



WAITING FOR THE MAIL

For quite some time I've had a note scribbled to myself to write a piece on 'waiting for the mail'--thinking back to when it was a social event to go over to the post office in the evening and wait for the mail to be delivered, sorted, and picked up. However, the right opportunity never came up, until now.

The last (September) newsletter that advertised our annual meeting for September 15 arrived in various Dennis post offices anywhere from Thursday the 12th to Tuesday the 17th. This was somewhat of a departure from our previous newsletters. They had been delivered within a couple of days from when Isabelle Flynn mailed them. However, there is a new system in place at USPS. After inquiry we are advised that "third class upgradeable mail time allowance from time of deposit is three days in Bourne plus three days at local post office". Glory be--David N. Wixon and C. Lovell Goodspeed must be spinning in their graves.!

With all due respects we do remember when!--all the mail was delivered locally by the next day--or even the same day it was posted, and that included post cards and packages. We have a letter from Aunt Sally Hall written to Miss Georgetta Nye who was training to be a nurse at Morton Hospital in Taunton, MA. The letter was posted at the Dennis Post Office at 6:00 A.M. Jan, 31, 1910 and received in Taunton at 10:30 Jan. 31, 1910. It was the custom at that time to stamp the time of departure on the front and the time of arrival on the back of the letter. Also a number of post cards in our collection show a same day or next day delivery in many areas of New England, New York and New Jersey, so we are puzzled as to why it should take six days to get from South Dennis to Dennis Port. Guess we'll have to chalk it up to "progress".

In the early days the morning mail was attended to in a rather perfunctory manner. Folks went to the post office and picked up their mail--or noted the lack thereof--exchanged pleasantries with whoever was there, then went on about the business of the day.

The evening mail was entirely another matter. The days chores had been disposed of, a substantial supper was under everyone's belt, and it was time to stroll down to the post office to pick up the night mail, unless it was the night for one of the lodge meetings--then it was a quick trip and on to the lodge where you'd meet everyone you would have met at the post office. Sometimes there was a surprise--someone who had gone away to find employment would be home on a day or two visit and that would be fodder for conversation for weeks to come. At a couple of our post offices there was an outside bench called "the liar's bench" by the local wags. No matter what story was told there was always someone in the group who could top it--or would try to. Of course, the "liar's bench" was a fair weather perch. In inclement weather they congregated inside and in cold weather there was a three or four deep ring around the cast iron stove. The first comers got the chairs and benches, the late comers had to stand or lean against the counter or wall. Not a single event in any village escaped scrutiny from this self appointed jury. Everyone had an opinion--and voiced it--sometimes by speaking out or by an affirmative "Aye" to whatever was being discussed.

The morning mail could find either men or women picking up the mail but the night mail was 'mostly for men'--except in the summer. Then all the rules changed. The summer folks used the night mail as a place to pick up their mail or a date, check up on who had arrived and who was leaving, and catch up on the local gossip.

"Picking up the night mail" was a good excuse for some of our young men and women to get out of the house in the warm summer months. Of course, the girls always went by twos or threes--or they wouldn't have been let out of the house--but once out of eyesight a young beau or two would magically appear. The mail was picked up on time and usually a phosphate or ice cream would be lingered over at the drug store, then home by the long way around. Somehow the girls always managed to meet up before they got to the front door--decorum was preserved and the mail was delivered into father's hands. Many of the 'mail' romances turned into golden wedding anniversaries, with a few parcel posts delivered along the way.

The mail for South Dennis, West Dennis and East Dennis arrived at the South Dennis Railroad Station. Dennis Village mail was picked up at Yarmouth by Richard Hefler and anything posted for Dennis Port was dropped off at the North Harwich station. Passengers, parcel post and express shared the ride back to the village with the mail. Postmasters J. Harvey Jenks, Jr. in West Dennis, Marshall Underwood in South Dennis, Lovell Goodspeed in Dennis, Warren Rogers then David Wixon in Dennis Port and Postmistress Mrs. Susan Sears in East Dennis ruled their postal domains with a steadfast hand dispensing 2¢ stamps for a letter, 1¢ stamp for post cards, and collecting box rent at 15¢ for the quarter year. They kept meticulous records. We have some postal record books at the Pauline Wixon Derick Library documenting every cent that went across the counter.

David Love of Dennis Village drove Dick Hefler's mail wagon on occasion. On one blizzardy December night the train was late getting to Yarmouth station because of the snow. David loaded his mail sacks onto the wagon--more than usual because of Christmas correspondence and packages--then fought his way through the drifts to Dennis, arriving a couple of hours late. After depositing the numerous mail sacks on the floor and brushing the snow from his face he said in a loud voice, "I wish Jesus Christ had been born in July!"

Those may have been very different days from what we have now, but no one can argue with 4½ hours from Dennis to Yarmouth then over the Old Colony RR lines to Middleboro--off at Middleboro and onto another train to Taunton. The mail sack was dropped off at Taunton station, delivered to the post office where Aunt Sally's letter was stamped on the back and dropped into Morton Hospital's mail box. I'll take that kind of service any day!

