

Dennis Historical Society Newsletter

Volume 27, number 5

May 2004

Calendar of Events

Saturday, May 15
1-4 PM at the Manse
77 Nobscussett Road
Dennis Village

Captain Seth Crowell:
From Sailor to Senator,
a special Maritime Exhibit
telling of Capt. Crowell's extraordinary life, including time in Dartmoor Prison in the War of 1812

Saturday, June 26
1-4 PM at the Manse

Josiah Dennis Manse Museum Opening Reception. Special exhibit: "And The Friendship Lives On" The Golden Age of Ornamental Penmanship 1840-1895. Signature quilts and autograph albums. Refreshments.

Sunday, June 27
1-4 PM at Jericho,
Old Main Street
West Dennis

Opening Tea at the 1801 Jericho House and Barn Museum. Join the Jericho Committee for a tour of this wonderful old house. Refreshments

Josiah Dennis Manse Committee Awards Title of Member Emeritus to Dorothy Bell

Dorothy Bell was recently presented with a certificate approved by the Selectmen awarding her the title of Member Emeritus of the Josiah Dennis Manse Committee where she has served for 17 years. Dot has also been a vital part of the DHS school program for years. While her mother, Chris Harriman, presided over the keeping room and taught the children how people lived and worked in 1736, Dot was in the next room telling another group about the Nobscussett Indians and how they taught the early settlers to survive using native plants, seafood, and different gardening skills. When Chris could no longer be there, Dot took her place in the keeping room. Teachers and parents alike enjoy listening to her as she brings history alive for the Ezra H. Baker third graders.

Dot has served on many local committees and has been a very active member of the Dennis Union Church while raising her family, tending her elderly mother and caring for her grandchildren. She has a wealth of knowledge about local people and Dennis history.

We are truly fortunate to have her as a member of the Manse Committee and a citizen of our town.

Thanks to Nancy Howes for the picture and article.



Dot Bell helping Girl Scouts Denise Silva and Rachel Crafts to complete their Textile Arts Badge on March 13 at the Josiah Dennis Manse.

Note: Even when Dot's mother, Chris Harriman, was in a nursing home, Dot would bring her to visit the Manse. In fact, Chris persuaded other patients in the home to help her make the paper hats we use for the girls in the school program. On January 1, 1998, just a month before she died, Chris wrote in her notebook: *Dear Lord, lead me to the person you want me to speak to through my life today.* She was still thinking of others and how she might help them. They say the apple doesn't fall far from the tree!

Life in South Dennis Before WW II *by Eugenia French*

This is the beginning of a narrative written by Eugenia French who lived on Mayfair Road, went through the Dennis school system and graduated from Yarmouth High School in 1942. Eugenia now lives in Pennsylvania and has a summer home in South Dennis near Swan Pond. The story has been transcribed by Phyllis Horton from a copy of a handwritten notebook given to DHS by Helen Crowell Angell.

I must have walked many thousands of miles during my youth as I walked the sandy road from the Mayfair area to the village of South Dennis and back. During those years it was merely an ordeal—just a way of getting from one point to another. Now, if I could once more walk that narrow, sandy road as it used to be, I'd enjoy the nature immensely. Three seasons were enjoyable. Winter was not pleasant.

In the spring there were the fragrant mayflowers blended with the pine cones. Later on, along the road and often in the center, or "horsepath", of the road were patches of wild lupine. Sweet fern, hog cranberries, an occasional pink lady slipper and other beautiful wild flowers, although less well known, added to the nature scene. On sultry summer walks when the miserable horse flies buzzed around a hiker's head, a piece of indigo plant could be used to swish them away.

As my brother, Parker, now a minister in Nashville, Tenn., and I would leave town and head home-ward the last inhabited house was occupied by the Ned Clough family, just beyond the home of Dr. Norton Nickerson. Mr. Clough was fire chief for some time.

Next was "The Haunted House", a place of mystery or fright depending if it were bright daylight or twilight hours. It was easy to see it had been a beautiful home at one time. No one had lived there for many years and I'm sure the only spooks were transients seeking shelter. There was a great spiral staircase near the front entrance and there were a number of rooms on the first and second floors. I remember some of the prettiest wallpaper I've ever seen was in this place.

Each season saw more deterioration. One time we discovered someone had broken out pieces of wall and bricks around the fireplaces, presumably looking for hidden money. Eventually doors and windows disappeared. Beautiful wisteria draped itself over the side porch. My brother and I plus many friends had adventures there. If darkness was approaching as we'd pass, we'd run as fast as we could till we were safely by. It is completely gone now, but I have the memories—one old red brick which is a doorstep here in Pennsylvania and a few old metal buttons with pond lilies on them which I'd found there as a little girl. (Incidentally, this old house stood across the road from where a little store now stands which had been known as the "Red Cottage Store" for some time.)

As we walked on further, still on a macadam road, we approached "Sandy Bottom". Everyone around there knew "Sandy Bottom". It was a hill and it was sandy and full of little stones. It was just south from where the Dennis Water Company now stands. The hill has been changed and nearly leveled to make possible the Mid-Cape Highway and overhead bridge.

On the north side of "Sandy Bottom" the road divided. First branch off was a sand road to the left that went to the railroad bridge. There was another seldom-used and partly grown-up road that cut back at a sharp angle to the right. It came out close to Leon Hall's house which was on the road that was at that time the main road to the north side of town. School buses traveled this road and not the one towards Mayfair Road.

