



# Dennis Historical Society Newsletter

Volume 31 Number 9 Send letters & stories to Dennis Historical Society, Box 607, S. Dennis 02660 or to pmrhorton@aol.com October 2008

## Calendar

Wednesday, October 8

3:00 p.m.

DHS Board Meeting

At Jericho

All are welcome to attend!!!!

Saturday, October 19

6:00 p.m.

*Twilight  
Cemetery  
Visions!*

*See the Last Page!*

Saturday, November 1

12:00 pm

Dennis Historical Society  
Annual Meeting & Luncheon  
At

Sea View Restaurant.

Mr. Ben Thacher will offer a  
parcel of Cape Cod Yesterdays

Reservation Deadline Oct. 21  
Call 508-385-9308

Sunday, December 14

1:00-4:00

Christmas Open House At  
The Manse

Sunday, December 21

1:00-4:00

Dennis Historical Society  
Christmas Open House  
At the

Jericho Historical Center  
West Dennis

## *The Bright Blue Days of October....*

..... are some of the gifts we look forward to on Cape Cod. The air is clear, the mornings and evenings are crisp and the days are pleasant. Once in a while a perfect day comes along, better than all the rest. It makes you wish every day could be that good. The old Cape Codders called it a "weather breeder".

Friday, October 1, 1841 was such a day. Dennis folk used the day to good advantage picking the last of summer's garden to put by for the coming winter, hauling seaweed up from the beach to bank the house foundation against winter's chill and airing out the woolen clothes that had spent the summer months safely tucked away in the cedar chest. The fishing fleet had left that morning for George's Bank, 100 miles southeast of Highland Light, to catch the last of the south migrating mackerel. Life was good.

Saturday, October 2. During the night some people noticed that the wind was picking up but that was not unusual--this was the Cape. We have wind all the time. They arose at daylight and went about their daily chores. With winter around the corner there was no spare time to lie about. That could come on cold winter's days when the snow was piled against the house and except for taking care of the animals there was no good reason to be outside. By noontime a strong northeast wind was blowing and the mariner's families were hoping the fleet was well away from the wind.

Sunday, October 3. At day break a strong gale was blowing. The few people who arrived at church are sure to have asked God to protect the men out on George's Bank. During the day the wind increased until it was near hurricane strength. The wind driven tides and crashing waves reached record levels flooding salt works, salt meadows, pushing streams over their banks and driving up through NobsCUSset Harbor flooding the fish packing sheds and other maritime shops. Dennis, with its good harbor and excellent facilities for handling fish had become the favored landing site for other Cape schooners. Every Cape town sent small schooners out for a share of the prolific mackerel. There can be no doubt that everyone on the Cape, and especially in Dennis, had a terrible night listening to the shrieking wind and pounding rain and worrying about all the men at sea.

Monday, October 4. At first light the townspeople were out assessing the terrible damage that lay everywhere. Trees were uprooted,

barn roofs were gone, small buildings were demolished, and everyone was in shock. Great damage had occurred at the saltworks, with most of the covers blown off--some intact and some reduced to sticks. Some of the salt houses had been stove in with boards scattered everywhere, and of course, the entire salt crop was lost. At the harbor, boats that had been anchored were now strewn around on high ground, some damaged, some not. The packing shed and other buildings suffered the same fate.

All of this was as nothing compared to the heart-breaking story that trickled into Dennis on Tuesday, October 5. The schooner *Village*, Capt Eben Howes, was noticed approaching with her flag at half-mast. She docked at 5:00 P.M. with coffins piled high on her decks. They contained eight of the nine-crew members of the schooner *Bride*, Capt. Noah Crowell. The *Bride* was found cast up on Race Point, Provincetown. Her decks were stripped bare and the companionway was closed, locked from the inside with the bodies drowned. Kimball Howes was missing and it may be assumed that his being washed overboard was what prompted the crew to go below and close the hatch. She was one of twenty-six ships washed up on Race Point.

