



Dennis Historical Society

Newsletter

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The next Board Meeting will be conducted by email on Tuesday, October 13th

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

GRANDMA CROWELL

(Louisa M. Sears Crowell 1852-1951)

Musings of a Great Granddaughter

Grandma Crowell was my great grandmother, Louisa Maria (pron. Mariah) Sears Crowell. When young she was known as Lulu and by the time she married she went by Louie!

Born in 1852, supposedly at sea, she never knew her father. Her given name was Catherine Martin, Martin being a very hard name to research. Knowing of only my great grandfather on my mother's side, Robert Mitchell Taylor, who is Irish, I'm wondering if Louisa is Irish, as I have a fair amount of Irish in my DNA. Of course it's just as likely she is English. Her mother's name was Margaret Martin, and there is a good possibility that she was not actually married to the father, who supposedly was a seaman and died at sea sometime before 1855, when she was adopted.

Might her adoption at age 3 by Captain Joshua & Minerva Handren Sears (who apparently had been unable to bear children) have helped to lead little Lulu to a much nicer life than living with her unmarried, uneducated single mother? As she grew, did she ever wonder about what her future held or who her parents were? At what point did she learn she was adopted? Could she have imagined all the changes in the world and the inventions she would have seen in her 98 ½ years on this earth—almost all of them lived right here on Quivet Neck in East Dennis?

Her father was a well-known clipper ship captain, Joshua Sears, traveling the world and gone for years at a time. What a hardy, hard-working people were these inhabitants of Quivet Neck. Young boys at 12-13 years of age went to sea as cabin boys, thus beginning their lives as seamen. They progressed to cook's helpers and worked their way up—literally, up the masts, and finally becoming mates and captains. When the men were away, it was up to the wives and children to tend the garden and any livestock, doing all that was entailed in order to live. By the time she was 5, she was on a year-long voyage around the world with her parents and her pony, FlyFly, on the clipper ship Wild Hunter, built right here in our Sesuit Harbor by the Shivericks. I cannot imagine me at 5 doing that--sailing on a boat with only the wind for power and no bathroom, weathering storms at sea! Ah, but times were different when I made my appearance and she knew nothing else!

Little Lulu knew nothing of indoor plumbing or electricity until the late 1800s. When she was adopted, Sesuit Harbor just down the street from her home was a busy place. The Shivericks were busy building ships over on Sesuit Neck and many of the hundreds of workers boarded here on Quivet. In fact, there was actually a foot bridge across the creek. What did she think of the vast numbers of salt vats decorating the harbor and shores of the Cape? Maybe they were just a fact of life taken for granted. Perhaps they were dwindling by the time Lulu arrived in East Dennis. They had begun during the Revolutionary War (1776) when the harbors were blocked. Without electricity, salt was the only means of preserving fish and meat. The process was designed by a neighbor, Sleepy John Sears. Even during the War of 1812 salt was scarce. The industry died out in the 1880s when salt mines were opened in New York.

When she was 9, in 1860, the Civil War broke out. I wonder what her impressions of that time were? Was she old enough to understand that at the end of the war slavery was abolished. She may not have realized that Cape Cod played quite a part in the Underground Railroad, or that a number of her neighbors harbored these slaves on their way to Canada to freedom, as this wasn't a subject for conversation. The "safe houses" had to be kept secret. Her future father-in-law was a stop on the railroad. Her father was still at sea, but a German border, Frederick Bergman, enlisted in the 43rd Massachusetts Volunteer Militia under the name of Thomas H. Hall. Did the \$250 signing bonus spur him on, or was it really his patriotism, as he claims! (See the Frederick Bergman file to learn about his relationship to the Sears') (The well-known Hall family lived right around the corner so perhaps he thought this a credible name!)

Surely, being from a seafaring family and community, Lulu must have heard about the numerous shipwrecks around

the Cape, especially those claimed by the outer banks. With each one did it cause her renewed worry about her own father?

When young, Lulu knew only travel by horse & buggy, or by sea. A trip from East Dennis to New York City took five days by stage coach. By 1855, the Gold Rush had become a precursor to a world of travel that would vastly increase in her lifetime. Young Thomas Hall, a local boy, shipped as crew with his neighbor, Joshua Sears. When they arrived in California, he and a friend jumped ship to head to the gold fields to make their fortune! At some point, they arrived back home with no fortune to show! The railroad finally made it to Dennis in the 1850s. By the time she was 60, the automobile had replaced the horse and buggy, and the Model T was being mass produced by Henry Ford. Now the trip to New York would take only 7 hours!