CALENDAR

Oct. 9 7:30 P.M. DHS Board meets with Sarah at the Paddock House.
Oct. 31 All Hallow Even. Beward of some rascals tipping over your necessary!

THE ANNUAL MEETING OF 1996

The Jacob Sears Memorial Building was host to a goodly crowd at the DHS Annual Meeting. President Brendan Joyce sailed through the business for the year as if he had a good tail wind. The secretary's report outlined all we had done over the last year--my, we have been busy! Josh Crowell informed us that we are in good, solid fiscal condition, Isabelle Flynn reported our membership count at 346, and next year's slate was presented for the general assembly's vote. Our officers for the coming year are: President--Brendan Joyce, Vice President--Catherine McNamara, Recording Secretary--Beth Deck, Treasurer--Joshua Crowell, Corresponding Secretary--Pat Rothermel, Board Members Nancy Sears and Sarah Kruger were elected for three years. Our sincere thanks to Rosemary Mailhot who retired as Corresponding Secretary.

The program was delightful. Eleanor Mason of New Bedford, a long-time Pilgrim guide at Plymouth Plantation did a running commentary at 17th century fashion show ably assisted by "volunteer" Joan Martin. Good job, Joan! Remember to wear your bun roll lest ye be thought 'common'. We have asked Mrs. Mason to join us again for next year's Festival Days. We'll keep you informed. As usual, the refreshments were heavenly!

THE HOWES FAMILY REUNION IV

October 5 was a bright blue brisk autumn day--just right for a homecoming. 125 descendants of Thomas and Mary Howes returned to Dennis Village for a day of congeniality, ancestor searching, and renewing family ties. They came from all over the United States and Canada. The first reunion was held here in 1987. The headquarters was Carleton Hall with side trips to the Howes Burying Ground, Scargo Manor and Four Chimneys Bed and Breakfasts (early Howes homes), and Sesuit Harbor where the Shiverick Shipyard was situated. Nancy Thacher Reid compiled a list of some old Howes houses with names of the original owners, so a lot of folks went to look at the house their great-great-great grandfather built and raised his family in--and probably to wish the family still owned it! Brendan Joyce and Josh Crowell ran the Shiverick slide show three times at the Dennis Union Church hall. The Josiah Dennis Manse was open in the afternoon and a very enthusiastic crowd came to look at the large oak chest Thomas and Mary brought to the New World in 1637 holding all their worldly possessions. Other items of special interest were Thomas' original will and the deed that partitioned out the land to his three sons Thomas, Joseph, and Nehemiah. A good number of other Howes artifacts were equally important and interesting to our visiting cousins. Reunion Chairman Nancy Howes did a great job planning and scheduling so that everything went like clockwork, ably assisted by husband Dick and a host of other DHS members.

A flock of Crowells (with Howes ancestors) helped out at Carleton Hall--Lu, Seth, Bill, Marc, and Josh, also Ruth (who used to be a Crowell) Janke and husband Lloyd. Joan Martin and Isabell Flynn managed the DHS book table where they sold over \$650.00 worth of books, family trees, and cup plates we have for sale. Well done, ladies! Jim Carr had an interesting display of Howes Sea Captains and presided over the copy machine, Nancy Reid furnished genealogical and historical answers to one and all, and yours truly manned the reception desk and also answered a myriad of questions from 'where's the bathroom' to 'where's my great-grandfather's home'?--made especially challenging when they couldn't remember exactly what the grandfather's first name was!

HFA President Amelia Bardwell of Whately presided over the business meeting, DHS President Brendan Joyce welcomed everyone to Dennis and Rev. Robert Howes gave the invocation. Prizes were awarded to the youngest--Maxwell Hewitt, oldest Muriel Howes Schoemherr, and coming the farthest--Gerry Watters from El Cajon, CA. Rev. Josh Crowell of Essex, CT and Dennis gave the benediction and everyone was off and running to see the Manse and anything they didn't get to in the morning.

The volunteers who worked at the Manse were: Helen Richardson, Eleanor Roy, Rachel Baroni, Sarah Kruger, Mig Maher, Sheila Duker, John and Alice Burton, Susan Kelley, Fred Ebel, Nancy Howes and myself. It's always great fun to show the old house off to an interested group. We reconvened at Carleton Hall in the evening for Jim Coogan's show "Women Who Went To Sea".

Here's a special notice to any descendants of Thomas and Mary Howes. Robert Howes is finishing up the Howes genealogy but there is still time to have your line listed. If you are interested write him at 2951 Winterset Road, Las Cruces, NM 88005, tel. 505-525-2876. You can also become a Howes Family Association member by submitting \$12.00 dues to Nancy Howes, Treasurer, Box 904, Dennis, MA 02638 and perhaps we'll see you at our next reunion!

Dennis Historical Society
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