



Dennis Historical Society Newsletter

Volume 22 Number 10

October 1999

Calendar of Events:

**Monthly Meeting,
Board of Directors**
Open to all interested
members.

**Wednesday, October 13
7:00 PM**
Josiah Dennis Manse

**Sunday, October 31
Graveyards of Cape Cod**
Narrated slide show by Jan
Stenberg and Nancy
Shoemaker
Come hear some stories
(hair-raising and otherwise)
about our hallowed Cape Cod
burying grounds.
Carleton Hall, Old Bass River
Road, Dennis Village
2:30 PM

**Sunday, December 12
Christmas Open House**
Celebrate the season with
Dennis Historical Society's
annual event.
Josiah Dennis Manse
2-4 PM

JUST A REMINDER...
Membership Dues were
payable on
September 1, 1999.
To continue to receive
your monthly newsletter,
please be sure your
membership dues for the
new year have been paid.

CRANBERRIES, FROM HENRY HALL TO "PEG-LEG" WEBB

By Jack Sheedy

Part two of a three part series

Most accounts point to the men of Dennis and Harwich as those who experimented with the cranberry during the early to mid-nineteenth century and created the industry that still thrives today. Henry Hall of Dennis noticed in 1816 that cranberry vines in a bog on his farm actually yielded more fruit when sand blew onto the plants. In his bog he conducted experiments to determine the best conditions for growing the berries. As his bog began to grow, his brother Isaiah got into the act. He operated a cooperage and his services provided barrels for the harvest. In fact, his barrel is still the official unit of measure used today.



Cranberry Picking – Cape Cod , Massachusetts

In 1847, Cyrus Cahoon of Harwich planted what is considered the first commercial bog on a quarter acre of his land. His neighbors did not think that people would actually pay money for a berry they could easily go out and pick for themselves. A few years later, when Cahoon's bog was yielding a healthy crop, and when he had found a market for his berries, his neighbors realized they had been wrong. Others began to clear their bogs and plant vines in the wake of Cahoon's success.

Though ridiculed, Captain Abiathar Doane of Harwich experimented with setting his vines close together and discovered that it increased the yield in his bog. The experiments of Abel D. Makepeace of West Barnstable developed a superior berry, making him the world's largest cranberry producer and earning him the title "Cranberry King."

Little by little, the pioneers of the industry were finding out what made cranberry vines happy. The happier the vines, the greater the yield, the larger the berries and the tastier the fruit. It was trial by error much of the time, but slowly the secrets of the cranberry began to unravel. The growers of Cape Cod now knew more about cranberries than anyone else in the world. Their craft was both a science and an art.

A bog would normally begin to produce berries just three years after its creation. Given proper care, a bog could continue to produce indefinitely. It is not uncommon to find century old bogs still in operation today. The work was hard yet a typical bog

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CRANBERRIES, FROM HENRY HALL TO “PEG-LEG” WEBB

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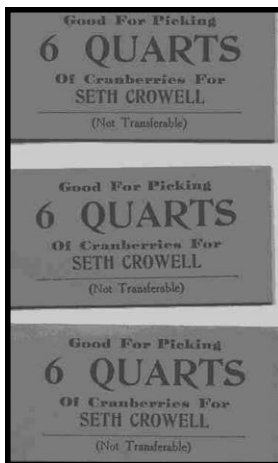
owner could make a decent living. It is believed that just one acre of bog could support an average nineteenth century Cape Cod family. A few acres could make its owner rather well off.

It is a well-known fact that a good cranberry bounces. John “Peg-Leg” Webb discovered this characteristic of the berry when he accidentally dropped a large number of cranberries in his barn and noticed that some bounced on the wooden floorboards and others did not. Examining the berries, he realized that the ones that did not bounce were inferior or spoiled.

Cranberry separators were later developed to test the berries for their “bounceability.” A berry was given seven chances to bounce over four-inch high hurdles. If they failed the test they were discarded. High-grade berries were those that bounced over the very first hurdles. These berries would be sold as fresh fruit. Medium grade berries took more than a couple of attempts to clear the separator hurdles and would end up in juice drinks and sauces.

A good berry also floats. This is because a cranberry has four air pockets, an important characteristic when wet harvesting methods were later employed.

*From the book **Cape Cod Companion** by Dennis residents (and DHS members) Jack Sheedy and Jim Coogan, due in Cape bookstores this Columbus Day.*



Picking tickets – Pickers received a ticket for each six quart measure filled.



Tallying – Pickers were paid by the number of measures they picked.