What was 13 year old Lulu doing in 1865, when Lincoln was assassinated? Her parents sent her to Dean Academy in Franklin, MA, where she graduated in 1875 at 23 as the valedictorian. I have her valedictory address. I wish I knew what major she pursued. The next year, 1876, at 24, she married her neighbor, Edwin Dillingham Crowell, 25, son of Captain Prince Sears Crowell (a retired ship captain, and one of the financiers of the Shiverick Shipyard) & Polly D. Foster Crowell. Edwin was a farmer and a surveyor. Unfortunately, Edwin died of consumption (TB) 6/10/1897 at the age of 46. That left Louisa with 5 children, Minerva Evelyn – 20, Louis Austen - 19, Gertrude – 15, Edwin Dillingham, Jr. – 11, and Mildred – almost 6.

At some point after that, Grandma had to have an operation for gall stones. There still were no electricity or phones on the lower Cape and no hospital or ambulances. According to her daughter, Aunt Mil, she was put on a cot and taken to the train depot in a baggage wagon, and then put on an early train in the baggage car! She was taken to Boston and then transferred to a hospital (Mass General?). Somehow she pulled through. I probably would have died on the way to the train in a wagon! They did send her home with a nurse!

When she was 60, in 1912, the “unsinkable” Titanic took its maiden voyage, struck an iceberg and sank! How much world news made its way to East Dennis at that time? In this year (2020) of the coronavirus, it makes me wonder if Dennis was impacted by the Spanish Flu of 1918. I read it was in Chatham. Louisa would have been 66. Did she have to quarantine or wear a mask? In 1926, when Grandma was 74, young Queen Elizabeth was born. According to the 1850 census, there were 3,257 people living in Dennis; by 1951, when she died, the population had taken a sharp decline and there were only 2,499 people—about the only thing that declined in her lifetime. Millard Fillmore was president when she was born and she lived through 21 presidents, including Lincoln, Grant, both Roosevelts and Truman!! There were 31 states in 1852, and when she died only Alaska & Hawaii were missing!

She also lived to see the Spanish American War (1898), WWI (1914-18) in which her daughter, Minerva, was a “Reconstruction Aide” (Physical Therapist!) in France and World War II (1941-45), when she was 89. Could she have imagined the Wright Brothers inventing flight in 1903 with the first commercial flight in 1914. To my knowledge she never actually took a flight. The telephone with its multi-party lines came about 1915, but who knows when they actually had one! As long as I can remember, they had a party line. You had to know your own special ring. There was one lady who seemed to spend all day on the phone (sort of like people are now with their cell phones!) This lady obviously listened in on other calls to get some gossip as you could hear the click when she picked up the receiver! Minerva had quite a strong mind and spoke it. On March 3, 1913, she marched on Washington with the suffragettes. We actually have a picture of her with the group. She marched again right down 5th Avenue in New York in 1917. What did Grandma think of her spirited daughter? Was she proud? They won the right to vote in 1919-20. This, however, did not give ALL women the right. The rules varied state to state and town to town. Native Americans couldn't vote until 1924, and women of color, not until 1964! Many places you had to have a certain amount of property. If your husband qualified to vote, and was away, you could vote in his place. Did the Great Depression interfere with her life in any way? How did it affect Cape Cod? She never had much money since her husband died at such an early age. Did her garden supply enough? Were they able to get meat, etc?

Having seen so many innovations and changes in her lifetime, it's hard to imagine which one she thought to be the most profound. She died when I was in 7th grade. I was still a kid and now could kick myself for not knowing enough to ask her these questions myself. Ah, hindsight! Grandma Crowell certainly left her own legacy for us. To remember her past is to embrace our future!

Barbara (Bo) Eastman Durst

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So once again, thanks to a reader willing to share a family narrative, we have learned more about our town, our history and the people who lived it! Thank you so much Bo for sending such a wonderful story!

Contributions to the newsletter are greatly appreciated. ***Our Memories are our History!***

A couple of months ago, DHS Board Member, Betsy Harrison, gave me a short story which was written by her grandfather, Rev. John Stanton, after he retired from the ministry. It captures a glimpse into our past which only someone who had lived in those times can describe. We all could use a bit of light-hearted fun in our lives these days, and I hope this story makes you smile too. Thank you Betsy!

The Last Whistle

Inevitably, the time would come when trains would stop running between Hyannis and Provincetown. Cars, busses and trucks put them out of business. Cape Cod kept building wider and straighter roads, so more cars could go faster. Zip.....zip.....zip.....zip, they go day and night!

The railroads first took off its passenger trains and concentrated on freight, mostly sand. Then it started carrying one passenger coach attached to the sand train. But finally, even that wasn't needed, and later, an ancient and colorful tradition passed into oblivion - the train that had for more than eighty years chugged back and forth through the center of the Cape, through scrub oak and dwarf pine groves, through cranberry bogs and with sight of lovely little lakes, ("ponds") to Cape Codders would soon run from Hyannis to Provincetown for the last time.

