



# Dennis Historical Society Newsletter

Volume 28, number 11

November 2005

## Calendar of Events

**DHS Board Meetings** are open to all interested members. Our next board meeting will be on **November 9** at 3:00 P.M. at the Josiah Dennis Manse.



**Sunday, December 11**  
Noon to 4 P.M.

**DHS Christmas Open House at the Manse**

Step back into a Colonial Christmas as the costumed interpreters serve you traditional refreshments. Stroll through the house and enjoy the lovely holiday decorations.



1736 Josiah Dennis  
Manse Museum  
77 Nobscusset Road  
Dennis Village

## Cape Cod Merchant Marine

*A school essay by Helen Wigginton (continued from October)*

The next phase in the progress of the Cape Cod merchant marine was the **Clipper ship**. These ships completely changed the **shape of the vessels of both England and the United States**. The bows were **very narrow and pointed**; thus they **pushed into the waves** rather than **squarely against them**. The masts were **very high and held one and sometimes two courses of well-fitted sails**. This change **was made** due to need of speed. It **required much more skill and experience to handle these ships than the flat bottomed packets**.



*Wild Hunter off Hong Kong*  
Captain Joshua Sears  
photo by Richard Howes  
painting by Nancy Devita

The **Shiverick shipyard** in East Dennis was founded by David, Asa, and Paul Shiverick and Christopher Hall, and is now commemorated by an **appropriate tablet**. It was **once well known for its clippers**. Some of the ships built at the shipyard were *Belle of the West*, *Christopher Hall*, and *Ellen Sears*.

At **one time in the Civil War**, **Captain James Dillingham, Jr. of Brewster of the clipper Snow Squall was coming from Penang to New York around the Cape of Good Hope**. As he was **crossing the Atlantic**, he **encountered a Confederate ship**. He managed to get away and arrived **safely in New York harbor**. Many of these clippers helped in **running the blockade during the Civil War**. Although some clippers existed **until the 1890's**, Cape Cod's merchant marine was **doomed before the sixties**. There were four reasons for this: the **increasing opposition of British steam**, **unfavorable legislation in Congress**, the **opening up of the west**, and the **expansion of the railroads**. There is yet another **reason to consider—that is the Civil War**. We would not have been **driven from the sea quite so soon if it had not been for the Civil War as during this time many ships were destroyed and were made useless**.

A few of the seamen doubted still that their day was done and sailed away just as bravely. An example of this was Captain Benjamin P. Howes of Dennis. During the Civil War he commanded the clipper *Southern Cross* and was in charge when it was burned by the *Florida* in 1863. After the war he commanded the *Lubra* and became a south sea trader. The *Lubra* was captured by Chinese pirates in 1866. Voyages were made to the Yukon gold fields as late as 1897 by Cape Codders.

These trips have an importance for us. In the towns from which these men came there developed an open-mindedness. No town could be narrow-minded when perhaps two-thirds of the houses had a man who had visited foreign ports.

It is impossible to mention the many names of captains and the ships which were known in the early history of our nation, for in Dennis alone in 1837 there were over 150 captains and first mates. But each voyage was worthy of note, and each of these early captains was in truth an ambassador from the United States to foreign nations. Our country was unknown then and these sturdy men won the respect of the world for us.

Just as the time came for these men of the sea to give up their ships and the life that they loved, so the time has come for us to leave our school and our schoolmates. As we leave, each of us is carrying happy memories of pleasant associations of our time spent here, and we hope that those who are to take our places will hold us in lasting remembrance.

*Helen Wigginton (Taylor) and her older sister Esther Wigginton (Howes) both became teachers at the Dennis Consolidated (Ezra Baker) School. Back in 1994 I was talking with Margaret Walker "Mig" (Maher) who also taught there. She talked about many of the teachers who got together to reminisce about former students and their families—Marion Mugridge Eldredge, Elinor Goodspeed Crowell, and Hope Crowell Hallett among them. Mig said that Elinor had a wonderful memory for the people here. Hope remembered her own teacher, Eva Crowell, who taught 5 grades in another Dennis school. Hope recalled that they had an outhouse and that the boys used to make holes in the outhouse to peek in at the girls. Makes you wonder what else the ladies talked about!*

## **If it's November, there must be cranberries!**

Back in 1965 Dean Sears gave a talk to the Dennis Historical Society. Although the subject wasn't about cranberries, they did come up when he was talking about Captain Barnabas H. Sears who was "a character." *He was always trying out inventions. For cranberries, he devised a frame to be built over his bog with cotton strips which would be sewed together to keep frost off the vines. He had women sewing yards of cloth for days! But when he tried the bog cover out, it split right down the middle. Seems Captain Barnabas was a bit of a character in other ways, too. He was sailing *The Star* from Plymouth to East Dennis in rough weather when a squall came up. The Captain was below resting when the mate asked, "What'll we do?" Not bothering to go up on deck he instructed, "Crowd the sail and let her go." What luck! He made Provincetown okay. During the Spanish American War he became concerned as he expected the Spanish fleet to invade at any minute. Depressed, he took to his bed. When worried friends visited and asked what he would like, he answered "Something 18 lying beside me!" Well, we started out with cranberries, anyway. Enjoy this Cape Cod treat and have a Happy Thanksgiving!*

## A Story for Veterans Day

Veterans Day is a time for remembering those who have given their lives for our country and also those they have left behind. The DHS purchased on e-Bay a copy of *Niles' Weekly Register* dated Baltimore, April 15, 1837 wherein we read of news from the *Boston Transcript*:

