



# Dennis Historical Society

## Newsletter

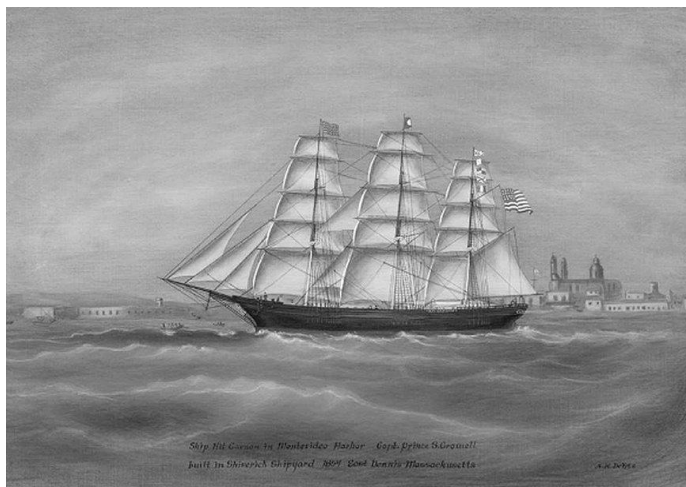
### February 2019

#### Volume 42, No2

Dennis Historical Society – copyright 2019 Internet: [www.dennishistoricalsociety.org](http://www.dennishistoricalsociety.org) Email: [info@dennishistoricalsociety.org](mailto:info@dennishistoricalsociety.org)

**The Next DHS Board Meeting will be held on Tuesday, February 12th, 2:00 pm at the Dennis Memorial Library 1020 Old Bass River Road, Dennis Village--Members Welcome**

Please send information & stories for the newsletter to Dave Talbott at the DHS Website email address: [info@dennishistoricalsociety.org](mailto:info@dennishistoricalsociety.org)



The *Kit Carson* (from a lithograph by Nancy DeVita) with permission

### *A Fleecing of America*

The 1,016 ton clipper ship *Kit Carson* was launched at the *Shiverick Shipyard* in East Dennis in 1854. Captain Seth Crowell of East Dennis was her first master, Captain Prince S. Crowell, her owner. After a lengthy succession of captains which included the owner's son, Prince F. Crowell, the *Kit Carson* set sail from New York City on December 9th, 1866, bound for Antwerp with general cargo.\* While off the east coast of England on January 8th, 1867, she met with continuous bad and stormy weather. This is where our story begins.

\* *I have been unable to determine who was the captain at the time of this voyage. If anyone can provide the answer to "This Unknown Captain," please email me at [info@dennishistoricalsociety.org](mailto:info@dennishistoricalsociety.org).*

*Thursday, September 6, 2018*

One of the most rewarding parts of checking the emails which come into the DHS Website is that mixed in amongst the announcements, newsletters, advertising and solicitations, are requests for information. Sometimes, these inquiries lead down very interesting paths. One came in on the date above from English author, Andrew Sargent. It was asking for a picture of the *Kit Carson* to use in an article, excerpts from which will follow. Knowing the accuracy and wonderful artistic qualities of the lithographs by Nancy DeVita, I directed him to daughter Nora's website for permission to use one of hers, the one which appears above.

I used the word "synchronicity" in a previous newsletter article to describe seemingly unrelated circumstances coming together unexpectedly at a point in time. It is applicable again. The *Kit Carson* was launched at the Shiverick Shipyard in Dennis, and on holiday from Dennis in 2012, I celebrated my birthday with my wife, son, daughter in-law and twin granddaughters in Deal, UK.

