



Dennis Historical Society Newsletter

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Hurricane Ramblings

Our recent visit from Miss Storm Irene brought back memories of some perhaps interesting stuff on the subject of hurricanes. First, a bit of information on the origin of the term "Hurricane". The most accepted definition is that it is of Caribbean origin. Seems that the Carib god 'Hurican' was derived from the Mayan god 'Hurakan', one of their creator gods, who blew his breath across the Chaotic water and brought forth dry land and later destroyed the men of wood with a great storm and flood. Ok, now that I've imparted *that* bit of useless knowledge, can you imagine a time when, in the absence of *any* mass communications all folks had was an eye to the sky and, if rich, a barometer? Let's look at the 1600's – a time when records were very scarce – and ponder a bit on the fate of the citizens and maritime folks of these times. By the way, Gov. Winthrop was (almost) the only written source of storm information from this period.

Cape Cod has had its share of those Caribbean monsters. The first such recorded event in the Colonies, "The Great Colonial Hurricane" of August 1635, was only 15 years after the settlement of Plymouth Plantation, and created a major disaster. Also known as Gov. Bradford's Hurricane, it would be 180 years before another hurricane of similar force would hit the area, that being The Great September Gale of 1815. Most of the storm history of this time relies on the writings of John Winthrop of the Massachusetts Bay Colony and William Bradford of Plymouth Plantation. As Gov. Winthrop wrote "The tide rose in Naragansett fourteen feet higher than ordinary and drowned eight Indians flying from their wigwams". However, three years later, 1638 brought three major storms, August 13, October 5 and fourteen days later on October 19. Winthrop also reports major damaging storms on 22 November 1641, 8 November 1645 and 14 November 1646.

There apparently was a meteorological pause (or nothing bad enough to write about) as no major storms were recorded in this area until August 29, 1675 when a vicious hurricane hit New England. Based on the amount of damage, it has been placed as one New England's most destructive storms (just a bit below those of 1635, 1815, 1938 and 1944). Connecticut got bashed (again) with a major hurricane and flood in August 1683, which must have caused loss of life by Cape Cod seafarers and some unpleasant weather hereabouts as well. Then there was another hiatus in major storms.

However, the fall of 1698 brought three violent storms that caused great damage, but due to the lack of information, may or may not have been hurricanes. Writing about 13 August, Gov Winthrop described it thus: "in the night was a very grave tempest, or hiracono at the S.W. which drave a ship aground at Charlestown, and brake down the windmill there, and did much other harm. It flowed twice in six hours, and about Naragansett, it raised fourteen to fifteen foot above the ordinary spring tides, upright."

That ended the 1600's with an amazing seven major storms in just 11 years! Not counting blizzards – which likewise were scarcely recorded! (And this was before the industrial revolution and global warming!)

As local papers did not exist at this time and Cape Cod records are really nonexistent, we can only imagine the problems our early settlers faced when the sky suddenly turned dark and the winds howled.

Pete Howes

There is a lot of very fascinating information in our Newsletters of years past that were written by Nancy Thacher Reid. I'll bet that a lot of this information will be 'new news' to our more recent residents, and may bring back memories to others. From time to time I'll include some of these – also as a teaser as we are planning to republish Nancy's book "Dennis, Cape Cod" (in time for holiday shopping!) which has been out of print for some time.

Women Who Went To Sea

The story of Lucy Howes¹ has another chapter, one which I'm sure you'll read with interest. The First Mate who was able to work the disabled *Lubra* back to Hong Kong with only the help of young Lucy was another Dennis man named Henry Hall. When Captain Howes purchased the Bark, *Lubra*, he looked around for the ablest crew he could sign aboard. Henry was his choice for First Mate. He had gone to sea at an early age, as did so many Dennis lads, and in a short time he had worked his way from common sailor to officer. His skill in saving the vessel *Lubra* shows that Captain Howes' confidence in him was not misplaced. When the pirates first attacked the vessel, all hands did their best to defend her, but it was soon apparent that their efforts were in vain. Young Henry took refuge in a barrel, and several times the marauders thrust sabers through the staves, which wounded him severely. Nevertheless, when the Chinese abandoned the vessel, Mate Hall navigated her back into Hong Kong. He earned the eternal gratitude of Mrs. Howes and her daughter, not only for preserving their lives, but for salvaging the remains of the vessel. And Henry Hall was also to earn the gratitude of the entire maritime world, for he was called to testify at the trial of the pirates and his eyewitness testimony proved of great value. Henry returned to live in Dennis, where he married and had three children before he died in his thirties, his constitution no doubt weakened by the pirates' wounds. One interesting fact I have yet to divulge: young Henry Hall was but fifteen years of age at the time of his terrifying and heroic experience. (My thanks to members of the Hall family for information and documentation of this interesting story.)

Nancy Thacher Reid Mar 1982

A Fair Award to a Fair Docent

One of the Junior Docents at the Manse, Jacquelyn May, won 1st place in the special entry category from the Barnstable County Fair this past July. Her award was for weaving the piece shown in this photo. She is sitting on the circa 1700 loom at the Josiah Dennis Manse. She wove this piece on this loom, weaving it on linen warp with hand spun wool. The wool was dyed using Sweetruff for the yellow and Queen Anne's lace used for the green color.



