

Dennis Historical Society Newsletter

Volume 28, number 9

September 2005

Calendar of Events

**Saturday, September 17
10A.M.-2 P.M.**

Historic Dennis Bus Tour

Join us for a narrated bus tour of some of Dennis' well known and lesser known historic sites with Dennis historians Nancy Reid and Phyllis Horton. See and enjoy some of the stories about these special places. Lunch with a lovely view at noon. Fee charged. Reservations by September 10. Call (508) 385-9308 Meet at Dennis Sr. Center

**Saturday, October 1
10 A.M.-2 P.M.**
**Celebration of Dennis
Heritage, Arts and
Culture**

1736 Josiah Dennis Manse Museum will be open and refreshments served as part of the Dennis Chamber of Commerce third annual celebration.

At 2:00 P.M.
**Guided walk in historic
Sea Captains Cemetery
in South Dennis**
See story on August tour

**Saturday, October 15
7:00 P.M.**
Annual Meeting!

Mabel's Mixing Bowl

by Phyllis Robbins Horton

Having lots of company this summer and *standing in line* for almost everything made me reminisce back to summers of the late 1930's and early 1940's when life was much simpler. Some of the old timers got upset by the "invasion of folks from away." Many of us looked forward to it as an added excitement to summer. That "invasion" pales by comparison to today's traffic. Most of the visitors came for a month or for the season and by the time they left on Labor Day we were all well acquainted. Some came year after year and we were old friends. They all wanted to spend as much time as possible at the beach, would drive all the way from Dennis to Wellfleet or Falmouth to see someone they lived next door to back home, and just had to eat at Mabel's almost every night.

Mabel's Mixing Bowl on Main Street in downtown Dennis Port belonged to and was named for Mabel Woodward from Brewster. The site of her restaurant is now part of the Mobile Gas Station. Mabel started her restaurant sometime in the 1920's and continued up into the 1940's when her health began to fail. During her heyday it was a very popular place.

Everything served in the restaurant was home cooked. The most expensive thing on her menu was seventy-five cents—a steak dinner! Her year round specialty was chicken pie with mashed potatoes, peas, cranberry sauce, a beverage, pudding or ice cream, all for fifty cents. That was Cape Cod chicken pie, all meat and gravy, no vegetables. If you wanted pie for dessert, that was extra. Mince pie was also a year round staple and it was good. A generous supply of rum in the recipe probably added to the demand. Mabel's clam chowder was good old fashioned "clam chowda" with the emphasis on clams—a far cry from today's mostly potato soup that will hold a spoon straight up. The price was reasonable. Twenty-five cents for a bowl and ten cents for a cup. Another favorite was fried clams and no one ever went away hungry after a plateful of those.

The restaurant was fairly small and would hold probably 60

people. There was usually a long line to get in, but no one minded. It was worth the wait. The Ladies and Gents was outside, through the kitchen and turn left.

Mabel did her own cooking when she first opened, but when business picked up she hired **Gertrude Young** to help out. Gert Young was an A-1 cook in her own right, and she and Mabel made a good team. Later Gert left to open her own restaurant and Mabel hired **Frank Lomba** to take her place. Frank was of Portuguese descent and had learned to cook as a young boy on fishing boats. He had enhanced his skills at area restaurants and introduced Dennis Port kids to French Fries that we could buy, by coming in the back door of the restaurant—ten cents for a small paper bagful. Frank always seemed to have a big chop-



Postcard Collection—Mabel's on far right

ping knife in his hand which he used to punctuate his statements. He was a kind enough man and I don't remember that we were ever afraid of him and his knife. He had a mug of coffee on the back of the stove that was always steaming, and I realize now it held a little more than just coffee. That never seemed to affect his cooking. Mabel wouldn't have tolerated that!

Mabel took special care of the food she served and always did her own shopping. She had to have the freshest food available. Every day she drove her station wagon to Hyannis or New Bedford for supplies and always returned complaining about the high prices. But she never skimped on anything when she prepared a meal. She served special meals in season: swordfish, striped bass, eel stifle, shad roe, mackerel, and all kinds of blueberry, raspberry and blackberry desserts.

The years I remember her best were the late 1930's until she closed. She was a kind woman with a big heart who loved a good joke and had a hearty laugh. She was a hard worker and yet enjoyed life immensely. I never remember seeing Mabel without a hat, usually a crushed velvet toque fashioned by **Maude Estey** of Maude's Hat Shoppe, also on Main Street. (September 2004) She had a number of them in all colors to match her dresses. She wore her hat when she arrived for work and never took it off, no matter what she was doing. I thought it was a fashion statement, but understand now that it was because she was losing her hair.

My great aunt, **Mertis Murray Taylor**, and Mabel were fast friends and Auntie would appear at the kitchen door many afternoons for a few hands of Gin Rummy and a couple of highballs. Auntie would stay for supper and Mabel drove her home after work. All during their games Frank would tell stories of the great hands *he* had held in various and sundry ports. To hear him talk, he should have been a millionaire!

Mabel treated her employees like family. She was kind and generous to them all. They could have a meal during their working hours and the only restriction was—no steak! Most of the local girls, including me for a short space of time, worked for her at some point in their teen age years. I seem to recall the pay was \$1.00 a day, plus tips that were never overgenerous. **Ruth Small** and her daughter **Evelyn** were long time waitresses and several young men from away were summer waiters. Mabel enjoyed a night out on occasion at the old Southward Inn in Orleans and would take some of her older staff and a few friends along as company. She always picked up the tab.

