. He was assigned to the armament section and he spent his naval career in that field. For three years he was in charge of armament training on the training ship U.S.S. Constellation. He also spent considerable time patrolling with the North Atlantic Fleet.

The U.S.S. Nashville was launched at Newport News, VA in October 1895 and commissioned 19 August, 1897 to the North Atlantic Fleet with Chief Master at Arms Benjamin F. Baker on board.

When the U.S.S. Maine was sunk in Havana Harbor, war with Spain seemed to be inevitable and the Nashville was ordered to the Caribbean. From 22 April to 26 July, 1898 the Nashville captured four Spanish vessels and participated in an action that won Medals of Honor for a group of heroes, including Ben Baker of Dennis Port.

Benjamin's citation (G.O. 521, 7 July, 1899) reads: "On board the U.S.S.

(Continued on page 2)

# Preserving Our Historic Assets

As members of the Dennis Historical Society, we are all interested in the preservation and protection of our Town's historic treasures. If you are the owner of an historic property, you are, perhaps, even more concerned. Ownership of historic homes is for most of us a sacred trust, one which we take seriously. Driving around our villages, this devotion is evident in the many restoration and rehabilitation projects that have been and are being carried out. We become attached to these old houses of ours, and hope they will be as lovingly cared for after we no longer own them. Lately, the Dennis Historical Commission has had several homeowners ask what can be done to assure

that their properties will continue to be maintained as nearly as possible in their present condition.

One provision which the Town offers is the placing of an historic preservation restriction on your property. A covenant or other legal documents may be attached to your deed, which will forbid, or limit, alterations to the exterior and/or interior features of the building, limit changes in appearance or condition of the site, forbid uses not historically appropriate, or field investigation (i.e. archeological digs) without proper permit and also prohibit other acts or uses detrimental to appropriate preservation of the structure or site.

## Benjamin Franklin Baker, USN, MoH

*(Continued from page 1)*

Nashville during the cutting of the cable leading from Cienfuegos, Cuba, 11 May, 1898. Facing the heavy fire of the enemy, Baker set an example of extraordinary bravery and coolness throughout the action."

A number of American ships, including the Nashville, has blockaded the harbor. It was decided the underwater cables to Spain should be cut to isolate the island from Spanish commanders.

Under cover of barrage from the blockade ships, Ben and thirteen others left their ship in open boats to cut the cable. They managed, with considerable effort, under heavy fire from the beach, to grapple one cable the size of a man's fist into the boat where they sawed and hacked for thirty minutes to cut out a 150 foot section. They rowed out and dropped the ocean end of the cable into deep water, making it difficult for the enemy to retrieve it.

They rowed back to do the same with the second cable. Still under heavy fire from the riflemen on the beach, they managed to

split the second cable, but one man was killed and others were wounded, one mortally. Demolition of the third cable was called off as the men were now too exhausted and injured to do it. They returned to the Nashville, heroes all!

Benjamin was later involved in the Filipino Revolt, the China Relief Expedition, and the Boxer Rebellion, after which he retired. He reenlisted for World War I and was assigned to a torpedo station. He retired again from the Navy on 31 July 1919, settling in Brockton, MA.

Ben's military record is well documented and his career had its ups and downs. It seems that he had a weakness for strong drink - a fairly common event in turn of the century military life. He was 5'10 1/2" with blue eyes, light brown hair, and weighed 170 pounds. He also had four tattoos, including a frog with an American flag.

Ben's personal life also seemed to have its ups and downs. He was married at least three times, and yet is buried in the Baker family plot with no wife beside him. His

*(Continued on page 3)*

### Calendar of Events:

**May 7 & 8 - Maritime Symposium**

Sturgis Library and the Sheraton in Hyannis

**May 12 - 7:00 PM**  
Jericho Historical Center  
DHS Board Meeting - Interested members are welcome!

**May 15 - Dennis Sea Captains in the China Trade**

Josiah Dennis Manse  
1 PM - 5 PM  
Come meet an old salt with an exciting tale to tell!

**June 5 - Lady Slipper Walk**  
9:30 AM

Meet at Dennis Town Hall parking lot. Reservations requested. 508-394-0017.

**June 12 - Happy Birthday, Dennis!**

Annual Luncheon, with Premier Showing of "If This House Could Talk," tales of early Dennis Houses. By reservation only. Please see page 3.

**June 19 - Dennis Sea Captains in the China Trade**

Josiah Dennis Manse  
1 PM - 5 PM

**June 20 - Interpretive Flower Show and Opening Tea**

Jericho Historical Center  
Noon - 4 PM

**June 26 - Dennis House and Garden Tour**

Visit lovely gardens & homes. Tickets \$10.00  
For ticket information call 508-394-6114 or 508-394-0017

**Calendar of Events:**

**August 22 - Everyday  
Life in the 1800's**

Jericho Historical Center  
11 AM - 4 PM

Demonstrations of skills  
necessary for everyday life  
in an 1800's home.

