



Dennis Historical Society Newsletter

Volume 27 Number 11

November 2004

Calendar of Events:

DHS Board Meeting
Wednesday, Nov. 10
7:00 PM
Josiah Dennis Manse
77 Nobscussett Rd.
Dennis Village
Interested members are
invited to attend.

**Christmas Open House
at Jericho**
Saturday, December 11
1-4 PM

Celebrate the season at
the beautifully decorated
Jericho Historical Center
Seasonal refreshments.
1801 Jericho House
Old Main Street
West Dennis

**Visions Open House at
the Manse**
Sunday, December 12
12 Noon-4 PM
Step back into a Colonial
Christmas as the cos-
tumed docents serve you
traditional refreshments.
Stroll through the house
and enjoy the lovely
holiday decorations.
1736 Josiah Dennis
Manse Museum
Corner of Whig St. and
Nobscussett Road.

Letter from David Crowell III

Thanks to John & Loring Strudwick, Lake Forest Academy, Lake Forest, IL for sharing with us this letter from David Crowell. Thanks also to David himself for so much interesting information.

Dear Mr. S—or rather Loring and John—

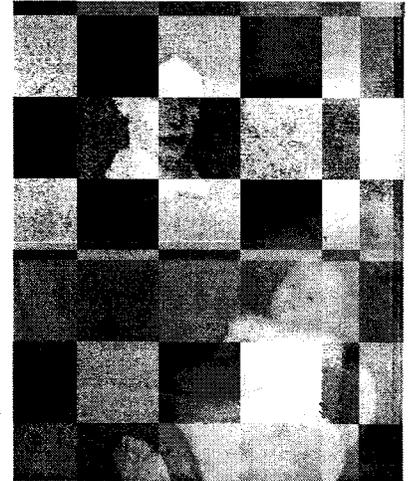
Many many thanks for your letter and pictures. And also for the Newsletter...

Enclosed herewith is a picture of Prince Sears Crowell's wife, Polly Dillingham Foster Crowell. In her lap is obviously a doll. My scenario is as follows: One of her children died about a month after birth and when the portraitist was called upon to do his job, Polly insisted on having the dead baby included. The painter used a doll to try to satisfy Polly's wish. I send two pictures should you want to give [one to] the people who rebuilt the David Crowell House. Evidently the mansion of his son Prince Sears Crowell must be no more. I went through that house when I was about 30. It was Victorian style, large, and included a dilapidated greenhouse (big). When I arrived a distant cousin (3rd or 4th) Edgar (78?) was holding a ladder for his sister, Edith, (80+) while she repaired the roof. He begged her to come down and she complied when she heard we had arrived.

From that house, besides the portrait, came a portrait of Prince himself which my deceased brother's family have and a banjo clock which I have. The earliest repair date I can decipher on the inside of the pendulum door is 1840. I do have some letters (copies) written by various members of Crowell families and if I find them I'll review them. Anything of real interest I'll relay.

Thanks again for the pictures and the local papers.

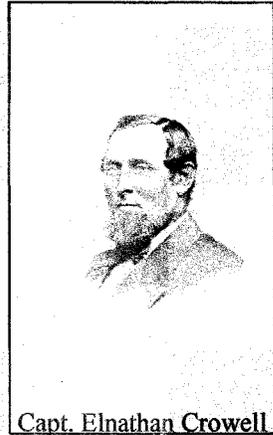
Sincerely,
David Crowell III



*Portrait of Polly Dillingham Foster
Crowell holding doll.*

A SECOND LOOK

Last month in the excitement over the find of the little diary picked up by Dot Kierstead at a yard sale, we made some hasty judgments. We have found since then that the diary was kept by Eliza Maria (Coddling) Crowell (1834-1892) *wife* of Capt. Elnathan Crowell (1827-1880). We've discovered that Ada Eliza (Crowell) Nickerson, wife of Capt. Arthur L. Nickerson, was their daughter, and the Mamie so often mentioned was their granddaughter, baby Mary L. Nickerson born in 1879. We believe Elnathan was captain of the schooner *J. H. De Wolf* carrying on a coastal trade, in 1880 largely between Boston, Down East, New York, Philadelphia and Baltimore. (On February 17 she writes, *De Wolf sailed for Boothbay for Ice at \$125 a ton for Phila. Schr. U.B. Fisk sailed same day for Kennebec.*) Their son-in-law Arthur was on the Schooner *Allen C. Green*, also engaged in coastal trading. The third schooner, *U. B. Fisk*, played an important part in their income, and we may assume they held shares in this ship as well.



Capt. Elnathan Crowell

Nancy Reid's book tells us that the Fisk family of West Dennis maintained an interest in a sailing fleet. Captain Nathan Fisk (1803-1874) was part-owner of the wharf which stretched out one hundred and fifty yards into Nantucket Sound from the west side of Swan Pond River. He had interests in a number of the fishing vessels which used the wharf and also sailed a packet schooner between West Dennis and Rhode Island ports. (pp518-19) His four sons, Uriah Benedict, Luther, David, and Henry Harrison, were all sea captains. All four served the Union by transporting supplies to troops during the Civil War, and after the war they all invested in a fleet of coastwise vessels. Altogether, the Fisks owned the controlling shares in twenty vessels, most of which were under the command of West Dennis men. (p520) When our diarist writes that the *Allen Green* is in the river, we can surmise that gave the Captain time for a quick visit home. She wrote on December 6, 1880, *Arthur home from Boston. On the 8th, Arthur back to Boston. On December 14, Arthur out from Boston. December 16, Arthur came off vessel in River. Two days later she reported: Arthur sails for N.Y. this AM.*



From a photograph album once belonging to Ralph C. Nickerson (one of "Mamie's" younger brothers) which is now owned by Edmond Nickerson we can actually meet some of the people mentioned in Eliza's diary. To the left is a picture identified as *Grandma E. M. (Coddling) Crowell*. But on the same page with Capt. Elnathan is another woman, unidentified. Is it a picture of a younger Eliza or perhaps their daughter, Ada Nickerson?

