

DENNIS HISTORICAL SOCIETY ANNUAL MEETING - 1980

Held at V.I.C. Hall, Dennisport, it was conducted by Vice President, Bill Crowell, and included reports on the newsletter, now circulating over 400 copies per edition; our history classes, held in conjunction with the Community Schools program last spring, attended by an average of 75 people per class; the Ezra H. Baker School field trips which brought over 350 school children to the historic centers; bicycle trips, especially the new tour which includes the Mayfair area; and bus group tours, two of which will be sponsored by the Society this year. Virginia Gifford reported that about two thirds of our copies of Scuttle Watch have been sold. (If you desire a copy of this excellent young people's book about life on Cape Cod in the mid-1800's, call Ginny at 398-2160.) The report of the nominating committee was accepted and the following officers elected: President, Gail Hart; 1st Vice Pres., William E. Crowell, Jr.; 2nd Vice Pres., Pauline Derick; Treasurer, Joshua Crowell; Rec.Secr., Jean Johnson; Corr.Secr., Jean McMurtry; Directors: 3 yrs., Paula Bacon, Jean and Bill Taylor; 2 yrs., Virginia Gifford and Pauline Kennedy; 1 yr., Kirk Brown and Nancy Reid, and three additional directors to be appointed representing the Manse and Jericho Committees and the Historical Commission. A short but lively reminiscence about the Dennis town baseball team of the late 1940's brought to light some interesting anecdotes, all of which have been recorded in our on-going effort to collect all the history from those who remember it. Your reminiscence will be more than welcome. How about some photographs of the Clippers?

THE TALES OF THORNTON W. BURGESS

Among the favorite books borrowed from the South Dennis Library in my childhood were the delightful stories of Thornton W. Burgess. It is these tales of Peter Rabbit, Jenny Wren, Reddy Fox and the other friends of the Old Orchard and its surrounding neighborhood which we will be remembering at our October program when Nancy Titcomb shares with us some thoughts about Thornton Waldo Burgess born in Sandwich in 1875. He began his literary career by writing stories for his own children. His love of nature and of young people led him to the decision to publish a whole series of books, dedicated to both. Come and hear of this kindly man's career and of the Sandwich Historical Society's efforts to commemorate the memory of this well-known Cape Cod author of outstanding children's books. There's something for us adults in Thornton's books as well, for it is said that some of his best known characters are based upon the personalities of his Cape Cod neighbors! The meeting will be held at West Dennis Community Bldg. at 7:30 P.M. on Tuesday evening, October 21st. And as usual, guests are most cordially welcomed.

A MODEL OF DEMOCRACY--1780-1980

Andrew C.M. Laughlin, president of the American Historical Society in 1914 stated at that time, "If I were called upon to select a single fact...which more nearly...embraced the significance of the American Revolution...I should choose the formation of the Massachusetts Constitution." The Bicentennial of this remarkable document is being celebrated for the entire year in school and public ceremonies. Its significance lies not only in the finished document with its detailed Bill of Rights for all citizens, but perhaps more importantly in the way in which it was developed. It was at the insistence of the "grass roots" citizens, voting through town committees and town meetings, that a constitutional convention was held to compile the rights which local citizens felt were vital, and to organize a government based on checks and balances, insuring that no branch, and no individual could usurp too much power. Our town, then a part of Yarmouth, made a significant contribution to this constitution which was put into effect on October 25, 1780. Town meetings discussed its contents, the committee on correspondence contacted the General Court to make the will of the people known, and when at last a convention was called, Col. Enoch Hallett was chosen to serve on the Committee of Thirty who actually drafted the wording of the constitution (although much credit for this is given to John Adams). Col. Hallett, in addition to his constitutional duties, was High Sheriff of Barnstable County during the Revolution. He was also Colonel of the County Militia, responsible for recruiting, and on several occasions was in contact with General Washington in regard to the peculiar problems that the war brought to Cape Cod. He had the great responsibility (and Joy) of escorting the 480 British prisoners, captured when the Man-of-War, Somerset, went ashore at Truro through jubilant town after town, on the way to delivering them to the General at Cambridge. He had the equally happy duty of informing the General of the capture of 350 barrels of flour from a British ship off Bass River and seeing to the delivery of this flour when the Colonial troops had only four days supply of food remaining. So Col. Hallett was a busy, involved man, and knew well what the county felt was needed for state government. His descendants, some Howes and Halls as well as Halletts, live still in Dennis, and we should all take particular pride in recognizing the anniversary of this constitution which is the oldest in the hemisphere, and the model, not only for other states, but for the national constitution as well.

