



# Dennis Historical Society Newsletter July 2019

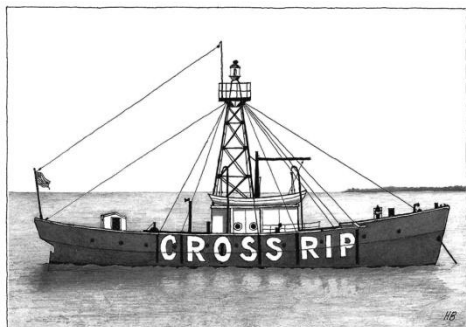
## Volume 42, No7

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**The Next Board Meeting, Tuesday, July 9th, 2:00 pm, Dennis Memorial Library, 1020 Old Bass River Rd., Dennis  
Members Welcome!**

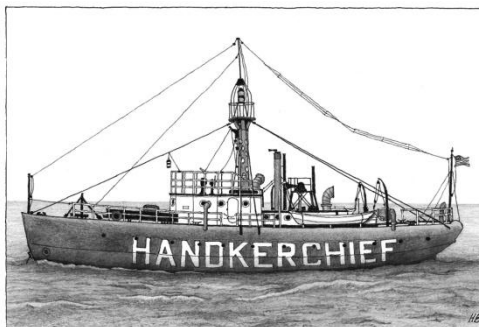
Please send information & stories for the newsletter to Dave Talbott at the DHS Website email address: [info@dennishistoricalsociety.org](mailto:info@dennishistoricalsociety.org)

## *Lightships*

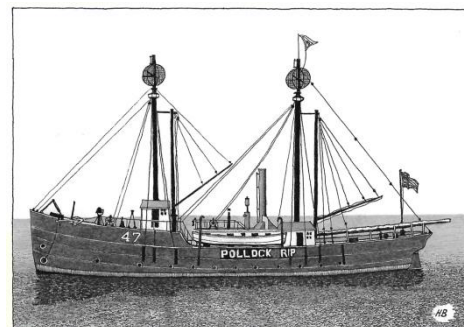
On June 15th, the Dennis Maritime Museum at the West Dennis Graded School opened for the 2019 season with another fascinating exhibit, *Dennis Life Savers. Lightship Men and Lighthouse Keepers*, lovingly prepared by our curator and museum director Phyllis Horton. In honor of this exhibit, famed local artist, Howard Bonington, drew three new pen and ink drawings of three famous lightships. In addition, Bonington, now turned novice historian, agreed to write an article for our July Newsletter about the history of these amazing floating lighthouses. These remarkable new prints will be available starting this month at the Dennis Maritime Museum.



(Cross Rip)



(Handkerchief Shoals)



( Pollock Rip)

Most of us are aware and appreciate the landmark Cape Cod lighthouses that still exist - their locations, configurations and their history. However, many are less familiar with the lightships that were once stationed in the waters south of the Cape from the early 1800's through 1983, but now are gone forever.

The New England colonies, and subsequently the states, developed into populous communities in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. As maritime commerce was the major practical means of transporting large quantities of people and goods between them, it grew tremendously during that time.

The waters off the southern coast of the Cape are replete with dangerous shoals and sandbars. Any coastal vessel travelling to or from New England seaports had to pass through Nantucket Sound and the shoals off Cape Cod, or else detour hundreds of miles around Nantucket and its shoals. Thus, these conditions posed a perilous obstacle which had an effect on trade. Current day records show the large number of shipwrecks that occurred from those who ignored the dangers and favored taking the short cut.

To overcome this problem, by 1826, ten lighthouses had been built along the shores of Cape Cod, Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket. But these could only deal with coastline dangers. No indication could be given of how to navigate the off-shore shoals. Sea captains petitioned for the government to mark these hazards. The solution was the placing of lightships at known fixed points offshore in the viable channels to provide signals toward which ships could navigate without running aground.