**Molly Downs of Yarmouth.** *The venerable Mrs. Molly Downs of Yarmouth, (Cape Cod), has received under the act of the last congress, making provision for the widows of soldiers killed in the revolutionary war, a pension which will render the short remnant of her life as comfortable as freedom from pecuniary necessity can render it. Mrs. Molly, for so we learn from the Yarmouth Register, she was called, in old times, and new times, and finally for all times, for she has been no changeling, was married in the year 1777 to Benjamin Downs. One month after the marriage there was a loud call for soldiers to defend the country. Benjamin was of the proper age and strength and spirit, and the patriotic town of Yarmouth during the whole war in no case admitted of a draft—all were volunteers. Benjamin's patriotism swallowed up all other feelings—and love of self and wife were lost in love of country and love of duty, and he enlisted for three years and went into the army, where he soon died.*

*Mrs. Molly has ever since, for sixty years, been the widow Molly Downs; so long that few of the present generation ever knew that her husband died in the service of his country. She mourned as others have mourned, and often thought of Benjamin, and for a time spoke of him—but it were worse than vain to speak of one known to no one but herself. Thus she lived—a wife of thirty days and a widow of sixty years—her only treasure the memory of her young husband, the patriot martyr; and her country. then poor in all but the valor and patriotism of her sons, now rich and able to discharge its debt of gratitude—has placed on its pension list the name of the widow—Molly Downs of Yarmouth.*

## Member News

First, a reminder...Have you renewed your membership for the year which began on September 1, 2005 and runs through September 1, 2006? Check your mailing label for the expiration date of your subscription.

If you are a "snow bird," and want your Newsletter sent to a winter address, please be sure you have notified us of your departure date. We do our best to remember what you've told us in the past, but things may have changed since we last heard from you.

We were sad to learn of the death of Ed Howes of Greenwood, IN on June 13, 2005 and of faithful member Miriam W. Ellis of West Dennis on July 12th. We send our deepest sympathy to their families.

Thanks to Life Member Judy Dubin for a donation in memory of her husband Michael Dubin, and to Life Member Shirley Loud for her donation and gift memberships to three friends. Thanks also to Peter and June Howes for sending four gift memberships to family members.

It's also time to welcome new members: Judith Shannon of Dennis Port; Judy Chesley from Dennis; Carol & Joerg Haerberli, E. Orleans; William Hubbard, South Dennis; Dorothy Kierstead, New Smyrna Beach & Dennis; Barbara Baker Nerney, Hampton, NH; Harry Van Iderstine, New Smyrna Beach, FL; Sheryl McMahon & James Fournier, Dennis; Julie Kiely from Winchester; Mr. & Mrs. Brian Harrold of Westborough; Mr. & Mrs. Douglas Cokely, Bradford; Mr. & Mrs. Timothy Rhodes, E. Greenwich, RI; and Dawne E. Howes from Southbridge. We're happy to have you as members!

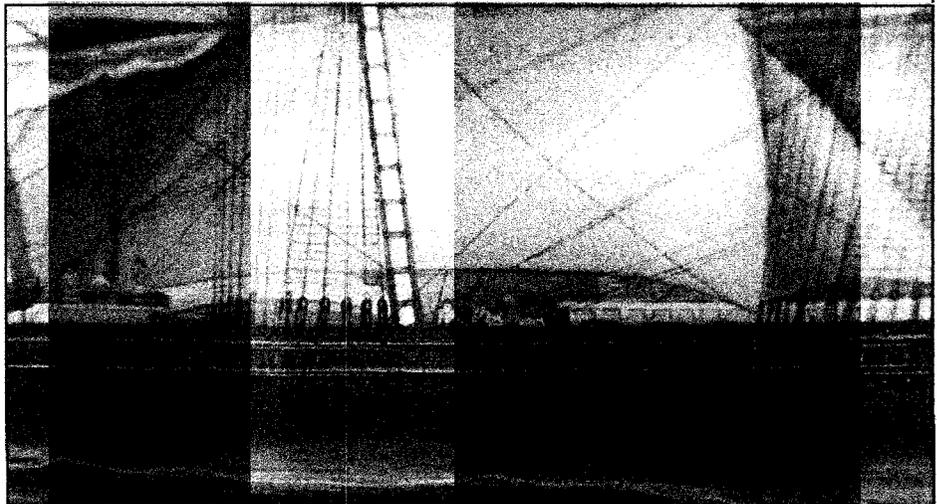
**Dennis Historical Society**  
**P.O. Box 607**  
**South Dennis, MA 02660-0607**

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

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

## The Way We Were

According to Nancy Reid's *History* (p. 382) Captain Sears took his wife Minerva (Handren) (1819-1905) and his daughter Louise Marie (1852-1951) with him on one of his voyages around the world in this fine vessel. So fond was the gruff and exacting captain of his little daughter "Lulu," that he allowed her to take her pony along with her and exercise him on the decks as they sailed the seven seas. Traveling alone on subsequent voyages, he frequently recorded comments in his log about how lonely and homesick he was for East Dennis. He retired from the sea in 1860 and the *Wild Hunter* continued on with her career without him. She remained in service for twenty-seven years until 1882 when she caught fire while transporting cotton and was abandoned at sea.



Detail of Ship *Wild Hunter* at Hong Kong showing Captain Joshua Sears' daughter Lulu on deck riding her pony. Photo of Devita painting by Richard Howes