



Dennis Historical Society Newsletter

Volume 31 Number 10 Send letters & stories to Dennis Historical Society, Box 607, S. Dennis 02660 or to pmrhorton@aol.com November 2008

Calendar

Wednesday, November 12
3:00 p.m.
DHS Board Meeting
At The Josiah Dennis Manse
All are welcome to attend!!!!

Sunday, December 14
12:00-4:00
Christmas Open House At The
Manse

Sunday, December 21
1:00-4:00
Dennis Historical Society
Christmas Open House
Jericho Historical Center
West Dennis

There were four people -
Everybody, Somebody, Anybody
and Nobody.

There was an important job to be
done and Everybody was asked
to do it.

Everybody was sure Somebody
would do it.

Anybody could have done it but
Nobody did.

Somebody got angry about that
because it was Everybody's job.

Everybody thought Anybody
could do it but Nobody realized
that Everybody would not do it.

It ended up that Everybody
blamed Somebody when actually
Nobody asked Anybody.

Pound Pond River

One little-known historic area of Dennis Port was Pound Pond, now generally remembered as Sea View Playland.

In the beginning of English migration to the Cape most of the land from Herring River to Swan River and north around the east side of Swan Pond belonged to Jacob Crook, a member of the Harwich Satucket tribe. Eventually he sold or traded the land to English settlers. In just a few years the area's name changed from Crook's Neck to Crooked Neck and then Crocker's Neck which it kept until it became Dennis Port in 1862.

This whole area was full of swamps, bogs, ponds and rivers interspersed with some high ground here and there. This is where you will find all the antique homes in Dennis Port.

For about 300 years, until the 1930's the changes to the landscape was subtle with ponds becoming bogs and bogs becoming very wet spots every time we had a heavy rain. Portions of the rivers were diminishing or disappearing. Over the past 75 years most of the ponds and bogs have been filled in and built upon and the rivers have gone underground. One of the rivers is still partially visible—the Pound Pond River.

This river originates from the east side of Swan Pond and is nourished by springs along its path. Any old timer from Dennis Port could tell you how it flowed because "wet spots" marked its route. It meandered east and southeast to arrive at what is now Mike's Barber Shop and the Dennis Public Library, then south between Edwards Avenue and South Street. It turned east at the high ground along Lower County Road, went across Summer Street then south to the Inman Road Beach area. The part that is visible is the stream running along the east side of the recently purchased, town-owned Sea View property. The rest of it is still there---it has gone underground. Just ask anyone who lives near it about water in their basement.

Many years ago the Sea View location was called Pound Pond and it is marked on the 1858 Barnstable County map. It was a busy waterway open to Nantucket Sound. A boatbuilding operation was on the west bank of the river. There is no record of who owned it, although it was probably one or more Wixon family member as this end of town was Wixon territory. They built fishing smacks and one and two masted schooners---seventeen in all. We do know that "Jot" (Jonathan) Wixon (1837-1919) ran the boilers that steamed and bent the wood for the ship's ribs, and that William M. Rogers (1837-1902), blacksmith, made the fittings for the ships in his forge at the corner of Lower County Road and Summer Street, now Grandma Daisy's Gift Shop. Jot said, "I don't suppose anything was built there to match the fine Clippers made over to the North Side at the Shiverick yards but Pound Pond did pretty well before that storm hit it."

In the years that Jot Wixon and William Rogers would have been of working age there were four major hurricanes and five or more times when the ice in Nantucket Sound came ashore destroying everything it rammed into and silting up small waterways. Anyone of those could have closed the river.

The unnamed hurricane of 1944 proved how vulnerable this place is. That storm pushed a wall of water up over the beach and into the meadow all the way to Lower County Road where it covered the road with 8 feet of salt water, then went further on up the old river route. The water eventually drained off but all the shrubs in the area died from their exposure to salt water.

In the 1970's there was a system of underground pipes that ran from the end of the Sea View property to the Inman Road Beach to drain water into the Sound. A metal grate at the beginning of the pipes needed to be cleaned periodically to keep the water flowing—otherwise the water backed up and flooded basements in the downtown area.

The first homestead built next to the river was by George and Ella (Baker) Wixon. It was a salt box style house and stood near the road. George died at sea in 1895 and Ella remarried twice in eleven years. She eventually moved to Pawtucket, RI with her last husband and the house became her summer home. She also bought additional abutting land.

In 1916 she sold the house to Josephine Morgan of Boston who added several outbuildings and then sold it to Mary R. Finnegan of Worcester in 1921. This completely dispels the local legend that the Finnegan's bought the property to establish a farm that would exempt their son from being drafted for World War I. That war was ended in 1919.

Mrs. Finnegan had the house moved back further on the lot and had it rebuilt into a 2 1/2 story house with broad verandas around the first floor and sun porches on the second story. She also bought several abutting properties to form what is now the upland from Mrs. Sarah Inman, then purchased the Pound Pond area, (called an English meadow in the deed), with a stream running through it from James R. Smith and Isaac R. Kelley to complete most of the property now known as Sea View. The Finnegan family established a state of the art farm that hired a manager from away and several local people to run it. In time the farming operation was stopped. They continued to live there in the summer until 1951. They sold it to the Zinacovich family of Worcester who developed Sea View Village and Playland with its Barn of Fun that is well remembered today.

Sea View was purchased by the Dennis voters at the 2004 Annual Town Meeting to create a scenic park for the entire town to enjoy. The Sea View Property Committee has worked diligently toward planning a park that will enhance a healthy experience for all who use it. This property is in its final stages of clearance from town committees so it can go out to bid and work can begin on the park. They hope to have it open in spring 2009. I'll meet you there!