The economical preferred route for northbound coastal vessels was through Woods Hole or Vineyard Sound, then eastward across the middle of Nantucket Sound, head between Monomoy and Great Point on Nantucket, then turn north into the Atlantic. (Southbound the procedure was reversed.) Lack of specific knowledge of the location of the

channels in these areas led to many mistakes and wrecks. The shoals at mid-Sound (identified as ‘Cross Rip’) and those south and east of Monomoy (named ‘Pollock’ and ‘Pollock Rip’) were major culprits.

Lightships were stationed at Cross Rip at the center of the Sound, Handkerchief Shoals just south of the reef extending southward from Monomoy, Shovelful Shoal immediately south of Monomoy, and Pollock Rip several miles east of Monomoy. This set up a reasonably safe route to proceed through Nantucket Sound: that was - sail eastward to Cross Rip lightship, turn northeastward to Handkerchief Shoal lightship, bear more northeasterly to Shovelful Shoal lightship, proceed eastward to Pollock Rip lightship, and then turn to port and proceed northward into the open Atlantic. A total of about 12 lightships were on station at points about The Cape to cover these and other contingencies.

When the Cape Cod Canal was constructed in 1914 the usefulness of the lightships diminished. Vessels could now proceed from Buzzards Bay to Cape Cod Bay and onward without having to round The Cape and its shoals.

Over the years more than 200 different lightships of various types were assigned to cover the stations in Cape waters. Because many were sunk, destroyed, or decommissioned before the advent of photography, it is not possible to illustrate all of them. They embodied many changes in design. Some had to be towed to their station, some sailed, and some were steam powered. In all cases, when on location, they were identified by the name of the station (such as “Cross Rip”) with the name painted in large letters on the hull. When relieved, the station name would be repainted on the replacement ship. Most, but not all, had two signal masts each topped with “Day Marks”, circular grids painted distinctively for daytime identification. Below these, the night signals were mounted. The earliest of these were oil-wick lanterns which had to be lowered for servicing and refilling each morning. In later times the lanterns were replaced by permanent electric incandescent lamps. Identification during frequent periods of fog was originally done by manually-operated bells – later replaced by automated fog horns, radio and electronic signals.

The ships and their crews were subject to many perils. As they were stationed in mid channel, they were often rammed by other vessels at night and in fog. Not permitted to leave their stations, many were wrecked or sunk by hurricanes with loss of crew. Many were torn loose from their moorings by ice and drifted out to sea, lost totally. Some were torn loose but recovered. One, at Pollock Rip, was blown off station (and recovered) so many times that she became known as “The Happy Wanderer.” It was found so difficult to keep this vessel from dragging that she was fitted with moorings heavy enough to moor a frigate. Still, it became a standard insider joke that The Happy Wanderer had dragged from her mooring again.

In addition to the construction of the Cape Cod Canal, it is easy to see that modern science ended the practical necessity of the lightship. Improved shore light beacon distances, development of LORAN (Long Range Aid to Navigation), depth finders, radar, Texas Towers in lieu of ships, and a desire to reduce maintenance and manpower all contributed to their demise. Now, the most significant aid to navigation is the Global Positioning System, GPS. Thus, the lightship went the way of the dinosaur. The last Cape Cod lightship went off-station in 1983.

\*[Note: The concept of lightships dates back to ancient times when Roman galleys patrolled the eastern Mediterranean against pirates. A signal fire in an open basket on a galley anchored outside a port indicated the port was safe to enter. After a big gap in time, when only lighthouses were used, the English, in 1731, re-established the concept by anchoring a light vessel outside the Thames estuary. There were two dimly lit oil-wick lanterns extended outward from a yard arm. Tolls were collected.]