The schooner *Village*, Capt. Eben Howes, had been one of the last to leave NobsCUSset Harbor and so was one of the last to round Provincetown into the Atlantic. Building waves and increasing wind made him decide to turn back and ride out the storm in the safety of Provincetown Harbor. A number of other boats were lucky to make their way back also. Capt. Eben had the bittersweet duty of announcing the names taken by the sea and the ones who had survived.

The *Vestal*, Capt. William Crowell, brother of Capt. Noah, was also found on Race Point. The ship was demolished but the crew was safe. The *Zambucca* and the *Red Wing* also came ashore there with the crews safe. Other Dennis schooners were driven before the wind to Hyannis and Newport, RI. Three Dennis schooners were never heard from again.

At least twenty Dennis men died in that storm. Many of them were mere boys; still there were 9 widows and 16 fatherless children. Hardly a house in Dennis Village was not personally affected by loss. Twelve of the men were from the Howes Family, four were Crowell's and three from the Hall Family. This practically eliminated one whole generation of men from the village.

The south side of Dennis was also stunned by loss although not as great as the north side. Only six out of twenty-seven vessels moored or anchored at Bass River were able to ride out the storm. The schooner *Union* was lost. Others landed or were washed up on Nantucket or Martha's Vineyard, some intact, some demolished.

The storm took about 200 seamen, not all of who were Cape Codders. Some boats were from the South Shore. The hardest hit town was Truro, losing fifty-seven men, leaving twenty-seven widows and fifty-one fatherless children.

In an address given by Donald Trayser as part of the Old Home Week celebration in East Dennis on August 3, 1941 he said:

“Cape Cod has been swept by storms ever since a mighty glacier pushed it up from the sands of Massachusetts Bay. We remember them not by wind velocities or barometric pressures but for death and destruction. None ever reached into so many Cape Cod cottages to rob fathers and mothers of sons, to widow wives and to orphan children as the October Gale of 1841.”

The drowned seamen were buried in the Dennis Cemetery. Their tombstones tell their story.

The schooner *Bride* was towed back to Dennis, refitted and sent back out again to catch cod and mackerel.

A mourning picture dedicated to the memory of Capt. Noah Crowell is hanging in the East Parlor at the 1736 Josiah Dennis Manse Museum.

Memento Mori

By the way, October storms brought other problems to Dennis – and here is a bit of news from 47 years later:

10/2/88 Dennis: “One of the worst accidents on account of the storm was that of Edgar Merchant, who works for C.E. Lewis on the Tobey Farm. While Merchant was engaged in splitting wood, an outhouse was blown over, inflicting a wound on his head of a very severe character.”  
*Barnstable Patriot*

At least he was not busy inside at the time!!!!

### **Junior Docents at the Manse**

We are again very fortunate to have a wonderful group of Junior Docents helping to explain the DHS artifacts at the Manse this year. Perhaps some of you saw the recent article in the Register. We offer our sincere thanks to the many volunteers who supported the Manse as docents or junior docents.

The junior docents always added a certain “spark” to the many visitors’ time at the Manse as they so willingly helped them learn about life in the 1700’s. Here is our team from last summer:

Jessica Benoit  
Carly Belanger  
Anna Dixon  
Maggie Dixon  
Bridie Eckel  
Luke Eckel  
Jacqueline Harrison  
Addie Masterson



Annalee May  
Jacquelyn May  
Miriam May  
Jennifer McAvoy  
Ariana Rogers  
Hallie Stidham  
Maddie Stidham  
Nellie Stidham

Junior Docent ARIANA ROGERS with the mini-rug that she made on the circa 1700 loom at the Josiah Dennis Manse this summer. *Dick Howes photo*

### **Recent Museum Activities**

Autumn is the forerunner of colder days and nights to come. However, on Saturday, September 27 and Sunday, September 28 you would have felt warm and comfortable. The rainy weather on both days abided during the Open Houses at the Josiah Dennis Manse and the Jericho Historical Center. As the Harvest Days loomed ahead both houses were filled with sunshine and many visitors. The smell of apple pies wafted through the Manse as cookies were served with lemonade. Jericho served apple cider and homemade cookies. What a good way to welcome autumn.