The next two paragraphs are from emails which were sent to me by Andrew in our exchanges. Later, I will quote from an article he wrote for his local newspaper, the *East Kent Mercury*, entitled *Those Were the Days an Article on Cheating Boatmen*. They provide an essential bit of background:

*"The Deal boatmen were quite something. Deal is on the east Kent coast, midway between Dover and Ramsgate. Some miles offshore are the Goodwin Sands, and in the days of sail, countless ships anchored temporarily in the comparatively calm waters of the Downs (between Deal and the Goodwins) to pick up a pilot, take on supplies, have a new anchor supplied etc. But any ship which stuck on the Goodwins - very many did - were in a lot of trouble."*

*"So the Deal boatmen made a living by salvaging, fetching and carrying and so forth - "hovelling" it was called. In addition, they derived much of their income from rescue and from supplying sails, anchors and chains to ships in the Downs. On the one hand they were great boat handlers, and amazingly brave in saving lives (either using their own craft or when crewing a lifeboat). On the other hand they had a reputation, over at least two centuries, for squeezing every penny out of hapless sailors and passengers in need of assistance."*

When the *Kit Carson* reached the Downs she was in need of a pilot with local knowledge to assist her to a safe anchorage amidst the storm and had the flag requesting such a pilot flying.

***The following account is transcribed from the report made by a Mr. Montague Bere on the inquires into certain alleged dealings of the Deal Boatmen with the American Ship "Kit Carson," by Direction of the Board of Trade, dated 18th June, 1867.***

Editor's Notes: A *lugger* is a small sailing vessel with two or more masts used as a fishing boat off the coasts of England, Scotland and France. £. and l. are a pound; s. is a shilling; d. is a pence; a *fathom* is 6'. A *bottomry* is a type of contract of the nature of a mortgage, whereby the owner, or master of a ship borrows money at a specified interest rate to carry on or complete a voyage, and pledges the ship as security. A *stater* is an adjuster.

"She was hailed by a Deal lugger, the "England's Glory," of which W. Spears was part owner. Spears himself went on board of her, and agreed to bring her up in the Downs, to wait for a pilot from Flushing, whom his boat should bring off. She was anchored outside all other ships in the Downs, abreast of Deal castle, by tow anchors. Spears then returned to Deal, and an over-sea pilot, unlicensed, George Baker, was brought out to her from Deal by the lugger, and took charge of her from that time, until a Belgian pilot came on board at the Fairway Buoy off Flushing. Having been thus anchored in the fair way of ships passing through the Downs, she was seen from the shore to be driving towards the Gull lightship and the Goodwin Sands; and about 8:00 am on the morning of the 10th she hoisted signals of distress. These signals were immediately answered by the master of a steam tug called the "Oracle," who went to her at once in his vessel. He went on board, and saw the captain who expressed his fears, lest if the ship were left in her then position, she would drift on the sand. An agreement was come to between them that the steam tug should take the "Kit Carson" into a safe anchorage for 200 l. A hawser was passed from one vessel to the other, and after a good deal of trouble and exertion on the part of the crew of the steam tug, the "Kit Carson" was, about 4 pm, brought into a safe berth. Spears had also seen the signals and had gone out to help in his lugger, and had, with some of his crew, gone on board her. The services rendered by him and his men, for which he was subsequently paid, consisted of slipping the chains of the anchors by knocking out the shackle bolts. Even this service was inefficiently performed, for the steam tug was holding the anchors, and there a large quantity of slack chain that might have been easily bore in, and there was no real necessity for slipping the chains at the 45 fathom shackle, as is alleged by the protest to have been done.

The ship, having been brought into safe berth, was supplied with two new anchors, and 90 fathoms of new chain, brought out in the usual way by the Deal boatmen. The captain came ashore that evening, and went to the office of Messrs. Hodges & Co., who assume to be the consular representatives of the United States at Deal, Ramsgate, and Margate. He informed Mr. King, the partner of the firm, resident of Deal, that he wanted several new sails, and word was sent to Mr. Hodges at Ramsgate, who directed a sailmaker of that place to go to Deal and take the order for the sails. Crocker went to Deal, saw the captain, and received from him an order for five sails. The work was put in hand at once, but only two out of the five sails were supplied, though the price for all of them was charged in the account furnished to the ship by Messrs. Hodges & Co.