### **Epilog**

Ever searching for images to draw that relate to Cape Cod, its ambience and history, I noted that “Dennis Life Savers, Lightship Men and Lighthouse Keepers” will be the this year’s theme at the Museum. Aha! Having already drawn most of the Cape lighthouses, the lightships would make a great addition. As actual lightships are extinct, my search for remaining images led to two excellent books in the Cape library system:

*The Lightships of Cape Cod* by Frederic L. Thompson, published circa 1983

*Cape Cod Lighthouses and Lightships* by Arthur P. Richmond, published circa 2010

These works contain all the information you’ll probably ever want to know on the subject. To my delight, they also contain many old photos from Coast Guard archives of the actual vessels.

**Howard Bonington**

Again, another of our members has come through for me/us! The following poem is the work of Pam Eaton. It was inspired by a headstone in the South Dennis Cemetary The questions the headstone raised for Pam were answered through her research, and provide the touching story you will discover when you read her poem. Thank you Pam!

First published in the *Cape Cod Genealogical Journal, Spring 2019*, it is reprinted here with permission.

## Chinese Woman Elegy

by Pam Eaton

I stand before your gravestone and wonder what's your name.  
It reads *Chinese Woman*; your name is missing, who's to blame?  
You were brought from *Hong Cong*, a phonetic spelling indeed  
by Captain Alpheus **Baker, Jr.**, as a nanny for his children in need.



Captain Baker was master and owner of the *C.C. Leary* ship  
And his wife and children had joined him for a long, adventurous trip.  
After stops in the Americas, he sailed across the sea,  
At last arriving in Hong Kong, a place he wanted to be.

It was a long stay in Hong Kong with business clients to see,  
The Captain's wife Sarah needed help; she made a little plea,  
To find an Amah\* for her children, a small necessary chore,  
She sought a devoted person, with just the right rapport.

*\*Amah, of Chinese origin - A wet nurse, maidservant, nanny*

They found a gentle soul who gave their children loving care,  
She was just the right person, there was none who could compare.  
And so great was her kindness, Sarah Baker asked her to come  
To Cape Cod to care for her children for a generous, good income.

How did Amah feel, was her Chinese life so bad?  
Were times hard in the 1870s, was her future looking sad?  
And now there was a chance, an exciting opportunity  
To live in a foreign land, a New England, Cape Cod community.

Sources: Photo courtesy of Find-A-Grave  
1870 U.S. Census  
Nancy Thacher Reid, *Dennis, Cape Cod*,  
Dennis Historical Society, 1996) 437-439

Amah sailed across the oceans, embarking on a new life.  
She was young, able and willing to work for the Captain and his wife.  
Months later the ship arrived and she stepped onto Old Cape Cod  
What was her first reaction? Was she thrilled? Was she awed?

The Baker family was greeted with bounteous hugs of delight.  
Family members embraced them. Everything was all right!  
Amah looked on with a sweet smile and thought this was okay.  
Never realizing at the time, she would eventually pull away.

Amah soon learned that Cape Cod was nothing like Hong Kong.  
The food, the people, the land, the language. She knew she didn't belong.  
There was no bustling city, just a quiet rural town.  
And worst of all she understood no one. This made her sad and down.

Despite the love for her charges, the children precious in her sight,  
Amah prayed that she'd return home, each and every night.  
Captain Baker knew of her sadness and made a solemn vow.  
On the next ship back to Hong Kong, Amah would be on it somehow.

But the waiting took a toll and she took a turn for the worse,  
Coming to Cape Cod with the Captain had turned into a curse.  
Amah's spirit weakened and withered and her body wasted away.  
She died at age thirty-one on a beautiful April day.

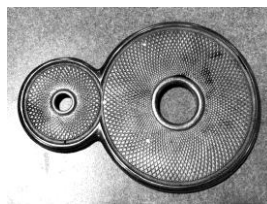
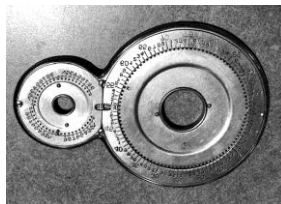
Did she whisper her final words? But no one would understand,  
As she was the only Chinese person in the whole of Cape Cod land.  
Her body was buried in the family plot behind the village church.  
At the time, no stone was laid, so to find her would need a search.

