



### A FEW DENNIS CRIMES...LARGE AND SMALL

We are constantly bombarded today with crime and violence--the newspapers are full of it and television is saturated with it. All too often it's even closer than that--it happens on our street, to our neighbor and sometimes even to us. But it was not always so here in Dennis. Going back to the early years crime seldom occurred and was mostly in the benign form of squabbling over property boundaries, minor offenses, or not adhering strictly to church policy. Nicholas Simpkins and William Chase got into a set-to over 'land of said Chase that said Sympkins had fenced in and claimed as his own'. This was settled by arbitration of Mr. Mayo and Mr. Thomas Dimmock--also, Anthony Thacher gave a Small Piece of his own land to William to soothe his ruffled feelings. Edmond Freeman was directed to inflict punishment upon Mr. John Crowe's maid servant as to be "just and equal" for pilfering goods from Mr. Crowe. The afore-mentioned William Chase also ran into trouble with the church and was arraigned for his language towards the minister Mr. Matthews, was censured by the court, and ordered to find sureties and depart the place in six months. The sentence was never carried out and William Chase lived out his life here in Dennis --although he was presented to the Grand Jury in 1654 for driving a yoke of oxen five miles on the Lord's day during time of service.

In more recent times crime took a different tack. On March 8, 1888 the village of Dennis Port was shaken by an attempted murder. Philip Cotelte, age 40, in a fit of jealousy, shot and wounded Miss Minnie Chapman, age 15. Minnie had evidently "blossomed early" and at age 15 could easily pass for 18 or 19--according to a reporter for the Boston Globe. She must have been eye-catching at age 13 as Philip fell madly in love with her and tried to court Minnie for two years in hopes of winning her hand. Minnie, however, took his attentions as a joke, and when he met her on the way to the post office at noon and asked her to accompany him to the Harwich High School graduation that evening, she laughed at him and refused. This infuriated Philip so that he went home, got his revolver, and accosted Minnie on her way to school for the afternoon session. His gun misfired the first time and she ran screaming into Capt. Ira Baker's home with Philip close behind. He fired again and shot Minnie in the side, whereupon he went out in the street, made the statement, "I had made up my mind that if she wouldn't go to Harwich with me she wouldn't go with anyone else.", put the revolver to his head, and pulled the trigger. Minnie was carried home and Drs. Ginn, Kelley, and Munsell were summoned. The bullet had fractured a rib and lodged between the lung and stomach. After much probing they were unable to retrieve the bullet and they left her in God's care to go attend Mr. Cotelte, who had been carried to his home. It seems the bullet had flattened out against his skull and except for a flesh wound and what must have been a serious headache he was expected to recover. He was arrested on Saturday and taken to Barnstable County Jail to await trial. Minnie languished for some time, but eventually regained her health, bullet and all. During the trial it was revealed that Minnie had indeed accepted his attentions--and at least \$200.00 in gifts and cash--over the preceding two years, and had been seen riding with him on numerous occasions. At the trial on October 16 the jury couldn't decide who was most at fault and they were discharged without a finding. Philip was released and returned to Dennis Port, and I'm sure Minnie and many other local girls learned the error of trifling with a man's affections.

1888 was also a banner year in Dennis as that is the year our first lock up was built in what is now the north parking lot of Dennis Town Offices. It seems that our Irish residents who moved to West Dennis to find employment in the shoe and overall factories were prone to celebrating a Saturday paycheck with a wee drop or two of Irish dew. The lock up was built to assist them in sobering up after a boisterous weekend. It seems likely the factory owners had a vested interest in their employees being able to return to work on Monday morning and were probably amoving force in getting a jail built. Ours was built for \$1,307.25 and we have had our money's worth out of it. In 1923 it became our Town Offices until 1948 when the present one was erected. The old lock up was sold and moved to West Dennis where it is now generating taxes for the town. Talk about Yankee thrift!! But, back to crime.

During the 1890's and early 1900's we find town expenses of \$1.50 to certain persons for "watching the streets" on the night of July 3rd. It was the custom of some young men to start celebrating the 4th of July a little early by ringing church bells, setting bonfires, putting someone's wagon up on the roof, tipping over outhouses, etc. In fact, Mr. Osborne Snow, East Dennis blacksmith had his outhouse overturned while he was still in it! In West Dennis these activities were the warm-up for the Antiques and Horribles Parade--and we think our Victorian ancestors lived staid, decorous lives!