The Streets Of Our Town

Probably the area of Dennis that has changed the most over the years of settlement is Dennis Port. First-comers found the fog and dampness of Crook's Neck, as it was then called, so formidable that for a while they left it to the Indians. But soon a few families set up housekeeping on the higher ground, Chases, Wixons, Kelleys, and Gages. Their descendants still live in the Port. They soon discovered that the richness of the sea far surpassed the richness of the land and so turned to the many ventures which continued to change and grow, and made Dennis Port the commercial center of the Town for over 100 years until the 1980's.

Sea Street, which leads from Upper County Road to Nantucket Sound, once led not to a shimmering bathing beach, but to a center of seashore industries such as wharfs for fishing boats, fish flakes, salt works, and a sea clam cannery. The heavy white shells from this last industry were crushed and strewn on the road that led from the village to the shore and it was then called Shell Road. Now all these picturesque industries have vanished and instead of hardworking fishermen and their wives and children, the beach is filled with

sun-bathers. As you drive down Sea Street, try to imagine that the black asphalt is replaced by white shell, the motels by salt works, and the tourists by men, women, and children with hats and light clothing to protect them from the blazing sun, mending nets, tending the fish flakes, rigging their small boats for a fishing trip. It is a much different place now on Sea Street than it was when Shell Road was one of the Streets of Our Town

Nancy Thacher Reed

History lesson **By Nicole Muller**

In last Sunday night's eerie twilight, costumed interpreters appeared as spirits of Dennis Past during a guided tour of Dennis village's Ancient Cemetery. "I was delighted to appear as Phoebe Dennis, Josiah Dennis' second wife," said Phyllis Horton of Dennisport.

As chairwoman of the Dennis Cemetery Education Center Committee, Horton's pleasure extended beyond the tour. Sunday night marked the public unveiling of the long-awaited education center in the cemetery's 1875 receiving tomb.

In the 19th century, receiving tombs were constructed to hold the bodies of those who died in winter, when the frozen ground prevented burial. "Before that, people reluctantly kept their departed loved ones in their barns until the spring thaw," Horton said. Receiving tombs were displaced by the advent of funeral parlors in the 1920s.

The museum project, which began in 2003 with the acquisition of a 19th-century hearse house, took several turns before its completion last week. In early 2007, committee members were disappointed to learn that the hearse house they were appointed to restore was beyond repair. "None of us was thrilled with the idea of building an imitation," Horton said. "We are dedicated to historic preservation."

Committee member Dick Howes proposed using the existing receiving tomb at Dennis village's Ancient Cemetery as a place to exhibit information on the burial practices in Dennis from its first settlement until the present.

With selectmen's approval, the committee, comprised of Horton, Howes, Hanger, Dave Talbott, Priscilla Husband, Sarah Kruger and Bonnie Hempel went to work cleaning and preparing the tomb for public use.

With community preservation funding appropriated at the September 2006 special Town Meeting, the committee purchased a new asphalt roof for the tomb. "That was the cheapest alternative to make the structure weather-tight," said Horton, who hopes that one day the tomb's original slate roof will be replicated.

Talbott and Howes cleaned the cement-floored, brick-walled tomb and built display cases from wood they salvaged from the old hearse house. "Electrician David Raunela donated his expertise and materials to connect the [overhead, fluorescent] lights that Dennis Memorial Library donated," Horton said. "The Village Improvement Society of Dennis provided electrical access to its account."

A window on the back wall of the tomb was puttied and reglazed. Exterior shutters, closed in winter, will be opened on warm summer days to provide a cool breeze for visitors.

An old tombstone, discarded because of an engraving error, is available in the museum for public rubbings. "We recommend that people refrain from making rubbings of the cemetery's old tombstones," Horton said. "Over time, rubbing wears away the carvings."

The rubbing stone was made for Wallace, son of J.C. and Priscilla Howes, who died Feb. 10, 1852, at age 5 months. "The old inscriptions are funny, moving and informative of our town's history," Horton said.

Horton is developing a walking-tour guide to tombstones in the Ancient Cemetery. When completed, the guides will be available in the wooden box outside the museum.

Selectmen Chairwoman Sheryl McMahan said she will recommend that selectmen charge the cemetery advisory committee with oversight of the new museum.

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

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

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

A Spooky Walk Enjoyed By All

The October 19th “Twilight Cemetery Visions” tour through the historic section of Dennis Village Cemetery was a sold-out event! Our Cemetery Guru Terri Fox, in her red cape, entertained, educated and charmed one and all. On her cue, as twilight turned to darkness, history in the old burying ground came to “life.”

Encounters started with the single Mom of the early 1800’s and included an Ancient Mariner, tales from Cyrus Howes, Rev. Josiah Dennis and BOTH of his wives, Rev. & Mrs. Stone, Major Micah Chapman, Temperance Hedge Howes, Jeremiah Howes, Asa & Susanna Shiverick, along with a wandering Sea Urchin of questionable origins.

Hot mulled cider, doughnuts and other goodies were served outside of the receiving tomb.

The participants of the walk were privileged to be the first visitors at the unveiling of this newest Dennis museum. Phyllis Horton is pictured with one of the exhibits.

The Historical Society thanks: Terri, Ursula, Pete, Burt, Wendy, Phyllis, Josh, Judy, Dave, Diane, Art, Maureen, Brendan, Jinny, June and Terri’s sister Jan for their participation in a must be repeated event in Dennis.

Proceeds of nearly \$400 were donated to the Manse Repair Fund.



Photo by Nicole Muller

June Howes