R. Howes Photo

Conservation Efforts

In the Newsletter of last September, we reported that the Dennis Historical Society has just acquired the framed portraits of Levi (1812-1914) and Myra (1818-1851) Howes of East Dennis, painted circa 1850. These paintings are closely tied to the models of the *Starlight* and the *Belle of the West*. In May 1862 the clipper ship *Starlight* of Boston came into Calcutta under the command of Capt. Levi Howes of East Dennis. In this painting, Levi would have possibly been approximately the age that this event took place. A photograph of Levi as a much older man resides in the Maritime Room in the Manse with the models. As you hopefully remember, he engaged in a race with his brother Allison on the *Starlight* from Calcutta to Boston that ended in a dead heat.



Dennis Historical Society has engaged the services of painting conservationist and expert Debra Strang of Wellfleet (formerly of Philadelphia, shown here with Phyllis Horton and the two paintings) to identify the painter and to stabilize, repair and preserve these two wonderful portraits. Debra and Phyllis Horton believe that these were painted by Giddings Hyde Ballou, (1820-1886), born in Stafford, Connecticut, Ballou was an itinerant portrait painter who travelled to Cape Cod from his family home in Medford in the 1840s and early 1850s in search of portrait commissions. If this identification is confirmed, an article on Ballou will be included in a subsequent edition.

¹ Privateers, Pirates and Beyond: Memoirs of Lucy Lord Howes Hooper – for sale by DHS

THE OBSERVATORY AT SCARGO (Parts I and II)

One of the most recognizable structures in Dennis is the Observatory on the summit of Scargo Hill. In my family, the familiar stone tower is referred to, punningly, as the "high point" of a visit to the Cape, and guests are invariably treated to the spectacular view and a retelling of the legend of Princess Scargo. Did you know that the present structure is the third to stand on this site? The first was built in 1874, when a group of Dennis residents organized the Observatory Association. They secured gifts of labor, material and money and built a wooden tower for a cost of \$519. Admissions to climb the tower was 5¢ and at the top was placed a telescope, given by the Hon. Francis Bassett. It was said to be so powerful that on a clear day one could read the time from the clock on the top of High Pole Hill in Provincetown, and see Nantucket to the south. A remarkable telescope, indeed! During the summer of 1875, between 1,500 and 1,600 people made the climb. Messrs. Lord and Crowell built a refreshment stand nearby, and the hill became a popular place for outings. But, alas, a February gale in 1876 flattened the structure. What happened to the telescope, I do not know. It was immediately decided to raise the money to rebuild, and I will tell you about the second tower another time.

"There was a tall building upon Scargo Hill,
But having blown down, 'tis not standing there still."

With these words, the Dennis correspondent to the Yarmouth Register laments the loss of the first observatory which stood atop Scargo Hill. The great windstorm in February 1876 which leveled the tower also uprooted the Liberty Elm on Boston Common, but unlike the elm, which was forever lost, the tower at Scargo would rise again. Almost immediately, plans were made to raise funds to replace the observatory, which had become a landmark for the Dennis villagers. Food sales and entertainments were held to benefit the building fund and by July of that same year, the new tower was complete. Joshua Crowell has a fine picture of the structure. About 30 feet high, it is a six-sided wooden building, resembling a windmill, but with an observation deck instead of a cap with arms and sails. Our Dennis reporter exclaims that this tower is surely strong enough to withstand a tempest, but in a good-natured jab at the Yarmouth Register's editor's inflammatory oratory, he adds that if Editor Swift will keep his fire confined to Yarmouth, the tower is sure to last for years. His light-hearted prophecy had an ironic twist. The tower did survive for a number of years, and withstood several tempests, and its end was not by wind, but by fire. I will tell you more next time.

Nancy Thacher Reid Nov/Dec 1982

Bequests

A great way to make sure that your love of history is remembered by future generations is to remember The Dennis Historical Society, Inc. in your will.

Membership

Thanks to all of you who have kindly renewed your membership so rapidly. If you have not yet renewed, PLEASE send your renewal back with your check as soon as possible. August 31 was the last day of our membership year, and we would LOVE to maintain your membership in the Dennis Historical Society

Dawn Dellner

DENNIS HISTORICAL SOCIETY BOARD MEETING – NEW DATE

Note: All members are invited to attend monthly DHS Board Meetings. The next meeting is at 3 pm on Tuesday, October 11 at the Jericho Historical Center, 90 Old Main St., West Dennis. To better serve our members, we have moved the meeting to the second *Tuesday* of each month.

P.S.

We're on Facebook!

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~ OCTOBER EVENTS ~



"FALL FOR THE ARTS"

A Cape Wide Celebration

October 1 – Saturday – 1 to 4 p.m.

Manse Open House

October 2 – Sunday – Noon to 2 p.m.

Jericho Open House

October 2 – Sunday – 2 to 4 p.m.

West Dennis Graded School Open House



THE CLOCKS ARE TICKING

*But, there's **still time** to*

send in your luncheon reservation.

The reservation deadline is *October 14*.

The luncheon date is *October 22*.

The luncheon time is 11:30 a.m.

The place is Liberty Hall, South Dennis

If the dog ate your reservation,
call Jinny at 508-385-4441 Today!
Don't miss seeing this historic building,
great food prepared by Dan Rosenbach,

and entertainment by

Edmond Rhodes Nickerson

