



Dennis Historical Society Newsletter

Volume 22 Number 9

September 1999

Calendar of Events:

Wednesday, September 8
DHS Board Meeting
Jericho Historical Center
7:00 PM Interested members
are welcome.

Sunday, September 26
**Merchant Mariners of 19th
Century Cape Cod:
Private Lives and Extraor-
dinary Voyages 1803-1912**
Dennis Historical Society's
brief **Annual Meeting**
followed by a narrated slide
show by maritime historian
Theresa Barbo
Carleton Hall, Old Bass River
Road, Dennis Village
2:30 PM
Refreshments

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

CRANBERRIES AT THE NORTH POLE

By Jack Sheedy

Part one of a three part series

Vaccinium macrocarpon, that is the scientific name for the American cranberry, a native fruit with over one hundred varieties. It is Massachusetts' state berry. Here on the Cape we are familiar with two varieties: the Early Black, which is blackish-red in color and matures in September, and the Later Howes, which is larger yet lighter in color and matures in early October.

Though cranberries grow in other parts of the world, the American cranberry is considered the largest, the tastiest and the most versatile. Of the states across the country where cranberries grow, Massachusetts has consistently been the largest single producer of the native berry with two million barrels harvested annually at a value of \$100 million. Over 13,000 acres of Massachusetts' lands are dedicated to growing cranberries, including many, many acres on Cape Cod. An additional 50,000 acres of natural wetlands support these bogs.

Like most things native to this country, the Native Indians were the first to enjoy the cranberry. They picked the berries, which they called sassamanesh, and ate them raw. They also cooked them, creating sauces and preserves or even mixed their cranberries with venison to make pemmican, rich in protein and providing much needed vitamins, especially Vitamin C, during the long winter months.

Explorer Robert Peary understood the value of the tart fruit and brought a supply of pemmican with him on his journey to the North Pole. The Native Indians of the Cape and southeastern Massachusetts also used cranberries as a dye as well as for medicinal purposes.

The earliest settlers realized their value. Besides eating them raw, they boiled them with sugar to create a sauce or sometimes sweetened them with maple syrup. The native cranberry was even once used to appease the King of



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CRANBERRIES AT THE NORTH POLE

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England. In 1677, Charles II was upset when he learned that the colonists had minted pine tree shillings without his permission. As a token of apology, the colonists sent the King, among other items, three thousand codfish, two hogshead of corn and ten barrels of cranberries.

One of three fruits native to North America, the other two being the Concord grape and the blueberry, the cranberry grows on low-lying vines in acid-peat, bog-like soil. Most successful conditions include sand mixed with the peat soil as well as an ample supply of fresh water. The plants need to be sanded every three to four years to help aerate the soil and flooded to a depth of several inches above the vines from December to April in order to protect them against frost and insects.

Many elements concerning the early days of cranberry cultivation are regulated to the realm of speculation. For instance, the very name "cranberry" seems to have a number of roots. Some say the name comes from the English "craneberry" because the stamens of the plant resemble the beak of a crane. Some say it is because the bogs attracted cranes, although cranes themselves do not eat cranberries. Others say the name derives from the German "kraanbere" (kraan translates as crane). Still others say it is from the Dutch "kranebere" (same translation).

Though the Native Indians and the early settlers made the cranberry part of their diet, both groups picked the berries where they found them growing. Throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries this relationship with the cranberry continued in the same fashion as no one had actually considered cultivating the berry. The vines grew in swampy bogs - inexpensive lands considered to have no worth. Yet this was about to change.

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

DENNIS HISTORICAL SOCIETY – ANNUAL MEETING SEPTEMBER 26TH

The Nominating Committee of the Dennis Historical Society presented the following slate of officers for election at our annual meeting. All members of the Society in good standing are eligible to vote. (To be in good standing, members must be current with their membership dues.)

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

Directors not standing for election -

Directors with 2 years of their term remaining – Brendan Joyce and Jean Goheen
 Directors with 1 year of their term remaining – Richard Howes and Nancy Howes
 Appointed Directors – Nancy Thacher Reid from the Historical Commission, Phyllis Horton from the Josiah Dennis Manse Museum, Marge Mantell from the Jericho Historical Center, and
 Lura Crowell as Assistant Treasurer, appointed by the Board of Directors

THE WAY WE WERE

by Nancy Thacher Reid

Many of our readers are “from away,” having chosen to live in Dennis because of its many charms. Those who have adopted Cape Cod bring with them many fond memories of the place from which they have come, especially in their growing-up years. Some of us are natives, growing up here in this special place. I think those who have adopted this town would be interested in the memories that those of us who are natives cherish. They love this place not only for what it is, but for what it has been. So, all you natives, let’s have an occasional column with your remembrances of the way we were, as we grew up in the town of Dennis. It’ll be fun for us, and I’m sure of interest to our newcomers who now call Dennis home.

