



# Dennis Historical Society Newsletter

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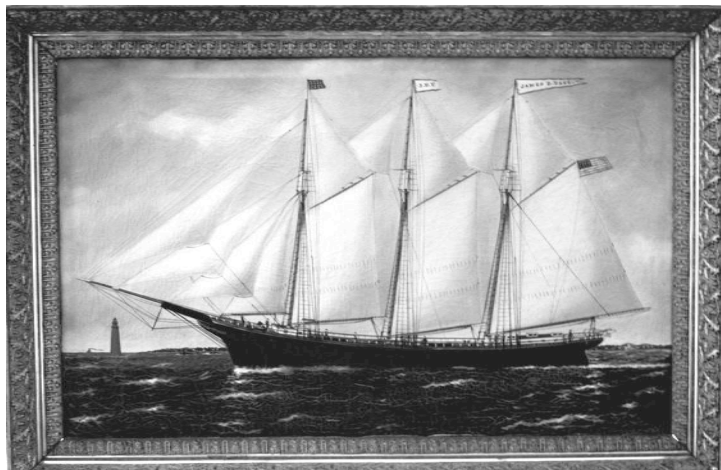
## Just Ramblin'

The Dennis Historical Society is very fortunate to own two maritime paintings by the renowned American maritime artist William Pierce Stubbs (1842-1909). Our latest acquisition is the painting of the Tern Schooner *James B. Pace*, kindly donated by Dean and Nancy Garfield of Dennisport and St. Petersburg, Fl. This painting is currently on display at the West Dennis Graded School and was featured in the Sept. 2011 newsletter. The second Stubbs painting is of the Tern schooner *Alfred W. Fisk* that has been on display at the Jericho Historical Center. Both of these vessels and those who sailed and invested in them are deeply tied to Dennis history.

This issue of the Newsletter we present the history of the *Alfred W. Fisk*. These two vessels and the Dennis folks involved with them will be the introduction of periodic articles on Dennis mariners, investors and other vessels whose paintings are in the DHS collections.

By the way, I always enjoy watching the reactions of the young visitors to the Maritime Room at the Manse on Thursdays when I describe life in the time of the Shiverick Shipyard and the ships associated with it in the mid-1800's. You know the list – no iPads, iPods, phones, TV, radio or electricity. Without electricity, we had no running water, thus no toilets (Yuck!) etc. No trucks – everything moved by sail and horse. An apple was for eating. Space was – you know – *up there!* Jules Verne published *From The Earth To The Moon* in 1865 – a real dreamer! No vaccines. No antibiotics. And so on.

Sailing vessels formed the only method of ocean transportation from ancient times up to the



emergence of steam driven engines, with this period well documented by a number of authors. Sailing vessels continued to carry more cargo than steam-driven ships until 1907! One author reported that a lighthouse keeper on the Maine coast recorded over 10,000 schooners passing by in one year and these were not all just headed to and from Maine. From many books you can gain the impression the sail era existed as some especially rewarding time. However, a bit deeper perusal shows that the good old times were not. Our educated minds easily accept that fact, sadly recognizing how more

difficult life was then than now. Taught by such mute evidence as old graveyard inscriptions of the impermanence of life, we view with almost unbelieving eyes that time past when childhood death from disease and accident and spousal loss as a result of birth or disappearance at sea were a somewhat commonplace and painful companion. Within the recent past, technologies' ceaseless press has transformed our lives quite completely and ended the use of sails for transportation. So with that bit of autumnal musing, what was the background of the *Alfred W. Fisk*?

## Schooner *Alfred W. Fisk*

Her history contains none of the tragedy that is notable in other vessels. Instead, she lived out her life as one of the many Tern schooners that provided the cargo delivery lifeblood of our country before and as steam and rail were introduced. I have no idea how she ended up. The last entry in the Ship Registers and Enrollments of Providence lists that her Enrollments and Registration were surrendered in Barnstable on Oct.

5, 1900. There are no entries for the Fisk in the similar Barnstable records of that time, a real mystery. Perhaps she was registered elsewhere. A lot more digging may find out where. In any event, that is the last of these records.

She was a three-masted or Tern schooner and had two decks and a billethead<sup>1</sup>. Built in 1872, she was typical of the schooners of the period, being 136.3 ft. long, 32.1 ft. wide (beam) and with a depth of 14.3 ft. Built in Bath Maine by Guy C. Goss, the famous shipbuilder on the Kennebec River (his shipyard would eventually become the Bath Iron Works), she bore the signal letters J.L.K.P. and the official registration number 105,114. With a gross/Net tonnage of 395.4/375.6 tons, she could carry a respectable amount of cargo. On launching, her owner and Master was Elihu Kelley of West Dennis, and she listed Providence RI as her home port.