INDIAN SUMMER

We have an interesting plan for November, when we are asking all of you with any knowledge of Indian lore and Indian artifacts to contribute to a program devoted to a study of the native Americans who dwelt in our area many centuries before the coming of the English settlers, and for such a short time thereafter. Please bring your artifacts and your knowledge to the meeting on Nov. 18 at W. Dennis Comm. Bldg. We are anxious to begin a list and perhaps a map of where Indian digs have produced a "find" in the town, and also to accumulate a bibliography of Indian lore and documents or history. For information, contact Gail Hart, 398-9359.

CALENDAR

- Oct. 15 Last day for car inspections
Oct. 29 Executive Board meeting, Home of Gail Hart, 7:30 PM
Oct. 21 "Cape Cod's Thornton Burgess", Nancy Titcomb, West Dennis Community Bldg.,
7:30 PM
Oct. 24 200th Anniversary of Massachusetts State Constitution
Nov. 18 Indians of Dennis, West Dennis Community Bldg., 7:30 PM
Also of interest to our members-----
Oct. 13 Bus Tour to Plymouth for Harvest Days, call 394-5739 for reservations
Oct. 31 and Nov. 1 Conference of New England Historical Societies, U.Mass,
Boston, for details call Ann Treat Reynolds, 398-3406

A LEGEND OF MAUSHOP

Speaking about our local Indians reminds me that a while ago I promised to tell you some of the legends of Maushop, the gentle giant-god of local Indian legend. He is a figure common to many Indian cultures in this hemisphere, god-like in his abilities to control nature and events, but displaying at times a touching human frailty which endeared him to all. He was known by different names in different tribes, but his size and strength are the same and the stories about him are so similar as to be striking. Some South American tribes called him "Harakan", and this is said to be the origin of our word, "hurricane", for when the tropical winds blew across the lands felling trees and breaking branches, mothers would whisper to their children, "Hush, for it is only Harakan gathering his firewood!" This is one of the stories of Maushop I love. The Wampanoags of Cape Cod were visited by a terrifying evil in the form of a huge bird which swooped down among the villages from time to time and captured a young child which it bore away and devoured. At last the people appealed to Maushop, their friend, to help them to protect their beloved children. Maushop observed that the bird always carried its prey toward the south, so with one great leap he landed upon Nantucket, but not a sign of the giant bird could be seen. In a second giant leap he landed upon Martha's Vineyard. Here he found heaps of small white bones. Sure enough, here was the home of the giant bird. Maushop waited until the Bird landed upon the Island with its latest victim, then he seized the evil one. A great struggle followed, but at last Maushop wrung the neck of the monster and flung his carcass into the sea. Then he sat down and lighted his pipe. When he sat back and enjoyed his smoke, the wind carried the great billows of smoke across the south sea and over the Cape, enshrouding the Indians' villages with a thick fog. And so, even today, when the mists roll in and envelop the Cape with fog, you will hear the wise old natives say, "It is only Old Maushop, smoking his pipe

THE STREETS OF OUR TOWN

Running from Main Street (Rt.6A) in the village of Dennis to the beach, Corporation Road is a pleasant residential street dotted with 19th century homes built by Halls and Howes. The serene beach at the end of the street gives no hint of the busy days of the early 1800's. The projection of land called Nobscussett Point has worn down so it is hardly distinguishable and the sights and sounds of a sailing past can be seen and heard in the imagination only. In 1814 sailing was becoming a vital part of New England life and Dennis was already involved in maritime endeavors. So a group of citizens petitioned the legislature for permission to build a pier easterly from the Point into the Bay noting that "our local situation is such that there is no convenient harbour". The original members of the Nobscussett Point Pier Corporation were Oren, Daniel, Zenas, and John (Jr.) Howes, and Henry Hall. Their pier extended some 600 ft. into the Bay and was built of stone and timber. The new landing place became the center of village activity, surrounded by stores, businesses, fish flakes and salt works. In 1851 the pier was extended to create even better accommodations for fishing vessels and merchant vessels as well. An account of some of the meetings of the Corporation exists, in the care of the Dennis Memorial Library, and it tells of the vicissitudes the pier suffered in winter storms and the expense of rebuilding. It is hard to see how the incorporators made any profit, but then, what Cape Cod business ever does? But business took a disastrous spin as the iron rails were introduced to Cape Cod and pushed further and further down the peninsula. I suspect that famous Cape quote "Cap'n, the railroad is a cuss!" was oft heard at meetings of the Nobscussett Point Pier Corporation. Eventually, the Corporation dissolved in 1873 and the incorporators turned their hand to other industries. Buildings, wharf and saltworks have all disappeared, and all that survives today is the name for Corporation Road, one of the Streets of Our Town.

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