Messrs. Hodges & Co., who furnish this account, represent themselves as Consular agents for many foreign States, and among them, for the United States of America, and have cards printed in which their office is described as the Consulate for those States. As far as the United States are concerned, they have, on the testimony of Mr. Morse, the American Consul in London (who was examined before me), no such official position as they pretend to have, but are merely private agents, and in no way recognized by the Government of the United States. The charge of 230 l. in the account is for money paid to the master of the steam tug "Oracle," who, having agreed to take the "Kit Carson" into a safe berth for 200 l., charged 30 l. more for holding her until the anchors were slipped. This extra claim was paid on the recommendation of Mr. King, who advised its payment, although extortionate, because he knew the ship might be detained in consequence, and was certain from experience, that the Admiralty Court would give a larger sum if a suit were instituted. 616 l. was awarded to the boatmen; about one-third for taking off the anchors and chain, and two-thirds for the trifling services already mentioned. The method of settling this sum was by arbitrators, one appointed by the boatmen, and one for the ship, who, in the case of disagreement, appoint an umpire. They hear the written story of the boatmen read in the presence of the captain. If he makes no objection to the statements therein made, they ask no question, institute no inquires, but consider at once the sum to be paid, which is not likely to be a small one, as their remuneration increases according to the amount of the award. In this particular case, the sum was awarded without any information given of the services rendered by the steam tug, one of the arbitrators saying, "If I had asked the questions (about the tug) they would abuse me." The items relating and chains furnish material for the remark that the prices charged are from 7 s. to 10 s. per cwt., in excess of the prices paid. As no risk is run by the suppliers, who procure them from the anchor and chain merchant, at whose risk they are stored, a profit of 98 l. 11 s. 8 d. out of 327 l. 1 s. 2 d. seems to be an exorbitant one. Lloyds' allow a profit quite as large, but such an allowance cannot be justified.

The bill for sails is 168 l. 18 s. 7 d.; of this amount, only 60 l. 17 s. was paid to the sailmaker and 108 l. 1 s. was stated to have been handed over to the captain by cheque, which was produced. This transaction appeared in the books of Messrs. Hodges & Co. in this form:---

	£.	s.	d.
Crocker, Sailmaker - - - - -	60	17	-
Paid to Captain in lieu of sails - - - - -	108	1	7

while in the account furnished to the underwrites, the whole sum appears to have been paid for sails actually supplied. The reason given for the charging of the whole sum in account before the bottomry bond can be made out, and that as a captain (especially one of an American ship) may have to sail whenever the wind becomes fair, he may supply himself, if the money is given to

him, with the other necessary sails at the next port to which he comes. This method of reckoning has two disadvantages:

1. The Captain, if very dishonest, can cheat both owners and underwriters.
2. The owner and the captain can cheat the underwriters. The attention of the underwriter and the average stater would be called to the fact of payments made to the captain, if the sum was divided as in Messrs. Hodges's books.

The next item is for Belgian Consular charges, a small one, but the incorrectness shows the very little attention paid to the interests of foreign ships, if they fall into the hands of Messrs. Hodges and Co. The proper fee is 2 s. 6 d., and 10 s. 6 d. is charged, because Hodges and Co. were ignorant of any charge having been made. It will be seen from this account that out of the 1,666 l. 9 s. 8 d., Messrs. Hodges and Co. made a profit of 363 l. 14 s. 7 d.; 100 l. for commission, a remuneration which they charge as they think fit; 165 l. 2 s. 11 d., 11 per cent. interest on the bottomry bond, for which 5 l. per cent. would have been the usual charge, and the remaining sum, as has been mentioned, difference of price of purchase and sale of anchor and chains. The usual notice of three days to invite tenders from other shipping firms for advances on the bottomry bonds, was not given."