Note that there were two other schooners built in Bath ME that same year: the *Henry H. Fisk*, Adams & Hitchcock owner, Henry H. Fisk Master and the *Uriah B. Fisk*, Dan'l O. Blaisdell, another well-known Bath builder who was her owner with Uriah B. Fisk as Master. The Fisk family was a major maritime force in Dennis (West Dennis). We will explore that family and their 'fleet' in a later edition.

The *Fisk's* original Registration was recorded at the Bath Customs District on May 15, 1872, and re-registered in Providence on April 9, 1863. At launching, she had twenty-five owners or shareholders, with the lead being her Captain. Other Dennis folks were James Kelly 2d, Obed Baker 3d and Edward Baxter. In addition, Alfred W. Fisk was one of the twelve investors from Providence. Guy C. Goss and Elijah F Sawyer (co-partners) of Bath ME were also investors as usual in the vessels that they built. The investors changed with time, and a new Registration was required at the change of her Captain or the investors.

#### Schooner *Alfred W. Fisk* History<sup>2</sup>

| Ship & Yacht Registers |                            |                    |              | Enrollments & Registrations <sup>3</sup> |                    |
|------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------|--------------|--|--------------------|
| Year                   | Owner                      | Master             | Hailing Port | Year                                     | Master             |
| 1873- 1879             | E. Kelley & O <sup>4</sup> | Elihu Kelley       | Providence   | 1873                                     | Elihu Kelley       |
| 1880                   | E. Kelley & O              | Hall               | Providence   | 1874-1883                                | James J. Kelley    |
| 1881-1883              | Jas. Kelley & O            | Hall               | Providence   | 1884                                     | Osborn White       |
| 1883 (1884?)           | E. Kelley & O              | Elihu Kelley       | Providence   | 1887-1899                                | Jonathan E. Kelley |
| 1885-1887              | Elihu Kelley               | Osborn White       | Providence   |  |                    |
| 1888-1895              | J. Baker & Co.             | Osborn White       | Providence   |  |                    |
| 1896-1900              | J. Baker & Co.             | Jonathan E. Kelley | Providence   |  |                    |

Where did she sail? She was a Coaster, plying the Atlantic seacoast with cargo. We have a few hints in the Barnstable Patriot from those times. On June 20, 1862 she is listed as passing the Port of Hyannis, bound for Baltimore. On June 20, 1882, she is listed as arriving at Bass River Harbor and sailing again. In the Jan 15, 1884 edition, she is listed as arriving from New York bound for Boston with White her captain. She sailed the 18<sup>th</sup>. Then the Dec. 25<sup>th</sup> 1888 edition has her arriving at the Port of Hyannis on the 21<sup>st</sup> and sailing on the 23<sup>rd</sup>, and a few years later, on Dec. 12, 1893, the news of Dennis Port is that "Mr. Edwin Kelley, of sch. *Alfred W. Fisk* is home for the winter." And finally, on April 17, 1894, she was anchored off Bass River on the 14<sup>th</sup>, arriving from Philadelphia and heading for Boston. There was a north-east gale, and concern was expressed for several vessels, while others had dropped anchor there "detained by the north-east gale".

### The Master, Elihu Kelley, West Dennis

Elihu Kelley was born on October 8, 1817, the seventh generation since David O'Killia settled in Yarmouth in 1652. He was named after both his father and grandfather. His great-grandfather, Eleazar Kelley, owned a substantial amount of land in the southwestern part of Dennis. His mother, Betsy, was the

<sup>1</sup> The billethead, was common in America between 1830 and 1880. An alternative to the figurehead, it was a less elaborate and costly decoration for a ship's bow. A billethead had a down-turned scroll; a fiddlehead had an upturned scroll. Popular billethead and fiddlehead designs included volutes, leaves, and rosettes.

<sup>2</sup> [Ship and Yacht Register List](#) G. W. Blunt White Library, Mystic Seaport

<sup>3</sup> [Ship registers and enrollments of Providence](#), ... v.1 pt.1. Survey of Federal Archives (U.S.). The Enrollments and Registrations provide a different record of her masters.

<sup>4</sup> O - Others

daughter of Jabez Howes. From the young age of thirteen, he was a mariner and master of various ships, and remained so for forty years until he retired from the sea in 1882.