DENNIS HISTORICAL SOCIETY – ANNUAL MEETING

The annual meeting of the Dennis Historical Society was held on September 26, 1999 at Carleton Hall. The meeting was followed by a narrated slide show by maritime historian, Theresa Barbo. The following were elected officers and directors:

President – Raymond Urquhart
 Vice President – Joan Monteiro
 Treasurer – Joan Martin
 Recording Secretary – Elizabeth (Beth) Deck
 Corresponding Secretary – Catherine McNamara
 Directors (for three years)
 Sarah Kruger & Nancy Sears

THE WAY WE WERE

THE BEACHES IN SUMMER

by Peggy Eastman

Growing up in Dennis in the 1940's, we never dreamed the time would come when anyone, especially year-round residents of the Cape, would have to pay to park at the beach to go for a swim. As a matter of fact, I cannot remember anywhere on Cape Cod in the 1940's where one would have had to pay to park a car, especially not at a beach.

The beaches in those days were akin to woodlands and open fields. We often did not know who owned what open land or wooded areas. And few owners cared if we walked on their property. Sometimes a beachfront owner would be testy about our hanging out on his beach, but few made any fuss if we were just going across it. As youngsters, we pretty much wandered wherever we wanted to go, and as long as we behaved ourselves reasonably, it was rare that anyone challenged our right to be there.

Those of us who turned 16 in the 1940's and got that greatest prize, a driver's license, could hardly wait for summer and a chance to use the family car (only one car to a family then). On the first good summer day, the lucky driver would collect a bunch of friends and they would set off for the beaches. A day's outing might include visiting several beaches in several towns. Of course, as teenagers we were looking for the beach where there was the most action.

For a number of years the town of Dennis provided diving platforms off the town beaches. Every spring the town would hire someone to paint and repair the rafts and launch them off the beaches where they were held in place with heavy anchors. Each platform had a diving board and a boarding ladder.

Not only did these rafts get a lot of use during the daylight hours, but they were often in use for those with the courage to swim at night. I didn't have any personal experience with night swimming, of course. I knew quite a few who did, however, and some of them admitted that night swimming often meant "skinny dipping," though more of that sort of thing went on (so I was told) at various pond beaches.

The beaches in mid-century were not staffed with lifeguards or a clean-up crew. We looked out for each other as much as we could and when accidents happened at the beach or in the water, we either took the victim home, to a doctor's home office or ran to a telephone in someone's house to call Clarence Bayles. Bayles was the Dennis Fire Chief and was also a storekeeper and postmaster in South Dennis. We didn't even consider the Cape Cod Hospital then because there wasn't anything there for emergency services. A doctor would be called in, if one were needed.

The privilege of roaming the Cape at will and enjoying its beaches, though free of parking fees, sometimes came at a price. And we were certainly among those who grew up and went to town meetings to vote for the funds to pay for lifeguards, emergency personnel and beach maintenance crews. That unquestionably also came at a price.

There is no going back to the "old days," but every year after Labor Day, before the chill of fall sets in, a trip to the beaches of Cape Cod brings just a taste of that wonderful freedom and openness we knew.

If you have remembrances to share, send them to Beth Deck at P.O. Box 93, East Dennis, MA 02641



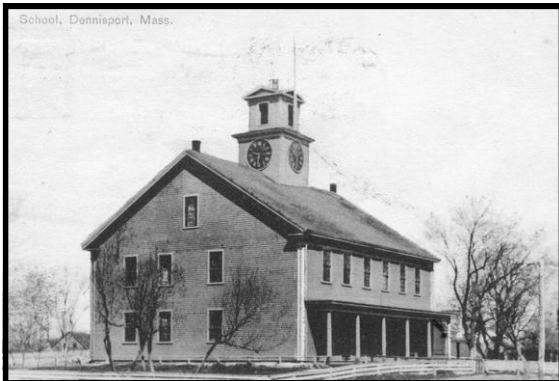
Dennis Historical Society

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Back to School Trivia Question...

Of the graded schools in the Town of Dennis, why was the Dennisport school the only one with a clock in the cupola?

Were these the only children in town who knew the right time of day?

The answer will appear in the November issue...

Dennis, Massachusetts 1872 Rules for Teachers

1. Teachers each day will fill lamps, clean chimneys.
2. Each teacher will bring a bucket of water and a scuttle of coal for the day's session.
3. Make your pens carefully. You may whittle nibs to the individual taste of the pupils.
4. Men teachers may take one evening each week for court- ing purposes, or two evenings a week if they go to church regularly.
5. After ten hours in school, the teachers may spend the re- maining time reading the Bible or other good books.
6. Women teachers who marry or engage in unseemly con- duct will be dismissed.
7. Every teacher should lay aside from each day pay a goodly sum of his earnings for his benefit during his declining years so that he will not become a burden on society.
8. Any teacher who smokes, uses liquor in any form, fre- quents pool or public halls, or gets shaved in a barber shop will give good reason to suspect his worth, intention, integrity and honesty.
9. The teacher who performs his labour faithfully and with- out fault for five years will be given an increase of twenty- five cents per week in his pay, providing the Board of Educa- tion approves.