



THE LIGHTSHIP CROSS RIP--PART 2

We were talking about the valuable lightship service which made sailing through Nantucket Sound so much safer from about 1830 to the 1960's. Without the benefit of Loran or radar sailing vessels relied heavily on visual aids, such as lighthouses. But in Nantucket Sound, with its many shoals, the lighthouses of the Cape and the Islands were out of sight for much of the passage. Spar buoys were tried at first but were invisible at night and when the seas ran high. Collisions occurred and even more often vessels were wrecked on the shoals as they attempted the passage. Nantucket interests petitioned for a "Light Boat" on Tuckernut Shoal in 1828, and while Congress debated two vessels were lost with a combined cargo estimated at \$600,000. So the Congress stopped foot dragging and authorized the lighting of the shoal. The lightship was originally closer to Nantucket, but in 1832 was located in the spot where it stayed until decommissioned and replaced with a lighted bell buoy in 1964. A volume could and should be written about this very well-known beacon and her many crews. More than once she was torn from her moorings, once coming ashore on Nantucket, once drifting southward around Nantucket, leaking badly, rescued by a passing schooner, which took the crew into North Carolina. Two adventures which I want to tell you this time took place when Dennis men were in charge of the ship. The first occurred in January of 1914. The three-masted schooner John Paul was crossing the Sound from east to west in a high sea with winds clocked as high as 80 miles per hour. It was cold, and the Lightship was covered with ice, and groaning at her anchors. The John Paul was also experiencing icing, and about 3 miles past the Cross Rip she lost her sails and attempted to anchor until the winds abated. The Coast Guard Cutter Acushnet came to her rescue and took her in tow at about 3 P.M. The seas were still running very high and the towed vessel was taking on water faster than the crew could pump. They tried to signal the Acushnet of their danger, but could not, and so the crew took to the boats at 10 P.M., still a long way from the Vineyard. From fear of freezing, the Captain decided to try to row back to the Cross Rip. It was 1:30 A.M., Captain Richard E.B. Phillips recalled, with the wind still blowing a gale, when he noticed from his cabin that there was a different sound than just the wind in the rigging. He scrambled on deck and called for all hands, and they quickly responded. Through the dark night, they could see the small boat mounting wave after wave as it attempted to reach safety. Captain Phillips cut a halyard and threw it to the frozen men, who with great difficulty made it fast around a seat and came up to the Lightship. The crew worked as quickly and gently as possible to bring the crew aboard. They were all in poor condition, some with frozen limbs. The cook had already died before the rescue. Captain Phillips and his crew nursed and fed the survivors until they could be removed to the Vineyard for medical care. For their skill in affecting the rescue all were given a letter of recommendation. In addition to the Captain the men from Dennis who were stationed on the Cross Rip and took part in the rescue were: Chester C. Nickerson, Mate, Albert Wixon, Engineer, Joe A. Baker, Cook, and Warren V. Baker, Seaman.

The second episode does not have a happy ending. Captain Phillips was on shore leave in February of 1918, when a great freeze up occurred in the Sound surrounding the Lightship. Mate Henry F. Joy of Dennis Port was in charge. Edoard Stackpole, the eminent historian of Nantucket states that, when Mr. Joy realized that his anchor chains had parted and that the vessel was no longer moored but merely held in place by the ice, he walked across the ice to Nantucket to request permission for his men to abandon the station. Incredible as that may seem, there are several instances when the Sound was frozen that deeply. You can imagine the disappointment of the crew when Mr. Joy returned to tell them that permission to abandon the Cross Rip was denied! So the men remained on board, awaiting their destiny. On February 20th a blizzard occurred, and following that the ice began to break up. Can you imagine the sick feeling the men must have had when the vessel began to move with the breaking ice? The local newspaper of February 28th expresses anxiety about the welfare of the men, as the ice field carried them, who knows where? Rumors reached waiting ears, that the crew had been removed from the vessel, that the ship had been spotted, and Captain Phillips published the hopeful news that there was a two month supply of food and four months supply of coal aboard. But reassurance and rumors amount to nothing. The vessel and its men were never seen again. It is most likely that she struck one of the dangerous shoals the lightships were sent to guard and went to the bottom with all hands. In addition to Mr. Joy, Dennis Port lost Almon F. Wixon and Arthur C. Joy, and West Dennis lost E.H. Phillips. Robert Crowell of South Dennis found wreckage of a ship at West Dennis in 1957 and there is speculation that it may have been the bones of Cross Rip. But the whole story of the fate of the Lightship Cross Rip will never be known.