There are so many people who come alive in the diary that it is almost addictive to try to identify them all. We meet "Uncle Elijah Baker", and "Uncle Elijah Coddling". There's mention of Capt. Varanus Nickerson and Dr. Hurlbut. Their pictures can be found in Burt's album #3. The pictures on this page were found in Album #5, and in album # 8 there is a picture of Ann Maria (Battey) Coddling, our Eliza's mother. This last was found at the home of Alpheus Baker in South Dennis, the same house where Dot discovered the diary in which we meet, in addition to family members, Mr. Cobb the butcher, Allie Baxter (who was given an egg), John Henry who was paid for plowing and cleaning the outhouse and Mrs. Jenks who tuned a bugle!



NOVEMBER—IT MUST BE TIME FOR CRANBERRIES

Back in 1999 we ran Jack Sheedy's articles all about cranberries, but after a visit to "Annie's Crannies" we're thinking about Thanksgiving dinner and that traditional accompaniment, the cranberry. In 1966 Ed Gelsthorpe gave a talk to give DHS some of the history of the cranberry. He said that in 1550 the Indians in Virginia used them. In 1605 James Ross of Virginia learned about them. In 1633 Mary Ring died in Plymouth, leaving her husband her petticoat dyed with cranberries which he was able to auction off for 16 shillings! In 1635 Roger Williams called them bear berries and observed Indians using them to make pemmican, mixing them with venison. Cranberries were known to have healing power and were used in poultices. In 1648 the Pilgrims used Indians to harvest cranberries, and by 1665 when Capt. Richard Cobb married his second wife Mary Gorham, they served cranberries at their wedding feast. By 1703 they were being served at Harvard. Other important dates were 1816 when Henry Hall cultivated them, and 1843 when Eli Howes developed a choice berry known as the Howes variety. In 1850 Early Blacks were important, and in 1860 even Thoreau was writing about cranberries.

In the 1850s and 1860s Cranberries were an important crop on Cape Cod. Often the properties were held in shares just as ships were—1/16, 1/32, etc. Cranberries were used on shipboard to prevent scurvy. When the sailing ships began to disappear, many sea captains turned to raising cranberries. It wasn't until 1912 that we enjoyed our first canned cranberries. In 1930 Ocean Spray Company was formed as a farmers' cooperative with the farmers the only owners.

Probably as a result of the publicity for Ed Gelsthorpe's talk we received this letter.

50 Depot St.
E. Wareham, Mass.
Jan. 20, 1966

Mrs. Richard S. Hall
Dennis Historical Society
South Dennis, Mass.

Dear Mrs. Hall:

I recently read an article in the Cape Cod Standard Times about the cranberry's history on the Cape to be told. I am retired from the Cranberry Experiment Station here, but about thirty years ago I made a study of the early cranberry history, under the supervision of Dr. H. J. Franklin who was in charge of the Station then.

I have been over the records and have made a few notes which I am enclosing. I thought that perhaps these might be of interest to you.

*Very truly yours,
Joseph L. Kelley*

In 1637 Thomas Howes came to Cape Cod from England. He became the ancestor of a numerous clan living largely in and around Dennis, Mass. About 100 years ago one of his descendants, a fair and attractive girl, Sally Howes, found the first vines of the Howes variety while picking berries for family use in Bassett Swamp in East Dennis. Her father, Eli Howes, being impressed by the appearance, went back with her, located the vines, and planted them on a small bog in a field near his home.

Captain Henry Hall noticed the luxuriousness of cranberry vines where the sand had blown and went to work on the idea of *originating one of the most important features of growing cranberries*. About 1820 Captain Hall of the town of Dennis started the sanding of cranberry bogs. James Paine Howes of East Dennis cultivated cranberries and was the first to ship vines in barrels all over the country. In time for Thanksgiving we can be grateful for the role of the people of Dennis in developing the cranberry as we know it today.

Dennis Historical Society
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THE WAY WE WERE

A while back we received a nice note from Nancy Adams of Sarasota, FL and Dennis, who made us smile at the family stories she enclosed. Her mother, Barbara McPhee, told of *her* grandfather who at one time had no money and nothing to eat. He went to the Bay, caught the "dirty lobster", went home, pulled down the shades and ate the lobster before anyone could see how poor he was to have to eat *lobster!* Nancy writes that she also saw her great Grandpa eat a "Cape Cod Turkey Dinner", i.e. codfish, mashed potatoes and beets. Wherever you are, we hope you enjoy your Thanksgiving feast, whatever it may be—cranberries included, of course.



Riding to the Cranberry-bog

Peter Worden Uplands 1977