During the late 1930's the Mayflower Restaurant was built next to Mabel's (now BZ's).

A number of her customers went there for a meal "just to see how it was" and came right back to Mabel's for their next meal. She didn't have a thing to worry about. The only draw at the Mayflower was a full service bar. The equivalent at Mabel's was her Rum Chiffon Pie, or the Mince. That would keep anyone happy.

Mabel's husband George was a barber. At one time he had a barber shop on the east side of her restaurant. In the late 1930's they moved from Brewster to a house on Upper County Road in Dennis Port, and George moved his business to their home. Mabel enjoyed the shorter drive home after work, especially as her health began to slip.

There are few memories that can survive intact for decades. Great food and wonderful people are two of them. Mabel, thanks for the memories!

Membership notes:

Dues notices have been sent out for the membership year beginning September 1 and ending August 31, 2006. Thanks to all of you who have sent a quick reply and renewed your membership. Our general fund (which pays Program, Membership, and Newsletter expenses) has dwindled away and your dues mean we can start all over again. We are happy to welcome new members **Frank and Shirley Sutherland of South Dennis and William and Barbara White of Brewster**. The very first to renew this year (even before we sent out the notices!) was the Allen County Public Library of Fort Wayne, Indiana. Thank you one and all.

Cowboys on Cape Cod?

We'll tell you that story if you tell us yours! Here it is right in the middle of Hurricane Season and we bet you remember at least one of them. Sadly, we have few personal stories about riding out these storms. Most of our records are from newspapers and picture booklets published at the time. Anyone remember 1938? Or how about 1944? I bet "Bob" rings a bell. (We were lucky to lose only a few shingles and some large tree limbs in that one, but it was an inconvenience being without power for a week. Fortunately we had Grandmaw's wood stove to cook on and managed to find her wash tub and scrubbing board to do some laundry.) What are your stories? We'd sure hate to lose them! You can tell us about "hurricanes you have known" by sending your story to our P.O. Box 607, S. Dennis, MA 02660 or try our e-mail address at dennishs@cape.com. This is for you out-of-towners, too! We'd welcome your memories

Coming soon!

Dennis Historical Society Annual Meeting—Saturday, October 15 at 7:00 P.M. at the West Dennis Graded School, School Street, West Dennis. Following a brief annual business meeting Phyllis Horton will present a narrated slide show entitled *Blue Water Wives and Mothers*. We will learn how Dennis women carried on their daily lives and raised children while accompanying their husbands on the seven seas of the world. Refreshments, too!

Did you miss it?

If you missed the guided walk through the Sea Captains Cemetery in South Dennis, here's your chance. Saturday, October 1 at 2 P.M. we're doing it again! See page 4.

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The Way We Were

What do these things have in common: slate, urns, willow trees, winged cherubs, marble, large monuments, small stones, ornate iron fences, mariners, civil war veterans, doctors, empty graves with headstones? All this and more was discovered at the old burying ground at the South Dennis Congregational Church on August 23rd when Historian Phyllis Horton led a group of 50 interested persons on a walk through that historic place.

The remains of people from all walks of life can be found there. The stories are many— Capt. Frederick Nickerson in 1862 piloted the Monitor to her sea battle with the Merrimac. Dr. William Gooch departed life in 1868. He had been a friend of Daniel Webster and actively assisted runaway slaves on their way to Canada and freedom. Even the founder of Raytheon Corp., Dr. Vanevar Bush, chose South Dennis as his final resting place. And let's not forget Theophilus Smith – he recycled before it was the popular thing to do. We even have a road named in his honor.

As the sun shone brightly above and the wind wafted softly through the leaves of the wonderful shade trees, Phyllis walked us through history. We all left the area richer for the experience.

Walk Through Sea Captains Cemetery by June Howes

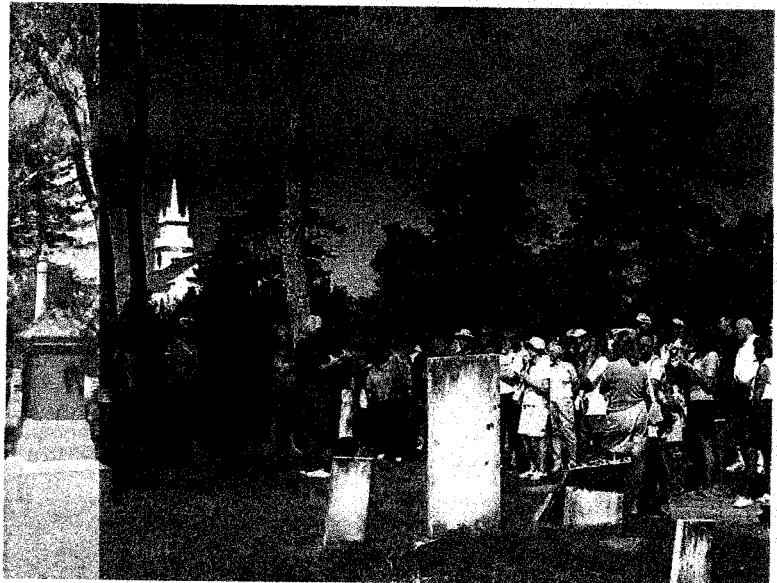


Photo by Peter Howes