



REPORT OF THE ANNUAL MEETING - 1988

First of all, those faithful members who attended the annual meeting were treated to a double feature--something not often offered in this day of \$5.00 movies. Our two prime time feature slide shows, "Dennis" and "The Story of the Shiverick Shipyard" were shown and were enjoyed by some who had never seen them and others who were pleased to see them again. Then the business meeting--something which can be dull, boring, and long drawn out--but not so with D.H.S. A fine report by secretary Lilla Smith, another by our very busy and efficient membership chairman Isabelle Flynn, and the usual very finely detailed treasurer's report from Josh Crowell, preceded the election of new board members Isabelle Flynn and Nancy Howes. So we are off to another year of bigger and better things. The board sincerely hopes that more of our members will be involved and help to fulfill the purpose of the Society in teaching, researching, and documenting the history of this interesting town.

CONGRATULATIONS TO BILL SCOFIELD

A special feature of this year's annual meeting was the presentation of a Life Membership to Wilson B. Scofield in appreciation of his excellent work on the audio-visual committee. Bill is our equipment expert, no small job in itself, but he is also our photographic expert. This means that every slide in our two long lectures, as well as those in our school program "short subjects" and the Cranberry and Indian projects we have recorded in slide and sound have come about by his careful work. All of us who have had the honor of working with him have been inspired by his high standards. Yet his passion for perfection does not make him difficult to work with. On the contrary, he manages to keep us all at our best, and the results have been the slide shows which have earned D.H.S. a great deal of respect from our neighboring historical societies and praise from every group which has seen them. Next time you see our newest Life Member, be sure to speak a word of thanks.

COME WALK WITH US

We will meet Conservation officer George MacDonald at the Chapin Beach parking lot Sunday, October 16 at 3:00 P.M. (Rain date October 23) and walk with him along the shores and dune paths of this most interesting land. He will tell us about flora and fauna, and what we can and cannot do to preserve this fragile beach for the future. Please come, for a most interesting afternoon. Dress warmly.

THE SEA CAPTAINS OF DENNIS

My major research project for this winter is to collect and organize all the information I can find about the sea captains of this town. When the pamphlet entitled Master Mariners of Dennis was published in 1965 379 names were printed on a list of sea captains from each of our 5 villages. I have found even more than that, and each of them had different and interesting experiences. So get ready for some sea stories. Looks like I'll have one a month for some time to come.

My first story comes not from research but from family tradition. My great-great grandfather, Lothrop Taylor Thacher, was a captain of several vessels and raised his sons to go to sea as well. Captain George Engs Thacher was my great grandfather and he naturally expected his sons to go to sea, and they all did. (One of them, Capt. Peleg, is included in Mrs. O'Neil's book mentioned above.) This story is about my grandfather, Capt. George's son, Charles. When he was a school boy he ran away from the Friend's Academy in Providence and stowed away on his father's ship headed from Newport to Russia. When discovered it was too late to return him to shore and so his sea training began. All of George Engs sons learned their trade, from able seaman to officer, through experience. So Charles, as he traveled this educational route, was at one time Mate of a ship of which his father was Master on a trans-Atlantic voyage. Great grandfather was a taciturn person by nature, not easily excited. Aboard the vessel he often improved his time below decks by playing his violin. On a particularly stormy night, Grandfather Charles was on duty on the deck as the seas mounted and the winds increased. Becoming somewhat nervous, he went below to appeal to the captain for advise. "Just haul in your sheets and follow your course," advised his father. A second time Charles came below. "Father, we have lost the foremast!" "Well". says Capt. George, "you still have two more, haven't you?", and he continued to practice his fiddle. Crisis followed crisis but no assistance came from the Captain except, "Sail on." Finally, in desparation, Charles made one last appeal. "We are leaking badly, sir, and the men are tired and threaten to stop working the pumps." This time father took the bow from the strings and regarded Charles coolly. "Mister Thacher", he said calmly, "You tell the men, either pump or drown!" I guess the men followed orders, for my grandfather Charles lived to tell the tale. It may not surprise you to learn that he did not spend many years at sea. Instead he came ashore and spent his life trucking mail and freight from the South Dennis depot to it's destination, behind a docile horse, at the helm of a sturdy wagon.

CALENDAR

- Oct 11 7:30 P.M. Board meets with Sarah
Oct 13 10 A.M. Provincetown Monument Museum. Annual Meeting of the Cape and Islands Historical Association. All welcome.
Oct 16 3 P.M. Walk on Chapin Beach and dune trails with Conservation officer George MacDonald. RAIN DATE Oct 23, same time.

DENNIS UNION CHURCH BUILDING - 150 YEARS OLD

I guess buildings don't have birthdays. But, when a church has been a part of the village scene for 150 years some kind of notice should be made. The church itself is, of course, much more than it's building. And the Dennis Union Church has roots much older than the building that now serves it. Once the only church in town, at one time it was one of many religious organizations in the village of Dennis. That must have been a difficult period for the people of the village. It was a time when the church was usually the center of social life as well as a uniting force. But it was also a time when the traditional New England outlook on religious matters was undergoing great change. Many villages were torn apart by becoming divided along religious lines. I thought you might be interested to hear about one of the people who influenced this religious turmoil. He was a character who became involved in the life of this and many other Cape villages, from 1833 to 1837. His name was Abraham Norwood, himself a convert from the orthodox viewpoint to that of the Universalists. He was serving the small church at Annisquam, when he received an invitation to come to Brewster to speak about Universalism. His delightful and sometimes irreverent autobiography, The Pilgrimage of a Pilgrim, describes this visit and his subsequent years spent in trying to make Universalists out of the citizens of the Cape. He came from Cape Ann by packet, and apparently was so encouraged by his reception that he decided to return here and labor. I have never read any of his talks, but I have read his farewell address to his old congregation--in rhyme. He tells first about his impression on arriving on the Cape.

"For the first time I stood on the Shores of Cape Cod

To deliver a message of mercy from God." (It gets worse!)

He feels that the vineyards of the Cape are ripe for his message, and that he has been chosen to rescue Cape Codders from religious darkness. He ends his address this way:

"I go, yes I go, to the Shores of Cape Cod

To spend and be spent in the service of God.

I leave you, I leave you, in peace may you dwell

Once more then, adieu, fare ye well, fare ye well."

I must assume that his sermons were more engaging than his poetry, for Mr. Norwood wrecked havoc among many staunchly congregational parishes here pulling away many liberal freethinkers. He established, or reorganized Universalist Societies in Orleans, Brewster, Chatham, South Dennis, East Dennis, and Dennis village. In the process, he enjoyed himself thoroughly, debating with Mr. Sanford of the South Dennis Academy, conducting meetings at the district schools on the north side, and taking personal satisfaction when Joseph Hawes of Yarmouth was "cast out" as Deacon of the church there, because he attended one of Norwood's lectures. In his life story he says: "I have slept in over 100 houses on Cape Cod...Yes, I do love Cape Cod, with it's good social openhearted benevolent inhabitants--it's bold enterprising men and it's neat, industrious women." The ministers of Cape Cod, needless to say, were not nearly so enamoured with Abraham! There never was a Universalist church built in Dennis village--although one stood for many years in South Dennis. Dennis members continued to meet at the school, or in homes, for a few years after Mr. Norwood had gone his way. But in due time the Universalists, as well as the Methodists, Presbyterians and other splinter groups rallied around old mother church. In 1866 the several religious societies joined together to form the Dennis Union Religious Society, now more commonly known as the Dennis Union Church. And may that church continue to grow and prosper, for the good of all who live in the shadow of it's 150 year old spire.

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