The years went by and eventually, the Captain and his wife had died.  
Their oldest son took the task of placing stones on their eternal bedside.  
The son remembered his Amah and wanted to mark her grave as well;  
Not knowing her name, it was engraved, Chinese Woman, as a fond farewell.

Chinese Woman lies among the family she faithfully loved and served,  
She was the first person of Asian birth to live on this Cape Cod earth.  
In South Dennis Cemetery, lies this Amah, now so long deceased.  
Chinese Woman, we honor you, may you always rest in peace.

### A New Twist to an "Unknown" Answered!

**Webb  
Adder**



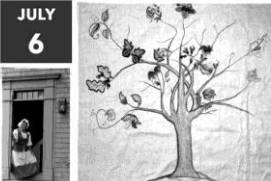
Last month's mystery object is *unknown* no longer. Unfortunately, timing did not let readers scoop the experts. The July Newsletter had already gone to press when the *Naval History & Heritage Command* emailed DHS with the correct identification. The object pictured last month was an early analog calculator. The first of our member/readers with the correct identification was Gail Hart. Gail found a local expert to consult, Brad Finch, *Navigational and Maritime Antiques* in Brewster. The **Webb Adder** was patented in 1896 by Charles Henry Webb. As the name suggests, it was a non-printing adding machine. There is terrific information about the device available if you search its name online. There are *YouTube* videos on how it was used, and also exploded diagrams showing its inner workings. When I reported the success of the search to Mike Howes who sent the original email, here was his response, "Thank you Dave for all the work you put into this and also to your contacts. If the patent on this was 1889, I believe that the Webb Adder was most likely purchased and used by my grandfather, Horace Anthony Howes, son of Captain Allison. He spent most of his adult life running cattle in and around Midland, SD. I have several other items belonging to Captain Allison - a nautical parallel ruler, compasses and time pieces. I assume they were all used in his nautical years."

Thank you to all who became involved in the search!

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**JULY  
6**

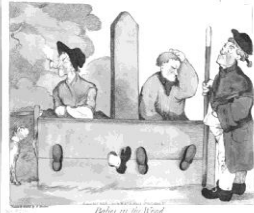


**COLONIAL  
BED HANGINGS  
PROJECT**

A special exhibit  
at Josiah Dennis Manse  
Saturday, July 6, 1 - 4pm

61 WHIG STREET IN DENNIS VILLAGE  
FREE ADMISSION (DONATIONS ALWAYS ACCEPTED)


*July 6th*



**CRIME AND  
PUNISHMENT  
COLONIAL STYLE**

A WONDERFUL ONE-DAY-ONLY EXHIBIT  
SATURDAY, JULY 20, 1-4PM  
JOSIAH DENNIS MANSE, 61 WHIG STREET  
FREE ADMISSION  
(DONATIONS GLADLY ACCEPTED)

*July 20th*



**Sea  
Captains'  
Cemetery  
Walk**

FRIDAY, JULY 26, 10AM

Join guide Terri Fox for a free walking tour through South Dennis Congregational Church Cemetery, 224 Main Street, and learn about local history through stories of notable early residents buried in these hallowed grounds. Park on the street or behind George School next door. Rain date: Sunday, July 28, at 9am.



**South Dennis  
Congregational  
"The Sea Captains'  
Church"**

*July 26th*



**CHILDREN ON THE FARM**

A delightful afternoon of fabulous family fun at the 1801 Captain Theophilus Baker House and Barn at Jericho Historic Center

**Saturday, July 27, from 1-4pm**

90 Old Main Street, West Dennis  
**FREE ADMISSION**  
(Donations gratefully accepted)

*July 27th*

*With all three museums now open for the summer, there are new exciting and educational programs on tap for July!*

*Mark your calendars and be sure to attend all of these events!*