

THE SOUTH SEA

Georgia Ferguson and Dolly Dodge charmed us all with their program on Cape Cod Bay. Now they have prepared a new program about what our ancestors called the South Sea-Nantucket Sound. With picture and story they will describe the shoreline from Falmouth to the Great Outer Beach at Monomoy. We hope you can attend, on Wed., Nov. 18 at 7:30 P.M., West Dennis Community Building.

TIME TO THINK ABOUT CHRISTMAS...

Circle Sunday, Dec. 13, for this is the afternoon when our annual Christmas Open House will be held. This year we invite you to Jericho House in West Dennis from 3-5 P.M. for Christmas conviviality and refreshments. The Hand Bell Choir from the Orleans Federated Church will provide appropriate music, performing at 3:30 and again at 5:30. Rhoda Babcock will be chairman of this event.

AND WHILE YOU ARE THINKING ABOUT CHRISTMAS...

Think about History! D.H.S. has for sale several items appropriate for gift giving. Scuttle Watch by Marion Crowell Ryder (\$4.95) makes excellent reading for young people of ages 10-16. Marion's book Cape Cod Remembrances (\$5.00) is delightful and appropriate for all ages. For a Yankee swap or stocking stuffer Master Mariners of Dennis by Neva O'Neil (\$1.00), The Story of Two Houses by W. Jeremiah Burke (\$1.50), or The White Spire by Ernestine Perry (\$2.00) will fill the bill. We also have a limited number of copies of They Built Clipper Ships in Their Back Yards by Admont Clark (\$2.00) by courtesy of Parnassus Book Store. A Vanity Plate for a friend's car pictures the Josiah Dennis Manse (\$3.98) or a tile depicting one of the eight clipper ships built at the Shiverick Ship Yard (or perhaps the set of all eight) might be the perfect gift for someone who has almost everything. All of these will be available at the November meeting. Books may also be ordered by mail, Box 607, So. Dennis, MA 02660-0607, adding 25¢ per book for postage.

THE STREETS OF OUR TOWN

It's that time of the year when we're thinking about gathering the family together for a turkey dinner, so what better time to salute little Cranberry Lane in Dennisport as our street of the month? For what is a turkey dinner without cranberry sauce and what would the history of Dennis be were it not for cranberries? Our town has the distinction of being the birthplace of the cranberry industry. For years cranberries had been harvested from their natural habitats and used as the Indians had used them, to add flavor to meats and stews, and raw, as a prevention for scurvy. Then one day, around 1812, Henry Hall of Nobscusset, growing anxious for his winter's supply of wood, cleared land which separated the beach dunes from the cranberry swamp where his family regularly gathered their berries. When the wind blew a layer of sand over a part of the swamp, Henry thought that he would have to send his children scouting for another supply. Imagine his wonderment when he observed that the part of the swamp which had been sprinkled with sand was producing more berries than the unsanded part! Now, Henry wondered, if he could improve the crop with such a cheap commodity as sand, couldn't he try to turn his family's berry crop into a commercial venture? And this he did, as did many of his neighbors. I have often wondered what masterly bit of merchandising could have convinced enough people to try these pungent, dry, berries. Sugar was dear, and roast turkey not a common meal. Nevertheless, cranberries were established as an important crop and sea captains, tired of following the Blue Water route to economic security, bought up cranberry swamps and experimented with sanding, ditching, feeding, and even insect control. Elsie Gray Howes told me that she could remember when her grandfather kept an old cast iron trypot beside his bog. He filled it with tobacco leaves which he steeped in water and then spread the liquid on his bogs. Today nicotine spray is still used as an insecticide on bogs. Economically the cranberry has been an important crop in all of Eastern Mass. since 1854, when the Rev. Benj. Eastman of Dennis published the first book on Cranberry culture. By 1889 3,000 acres of land were under cranberry cultivation. When it was picking time, schools were dismissed and the entire family would hand pick or scoop the cranberries from the vines. To my knowledge, Ansel Preston Howes was the fastest picker in Dennis. In 1877 he picked 330 qts. in 9 hours. Now the bogs are machine picked and few of our native population find seasonal employment. In view of the importance of the industry, it seems strange that this modest street is the cranberry's sole monument in Dennis. Nevertheless, at this holiday time, we cheerfully salute little Cranberry Lane, one of the Streets of our Town.

CALENDAR

Nov. 18	7:30 p.m.	West Dennis Community Building	Georgia Ferguson, "The South Sea"
Nov. 24	7:30 p.m.	Home of Pres. Bacon	Executive Board Meeting
Dec. 13	3-5 p.m.	Christmas Open House	Jericho

THE YEAR OF THE SCHOOL CONTINUES

Plans for the 50th anniversary of the Ezra H. Baker School continue to progress. D.H.S. will sponsor a writing contest, with prizes for each grade, on a subject relating to history and education. Elaine Simoneau is representing us at meetings to coordinate the anniversary activities.

And our history of education in Dennis also continues. I told you about the squadron schools - meeting at a convenient place in each neighborhood of town with a school master who travelled from place to place. I have read that in 1741 a schoolhouse was standing in Dennis, but I have not proven this. As late as 1761 Lot Howes records paying town money to Widow Charity Chase and Widow Mehitable Kelley for "keeping school" in their homes. But by 1770 at least some neighborhoods required a school house. Perhaps convenient places were not easy to find. Most probably the school had become too large for the average parlor. One school was built about this time in East Dennis, torn down and replaced in 1834. The other was built in Nobscussett, near the intersection of Main Street and New Boston Road. This school is the one now being restored on the grounds of the Josiah Dennis Manse, and I will tell you about it in detail next time.

As school buildings were built, the town was districted. Each district seems to have had a good deal of control over its school. Other town matters were also a part of the district system. Road repair money was divided among them, and in one town meeting each district was instructed to enforce liquor laws locally. By 1860, the town was divided into 14 districts, with a small one-room school house in each. The school was kept open all year long, children under 10 attending in the warmer months, older children in the winter. While Cape Codders admired education, the older children were needed in spring and summer to help with the work on the farm or at sea. I am having an interesting time tracing the history of these 14 districts. Some day I will be able to tell you about each of the school houses. Let me sum up with this description by the Rev. C. N. Hinckley, who taught in one of them: "The school house was situated between heaven and earth, with special reference to cold feet, energetic study, and the reduction of a large pile of wood to ashes."

A MEDIA EVENT OF INTEREST

We have learned that the Mass. Council of Art and Humanity has awarded a matching grant for \$1,000 to D.H.S. for the production of a slide presentation of the history of Dennis. Presently we are sifting through ideas of which highlights of our history we wish to portray. Rick Howard will fill the gaps with drawings of events and places which have disappeared from the scene. If you can help in any way, please volunteer by calling Paula Bacon, 394-5739.

YOU MAY BE MISSING SOMETHING

If you don't receive your newsletter next month, it could be your own fault. Any one who has not paid their dues will have to be removed from our mailing list. If you've just forgotten, there's still time to get your dues to Elinor Slade, Box 607, South Dennis, MA 02660-0607. A return stamped, self-addressed envelope would be appreciated.

Dennis Historical Society
P.O. Box 607
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Nov. 1981

Postal
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