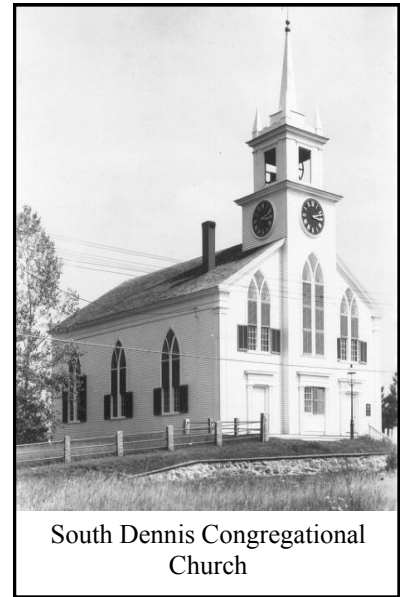
Growing up in South Dennis, there are two very special summer activities I recall. One came at the end of school in June. Sunday School at the South Dennis Congregational Church also came to a close in June, with the Children’s Day service, giving way to Bible School sessions which were shared among several churches. To celebrate the end of another church year, a field day was held. I remember them as taking place on the large lawn of the Captain Benjamin Miller Nickerson homestead, at the corner of Highbank Road and Main Street, now the home of Edmond Rhodes Nickerson. Throughout the afternoon of fun, we had three-legged races, dashes, sack races, dart games and even hopscotch and jump rope events. Every child had a chance to win. Although I do not excel in athletics, I remember these field days with great joy.

The other summer event I particularly recall was the Union Circle Fair held on the lawn of Liberty Hall for the benefit of the church. Tables were spread with gifts, food and bric-a-brac under the shade of those lovely old trees. Attractive as the tables were, added to the wonderful aroma of the supper which was being prepared in the old hall, my fondest memory is of the “grab bag.” I guess people still do grab bags at fairs, but not like the old Union Circle days. Standing beside a small table was the mannequin of a woman, dressed in old-fashioned clothes and a bonnet. She had sewn on her skirt – or was it on an apron? - what seemed to me to be one hundred pockets. In each pocket was hidden a prize. We kids had only to turn over our shiny dime, and point to the pocket of our choice, and the lady in charge of the “Woman of Many Pockets” would retrieve our grab for us. There was something magical about these pockets that I will never forget.

The Union Circle still has a summer fair, but indoors, and with a luncheon instead of a supper. And, alas, as far as I know the tradition of the Woman of Many Pockets is long forgotten – but not by me, as I remember the way we were.

NTR

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



South Dennis Congregational Church

Museum Hours

1736 Josiah Dennis Manse Museum

508-385-2232

77 Nobscussett Road, Dennis

Open June 22 – September 30

Tues. 10 AM–Noon: Thurs. 2-4 PM

Saturdays in September 2-4 PM

Admission: Free/Donations.

1801 Jericho Historical Center

508-398-6736

Old Main Street, West Dennis

June 23 – September 24

Wed. 2-4 PM: Friday 10 AM-Noon

Sundays Sept. 15, 12 & 19 from 2-4 PM

Admission: Free/Donations

Dennis Historical Society

P.O. Box 607

South Dennis, MA 02660-0607

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We're looking for a few good men (or women)...

Burt and Ruth Derick, Librarians for the Society, are in need of some assistance. The library contains many old documents, which are not accessible to researchers in their present state.

The old documents need to be photocopied and transcribed for use and the original documents need to be protected in polyester covers and filed.

If you can help, please call Burt or Ruth at 398-3183.

Dennis Village Garden Club offers to help with Manse gardens

Members of the Dennis Village Garden Club have offered to help with the gardens at the Josiah Dennis Manse Museum. After a master landscape plan is created, based on research into period gardens, the Garden Club will work together with the Manse gardeners to bring the plan into reality.

Colonial gardens often featured a variety of plants used for medicines, flavorings and even for the dying of fibers and fabrics.

It is thought that Josiah Dennis and his wife kept an apothecary shop and general store in what is now the west parlor of the Manse. Perhaps the gardens at the Manse during this time supplied some of the ingredients for the elixirs and simples offered in their store.

We'll look forward to a garden tour when the project is complete!



Susan Kelley and Nancy Howes at work in the Manse garden.