WE HAVE SOME NEW MEMBERS!

We send a warm welcome aboard to John Reardon, the R.J. Gillen family, Mr. and Mrs. Andrew J. Anderson, George and Mary Williams, Mary Jane Hall, and John P. Gleason. Our apologies to Mr. and Mrs. James Metropoulos for the misspell last time. Also....we have four new Life Members! They are Carol L. Ginsburg and Steven M. Ginsburg, Lura Crowell and Seth Crowell. Here's wishing you a long voyage with us. Just a thought....a DHS Life Membership would make a nice gift for that person on your list who already has 'everything'. Special note to the snowbirds....please update your change of address with Isabelle so your newsletter gets to the right address.

CALENDAR

Nov. 11 7:30 P.M. DHS Board meets at Josh Crowells.
 Nov. 26 Happy Thanksgiving to one and all!
 Dec. 13 3-5 P.M. Christmas Open House at the Josiah Dennis Manse. Great refreshments...you all remember Col. Negus! Steven Russell will entertain us . Save this date!!

DENNIS CONSOLIDATED/EZRA BAKER SCHOOL

A trip to Ezra H. Baker School for Grandparents Day last month was a pleasant one. Everyone met in the cafeteria in the Susan P. McHenry Wing for coffee and a welcome by Principal Donald Eldredge and PTAC President Kevin White. We were then led to the appropriate classroom by one of the students. We watched the students at their lessons and looked at their journals. Let me tell you....education is **alive** and well at Ezra Baker. There is so much enthusiasm about learning. It would be great to be a student again. On the way out we noticed class pictures in the hall starting with the 1955 graduating class. The first class to graduate from the new Dennis Consolidated School was on June 16, 1932. In 1948 the name was changed to the Ezra H. Baker School to honor the man who donated the school grounds. An Old Home Week School Reunion is being planned for September 18, 1993 as part of the year long Bicentennial Celebration. (We will keep you updated on this as it develops.) It would be most fitting to have a picture of every graduating class from 1932 for this special occasion. Please search through your scrap-books and attics. If you have one you would like to donate we'd love to have it. If you have one and would like to keep it could we please borrow it to copy and we'll return it to you in good condition? Before you send it please identify as many of your fellow classmates as you can. Send the photos to Phyllis Horton, Box 275, Dennis Port, MA 02639 or, if you are local, call 394-0017 or 385-3689 and we'll pick it up. Thanks, and happy reminiscing!!

BUDS OF GENIUS

The above is the title of a semi-monthly collection of essays and compositions written by the children who attended Union Academy in Dennis Village in 1861. The academy was held at what is now Carleton Hall, after it had ceased to be used as a meeting house for the Methodists. It is very apparent from the few copies of the work of the children that some budding geniuses like to write better than others--and did so prolifically. For many, it seems, this requirement was a chore for which they had no enthusiasm nor talent either. I know its not politically correct to group students or anyone else by gender, but heck folks, what can I do? The essays by the female students are long, flowery, philosophical, and occasionally impressive. The essays by the boys are not. Case in point, this "bud" author unknown:

"School is a very pleasant place. It is no disagreeable place for anyone. All you have to do is mind your teachers and to study your lessons. A composition is a hard task for me and as I have written this I think that I will stop."

Or this gem, by "Sam":

"There are many kinds of birds such as the eagle, falcon, hawk, condors, ostrich, bitterns, rook, crow, buzzard, partridge, sparrow, wren, snowbird, parrot, woodpecker, quail, bluejay, humming bird, peacock, bluebird, albatross, stormy petrel, pigeon, gannet, penguin, duck, gull, goose, coot, teal, frigate bird, messenger bird, tropic bird and pelican."

He forgot the chickadee. Well, we can't all be geniuses at the same thing. At least Sam knows his birds!

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