Following their statement of intentions to marry on Dec. 20, 1839, a 22-year old Elihu Kelley, a seaman from Dennis, married the daughter of Gideon Crowell, Anna (or Ann) of Yarmouth on January 14, 1840. His life at sea seemed to have allowed some sufficient time at home, for Elihu and his bride eventually had four children, Gideon Crowell (b. 10/22/1841, d. 12/30/1895), Ruth Ann (b.10/11/1848, d. ---), Faustina H (b. 5/10/1853, d. 4/25/1904) and Ada Andrews (b. 8/6/1875, d. 1/11/1900), who eventually became Mrs. George A., Nickerson.

What happened to his family? On January 10, 1865 their 24 year-old son Gideon, a merchant who lived in Dennis, married Edith A. Kelley, almost 23, of Dennis. It was the first marriage for both. Their children are unknown, except for a small stone in the West Dennis Cemetery with the inscription "May" that could have been their daughter. It's interesting that his sister, Ada Andrews, was born August 16, 1865, ten years after he was married (an age gap of about 34 years to her brother!), when her father was forty-eight. She eventually married George A. Nickerson and bore him two children before dying at what we now would call the young age of fifty.

Approximately eight years after her brother Gideon married, on May 1, 1873 his sister Faustina became betrothed to Royal P. Kelley, a 25 year-old sail maker who lived in Harwich. She was then twenty years old. They had three children. Finally, on the closing days of 1873, on December 31, Ruth Ann became the bride of Israel N. Baker of Dennis in a ceremony officiated by Rev. Alexander C. Childs of West Dennis.

Elihu retired from the sea a few years later in 1882 at the age of sixty-five. With four daughters, their families and property in Dennis and West Dennis, he had much to keep him occupied for the few brief years until he passed to his rewards on June 28 1890 at the age of 72 years, 8 months and 22 days. Burial was in West Dennis, where he resided.

Pete Howes

### **The Caleb Chase Fund**

Dennis Historical Society members came through in their usual fine fashion by adding donations to the Caleb Chase Widows Fund when they renewed their memberships.

Caleb Chase, native son of Dennis and Harwich and co-owner of Chase and Sanborn Coffee Co, left money after his death to each town to continue his philanthropy for older residents. The interest from the principle was to be used to help the needy widows. Today the interest is negligible and the needy qualifiers have increased.

Gifts from the fund are presented to elderly Dennis women and men who have had their taxes abated and still have trouble making ends meet. Most of those people had put aside money for their retirement never dreaming of how fast inflation would eat it up and secondly, that advancement in health care would keep them living longer.

The Caleb Chase Trustees are truly grateful to everyone who donates to the fund. The following DHS members gave generously:

Mr. and Mrs. Lowell H. Anness  
Mrs. Jane Bacon  
Mr. and Mrs. Peter Berrien  
Mrs. Naomi Costa  
Mr. and Mrs. Robert M. Difilippo  
Mrs. Margaret Eastman  
Dr. and Mrs. Martin Halpert  
Ms. Shirley Loud

Mr. and Mrs. Paul McCormick  
Ms. Cheryl McMahan  
Ms. Jean O'Riley  
Mrs. S. Bullfinch Ritger  
Mr. and Mrs. Richard Roy  
Mr. and Mrs. Paul Snyder Jr  
Mr. John Sullivan  
Mr. and Mrs. Peter Thorpe

Phyllis Horton

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~ ~ ~ **“Fall For The Arts” In Dennis** ~ ~ ~

October 7, Noon-3:p.m.  
“Quilts At Jericho”

The lovely quilts in the 1801 sea captain's home will be artfully featured.

Seasonal Refreshments  
1801 Jericho Historical Center  
90 Old Main St., West Dennis

Sadly, the October 7 Open House at the West Dennis Graded School has been cancelled.

Next Regular DHS Board Meeting  
October 9, 2:00 P.M.  
Jericho Historical Center  
*Members Always Welcome*  
(Are Your 2013 Dues Paid?)

**THE CLOCKS ARE TICKING**

Oct. 13 at 7 p.m. & Oct. 14 @ 2 p.m.

*A FUNdraiser*

“More Tales From Our Past”

Presented by DHS and The Historical Society of Old Yarmouth. Live on the stage at Carleton Hall

Members \$12.00, Others \$15.00

**RESERVATIONS A MUST!**

Call 508-385-3528

October 20, 11:30 a.m.

Annual Meeting, Luncheon *and* Tour of the Cape Cod Museum of Art  
PLEASE reserve by October 12

**WHERE**

Summer Stock Restaurant  
36 Hope Lane, Dennis Village  
Reservations: June @ 508-385-9308