**August 22 - Old Fash-  
ioned Pie Sale on the  
Dennis Village Green**

1 PM - 3 PM

To benefit the DHS  
Acquisition Fund.

Enjoy Freddie Trahan's  
Goodtime Guys, Dixieland  
Jazz. Sponsored by  
The Village Improvement  
Society.

**August 24 - Dennis Vil-  
lage Garden Club**

**Annual Flower Show**

Josiah Dennis Manse

10 AM - 4 PM

**August 25 - Walking**

**Tour of Historic West  
Dennis Village**

10:30 AM

Led by costumed guide,  
fascinating stories of early  
West Dennis and its resi-  
dents. Meet at West Den-  
nis Community Building  
parking lot, School Street,  
West Dennis.

**September 26 - Mer-  
chant Mariners of the  
19th Century Cape Cod:**

**Private Lives and  
Extraordinary Voyages  
1803-1912**

Carleton Hall, Old Bass  
River Road, Dennis

2:30 PM

Dennis Historical Soci-  
ety's Annual Meeting fol-  
lowed by narrated slide  
show by maritime histo-  
rian, Theresa Barbo.

## Celebrating the Town of Dennis 206th Birth-

Please join us at Christine's Restaurant in West Dennis on Saturday, June 12th at noon. Along with luncheon, you'll enjoy the premier showing of "If This Old House Could Talk," tales of early Dennis houses. Reserve before June 9th. Luncheon is \$13.00 per person, which includes tax and gratuity. Choice of entrees- Chicken Marsala or Baked Stuffed Sole.

Please make reservations for: \_\_\_\_\_

Enclosed is a check for \$ \_\_\_\_\_ (\$13.00 per person)

Choice of entrees: \_\_\_\_\_ Chicken Marsala  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Baked Stuffed Sole

Please enclose self-addressed, stamped envelope and mail to:

Joan Martin, Treasurer  
 51 Church Street, West Dennis, MA 02670

## Benjamin Franklin Baker, USN, MoH

(Continued from page 2)



Benjamin Franklin Baker, seated, far left, of Dennisport and other Medal of Honor recipients aboard the Nashville after their successful mission during the Spanish-American War.

daughter, Azula, grew up, married, and died in Dennis Port.

Ben died in Brockton 19 May 1927, at age 69, of complications following surgery. He was buried with full military honors and escorts.

Memorial Day is at the end of this month, a time to honor Benjamin Franklin Baker, U.S. Navy (ret.), Medal of Honor, and the 3,408 other MoH recipients who have serviced our country with such courage in battle. According to the Medal of Honor citation,

"The Medal of Honor is the highest award for valor in action against an enemy force which can be bestowed upon an individual serving in the Armed Services of the United States." Gentlemen, we salute you.

PRH



### Lights, Camera...Action!

We're looking for members with a yen for the TV industry! Through C3TV, two members of the DHS have the opportunity to sign up for courses, at no charge. If you've always wondered what goes on in a studio, or if you think you have a flair for the camera, call Brendan Joyce at 385-6492.

# Dennis Historical Society

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

FORWARDING & ADDRESS  
CORRECTION REQUESTED

Non-profit  
Organization  
U.S. POSTAGE  
PAID  
Permit No. 2  
South Dennis, MA  
02660

## DENNIS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

### We're looking for old documents...

Do you have an historic document that we could copy for our library? The DHS is looking for old wills, deeds and other documents with local historic significance, especially those with original signatures.

If you have an interesting document, please call Burt Derick at 398-3183. We don't want to keep the document, just copy it and catalog the information for reference.

### *What's happening with the West Dennis Community Building?*

How are the plans for restoration progressing? What historical significance does this building have? Watch for information in the June newsletter!

#### Calendar of Events:

##### **October 31 - Graveyards of Cape Cod**

Carleton Hall, Old Bass  
River Road, Dennis  
2:30 PM

Narrated slide show by  
Jan Stenberg and Nancy  
Shoemaker. Come hear  
some stories, hair-raising  
and otherwise, about our  
hallowed Cape Cod bury-  
ing grounds.

##### **December 12 - Christmas Open House**

Josiah Dennis Manse  
2 - 4 PM  
Celebrate the season in  
this beautifully decorated  
1736 home.

## WANTED: VOLUNTEERS

### THE SOCIETY NEEDS YOU!

We have openings on various committees, including the Program/Hospitality Committee, the Ways & Means Committee, and the Copier Committee.

If you'd like to help on a Committee, please call Kitty McNamara at 394-6114. Call Nancy Howes, 385-3528, for information on the school program.