"I have no doubt the "Kit Carson" was taken by Baker into a position on the Downs which was not safe, and that all subsequent assistance was intended to be rendered by boatmen from Deal, though fortunately for the ship, a steam tug happened to be lying there and came to her aid. The evidence of both Baker and Spears, as to the state of the tide on 10<sup>th</sup> January, were deliberately false, being disproved conclusively by the tide tables which give the time of high water at Deal. There was one person who had been on board the ship who gave honest and trustworthy evidence. He was the Belgium pilot, and from his statement, I very much doubt whether any new sails were ever wanted at all, and whether the protest itself as to the bad weather was not completely untrue. The bulwarks were said to have been washed away, while no witness, not even the Deal men, observed anything particular about their condition... there can be but little doubt that he (the captain) was induced by them (Spears and Baker) to order ships' furniture which he did not want, and to allow chains to be slipped at their longest lengths in order to benefit the confederates of the advising Deal boatmen."

6th February 1868.

(Signed) *Montague Bere*

*"The owners of the American ship Kit Carson were comprehensively fleeced. Spears, (with Baker, a pilot) took the Antwerp-bound ship to an unsafe berth in the Downs, and played only a minor and rather ineffectual part in putting things right. Then followed grossly inflated claims for services rendered, and for the supply of replacement anchors and superfluous new sails. Local arbitration failed to protect the interests of the owner and underwriters, on whom the preposterous costs were intended to fall. The captain, anxious to be on his way, joined in the scam. At the subsequent enquiry only one person who had been on the Kit Carson was reckoned to have given honest and trustworthy evidence – a Belgian pilot." Those Were the Days an Article on Cheating Boatmen*

### ***Again, quoting from Andrew's email:***

*"By the time William Spears died it was all pretty much over. Steam ships had no need to pass routinely through the Downs and hardly ever needed to anchor there."*



*(Photo by Dave Talbott)*

Like Dennis, Deal is steeped in maritime history. This is the *Time Ball Tower Museum* which we visited during our stay. The Deal Timeball, established in 1855 was a time signal for calibrating ships chronometers. Accurate time keeping was (is) essential for determining a vessel's longitude. Like the one at the 0 meridian in Greenwich, the timeball in Deal dropped at precisely 1 pm, triggered by an electrical signal from the Royal Observatory in Greenwich. It is hard to believe that in the days when the Shiverick clipper ships were sailing the seas, electrical impulses were insuring the accuracy of the dropping timeballs! The museum features exhibits about the tower's history from 1821, its use as a navigation aid, signaling station which used semaphore to communicate in the fight against smuggling and complete coverage of how the ball worked mechanically, and how it received its timing cues electrically.

I highly recommend the book *The Illustrated Longitude* by Dan Sobel & William J. H. Andrewes for any reader who is interested in navigation and the history of the quest for accurate time keeping.

### ***And here is where our story ends:***

"Having evaded Confederate cruisers all through the Civil War, the *Kit Carson* sailed into the River Plate, to find herself caught in the savage little War of the Triple Alliance (1865-1870), was commandeered, and ended her days as a block ship, sunk off Rio de Janeiro." *They Built Clipper Ships in Their Back Yard*, by Admont G. Clark.

**Dennis Historical Society**  
**P.O. Box 607**  
**South Dennis, MA 02660-0607**

**Non-profit Org.**  
**US POSTAGE PAID**  
**Permit No. 24**  
**South Yarmouth, MA**  
**02664**



*(Photo from the Dennis Historical Society's Digital Archives)*

### *"This Unknown House"*

With no responses for the January mystery house at press time, we all need what I think is a gimme! This house is in the archives as "unknown," but I am pretty sure I know where it is. Please help validate my thoughts by emailing me yours. It is identified in the archives as "Half-house, somewhere in Dennis." Also, if you can, please help identify the women at the fence.

This month's "Unknown House" picture is from the DHS COLLECTIONS\PHOTOS\Album 03\36-2001-07-17-Richard Howes\E - Henry Sears\Photo4.jpg, DHS Digital Archives. No other information available, except what appears next to the picture above. If anyone can identify it, the person, or provide any information about the picture, please email Dave Talbott at: [info@dennishistoricalsociety.org](mailto:info@dennishistoricalsociety.org). With last month's house still unidentified, readers have dropped a bit more and are now batting .546!