For many yaars July 3rd and 4th continued to be a time of merriment and deviltry to the dismay of the yearly appointed "street watchers" and in 1914 it got out of hand. A few boys in Dennis Port decided to celebrate the 4th not with a bonfire but with a little arson. The old Burgess windmill stood on Chase Avenue near Job Chase's Wharf overlooking Nantucket Sound. For years it had served as a mill to grind corn, wheat and salt, but by 1914 it had been standing idle and abandoned for some considerable time. The local boys used it as a convenient place to change their clothes to and from the beach. On the night of July 3 some of the more foolhardy youth in the village set fire to the windmill and it burned to the ground. No one was ever apprehended or charged with the crime. Edward P. Chase of Dennis Port, now 94, who told me the story--and knows who did it--has steadfastly refused to tell me who was involved, so I guess this will go down as one of Dennis' unsolved crimes.

There will be more next time about some other altercations in Dennis. Our town has certainly had a varied and checkered criminal past.

CALENDAR

Mar. 9 7:30 P.M. DHS Board meets with Lu.  
 Mar. 17 Happy St. Patrick's Day!  
 Apr. 17 2:00 P.M. Indian program at Carleton Hall. Details next month.

**CHASING THE BLUES AWAY**

Congratulations to all the hardy souls who made it to the Mid-Winter Festivity! We understand a few of our friends did not get dug out in time to join us at Christine's Restaurant. They missed a grand time. Mary Hood Hagler, the founding mother of our yearly event, would have been proud of the enthusiasm generated by all in banishing those mid-winter doldrums.

President Lu Crowell presented certificates of appreciation to our guests of honor, Past Presidents Richard and Nancy Howes. Dick also received a gift certificate to Hart Farm and Nancy was presented with a silver pitcher on loan from DHS to help her when she presides each year at the Col. Negus Punch and the mulled cider duties at our Christmas Open House. Dick and Nancy have dedicated many hours furthering the success of DHS. Lu also presented lovely bouquets to Gertrude Lailey and Phyllis Horton for their work in DHS. Carol Horton won a pair of tickets to Sturbridge Village donated for a door prize by Betsy Hall Wentworth. Pauline Nickerson Kennedy won two Sunday Brunches donated by Christine's, and Patricia Swain won the cyclamen centerpiece.

We were serenaded by the Mid Cape Chorus. The chorus, under the direction of Ruth Treen, are normally 54 strong but only 32 were able to get there. With 32 voices sounding that good I can't imagine how the full chorus would sound. They entertained us with show tunes, patriotic songs, a sing-along, and romantic ballads that went very well with the Valentine theme selected by Program Chairman Gertrude Lailey. Two of our members, George Nottle, USN (Ret.) and his lovely bride Tommi received a special serenade and applause as they were celebrating their 50th anniversary. We all wished them many more happy years together. All in all--a very successful blues-chasing afternoon. Thanks, Mary!

**SNOW... AGAIN**

As I sit writing this we are being advised of storm # 15 headed our way. It is supposed to be a grand dad of a storm. Let's hope all those weather prognosticators are wrong and we get off easy. Still, no matter what we get its doubtful it could surpass the Great Snow of 1717. The following is from the Obed Howes (1797-1870) Collection and makes our winter pale by comparison.

"Great snow 1717 when Grandmother Howes was born. It started snowing February 21st and continued snowing for 21 days. People had to be removed from the second story of their buildings, and many cattle perished. This statement made to me by my mother Sept. 22, 1848 and many times previous. (Signed) Obed Howes. The above was Grandmother Howes, wife of Great Sam, so called, her maiden name Sturgis--daughter of Edward Sturgis, Yarmouth. The above recorded for the satisfaction of those who may come after."

Life in 1717, under the best of conditions, was hard and physically taxing. Water came from the well outside, wood for the fireplace was stacked outside, and often extra food supplies were stored in an outbuilding. The first few days of that snow would have been an inconvenience as livestock was tended and wood and water brought inside. Imagine the distress when they were no longer able to perform these tasks and resorted to melting snow to drink and burning their furniture to keep from freezing. Lives were lost, livestock perished, and wolves roamed close to the homesteads. Even after the snow stopped falling it must have taken some time for the people to be able to leave their homes and get about. We'd best not complain--relatively speaking, our winter has been a breeze!

**AN OLD IRISH VERSE**

Here's a little greeting for all our Irish friends--and everyone else who is 'Irish for a day' on March 17th:

May the road rise up to meet you,	And the rains fall soft upon your fields,
May the wind be always at your back,	And until we meet again,
May the sun shine warm upon your face,	May God hold you in the palm of His hand.

Author Unknown

And may ye be in heaven a half hour  
 Before the divil knows ye're gone!  
 Also Anon.

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