A few feet more beyond "Sandy Bottom" was another sandy road which veered off slightly to the left of the hard road. This was the short cut to home and to Mayfair. It made up the third side of a huge triangle of nothing but woods. I remember many things of interest on the short cut road and the long-way-

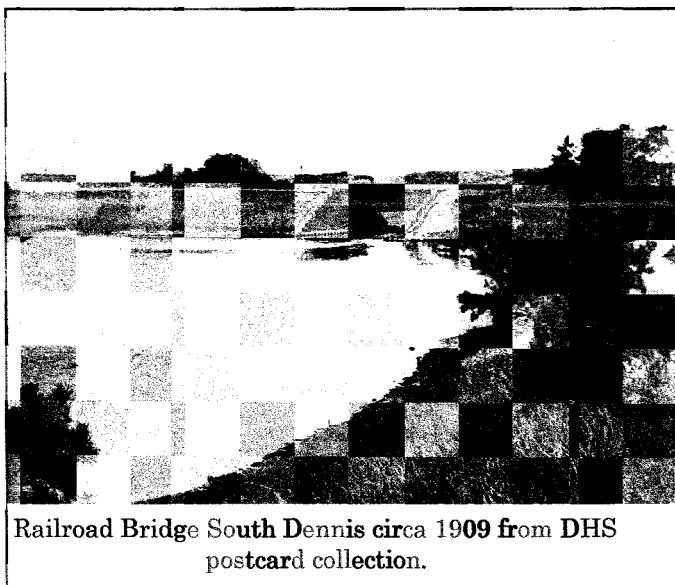
around road. Nearly half way home along the sandy road was another spot with a nickname. It was a small incline full of stony ruts, aptly called "Stony Bottom". Several times as a youngster I found arrowheads there. Following heavy wet snows the pine boughs along this road hung full and low with the cold white stuff and in spots they nearly met in the middle leaving a narrow pathway.

Home was a tract of land of approximately 10 acres which was mostly open area. I've been told that earlier the piece of land had more acreage. Over the years we've always referred to this as "The Homestead", but when I was young I sometimes heard it referred to as the "Old Gifford Place". It had been owned by an elderly Scotsman, a Mr. Gifford, till my parents purchased it sometime shortly after World War I. This was a special place to us and to a few historians who stopped by several times. We'd always heard that years before Mr. Gifford's time another house had stood on the same spot. I recall some people stopped and talked to us about the possibility of a plaque being put along the road stating that the first married white man to settle on Cape Cod had lived there. Somehow nothing came of it. Depression Days were upon us and there were more important matters.

The fact that another house had once been there was proven when I was a child and my parents had an addition built on the house. When a new cellar was dug alongside the little round one, diggers came across a large flat stone which appeared to have been part of a stone floor. Many of these stones were used for stepping stones in my mother's delightful little rock garden in front of the house. I believe some of these stones are still there. "The Homestead" burned a year or two ago and another home (was) built on the same site by the owners, the Hundleys.

From the backdoor of the Homestead we could see across Kelley's Bay and could see the railroad bridge. At that time there were no trees blocking our view and there was no Mid-Cape Highway bridge across Bass River. This railroad bridge brings to mind a scene of long ago when nearly everyone in town gathered at the railroad station to get a first glimpse of a silvery streamline train streaking on down the Cape. Other special times at the station were when a train would stop in South Dennis and we'd ride on it to the Barnstable Fair, a big summer event in those days.

But back to the Homestead...*to be continued*



Railroad Bridge South Dennis circa 1909 from DHS postcard collection.

School House News:

For years the school children have come to learn in the "1770 School House" on the grounds of the Manse. Further research leads us to believe the school house was already in place by 1745, as it is mentioned in a deed to the south mill which was written in that year. The building was used as a cooperatively-owned neighborhood school until it was closed in 1859 at which time a large grade school was built on Old Bass River Road. It was then used as a barn, a tool house and a shop. It was moved to the Manse in 1974 where it was restored to its present condition. Experts believe it may be the oldest school building in Massachusetts. Local historians feel it was designed by Nathan Stone, son of Rev. Nathan Stone, who was an important housewright in the neighborhood. The construction was probably done by neighborhood men—shipwright, millwright, housewright, farmer, fishermen and blacksmith—working together. The school house is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

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THE WAY WE WERE

Was it really just a few months ago that Sesuit Harbor looked like this? Now that spring is well under way, someone is bemoaning the loss of their little yellow sailboat which was blown by wind and carried by ice and waves all the way from Plymouth to the waters off Corporation Beach. The harbor master at Sesuit wasn't able to do more than notify the Coast Guard as Sesuit Harbor was solidly frozen in. Those of us who walk the beach watched helplessly as the tiny boat was dragged closer to the point of rocks east of Corporation (which on old maps is sometimes called Crowell's Point). One morning the boat was swamped by waves, and by the next it had sunk, leaving only part of its mast showing above the rocks. In the days that followed pieces washed ashore, the life jackets were found frozen into the ice on the beach, and the little yellow sailboat was only a memory—one more shipwreck off the coast of Cape Cod.

Photo of Sesuit Harbor February 2004

courtesy of Martin Halpert.