When the announcement was made in the *Oracle*, the *Register* and the *Standard Times*, that on a certain day, the train would make its last run, Caleb Crowell decided it would be a good idea to ride on the last train and have something to tell his grandchildren.

So, he went to the passenger agent and applied for permission. "Just tell the trainman," the agent said, "that you want to ride, and he'll take you aboard."

But the trainman felt differently. "I don't have the authority to let you ride," he said; "ask the agent."

"I asked him," Caleb said. "Then ask him again," he said, "but I can't let you ride."

"Sorry, I can't give you permission," the agent said, "but I might lose my job." "Then, how do I get on the train?" Caleb asked. "There must be some way." "Call the District Agent," the agent said, "He has the right to let you ride." "What's his name?" "Mr. Jones."

"Mr. Jones," Caleb said, "I'm Caleb Crowell and I want to ride your last train. Will you grant me the privilege? I expect to pay." "We're not carrying any passengers officially," Mr. Jones said, "I suggest you just go to the station and tell the trainman you want to ride." "I did that." "What did he say?" "Said he couldn't let me." "Then ask the agent." "I did that, too." "What did he say?" "Said I should call you." "You know we're bankrupt, Mr. Crowell, and the only person who has any authority is the Trustee." "What's his name?" "Mr. Cabot, a lawyer in Boston."

"Mr. Cabot," Caleb said, "I'm Caleb Crowell, and I want permission to ride your last Cape Cod train. May I do that?" "Mr. Crowell," Mr. Cabot said, "It wasn't necessary for you to call me; I don't have anything to do with the operation of the railroad; just tell the trainman you want to ride." "I did that, Mr. Cabot." "Then ask the agent." "I did that, too." "H...m...I'll tell what you should do." "What? Mr. Cabot," Caleb asked eagerly. "I'm very anxious to ride on the last train."

"Do you have a piece of paper?" Mr. Cabot asked. "Yes, Mr. Cabot." "Then, take down these words," the lawyer instructed, "and hand the paper to the trainman, and tell him I said you could ride." "Thanks. Mr. Cabot, I'm ready."

"I hereby absolve and excuse the Cape Cod Railroad, and all agents and trustees thereof, individually and corporately, from any and all liability in case of my injury, and all responsibility for my welfare, and I hereby direct that my survivors are hereby forbidden and legally forbidden and legally prohibited from instituting proceedings of liability against the railroad, and (or) the trustees and agents of receivership, for any accident, mishap or injury, however minor, that may occur while I am riding the train, or trespassing on their property."

Signed and witnessed,

Caleb Crowell

"Did you get that?" Mr. Crowell. "I did, Mr. Cabot, and thank you." "Have a nice ride." Caleb went to the station, armed with the paper, and the trainman let him ride.

It was a delightful summer's day, and the lakes, dunes and white houses glistened in the sun. Caleb relaxed and took in the scenery. This was an epochal journey, he thought. No Ford or Rockefeller could ever do what he was doing.

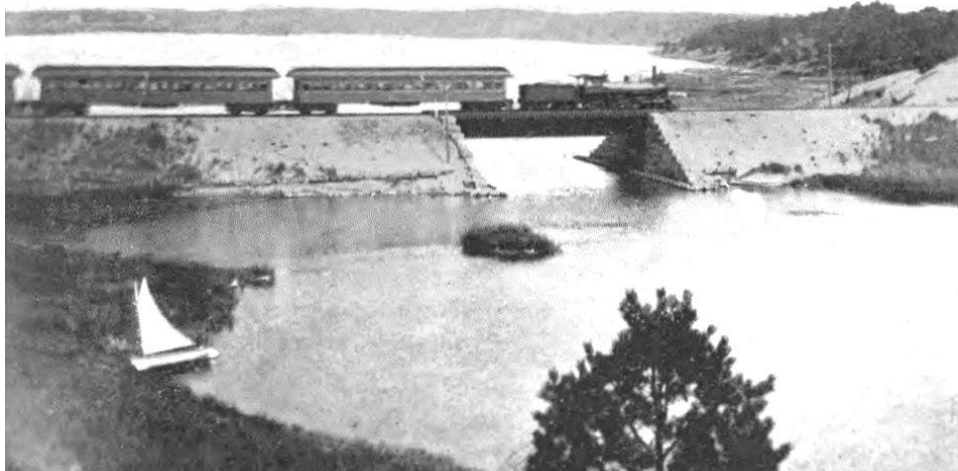
The trainman blew the whistle at South Yarmouth. The last whistle! He thought, and I'm immortal! The only one in the world to take this ride! I'll tell my grandchildren.

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Image from our Past



From the Dennis Historical Society's Digital Archives

As if this wonderful image were created just to be an illustration for Rev. John Stanton's short story, a steam locomotive crosses the Bass River Railroad Bridge heading east having just left South Yarmouth.

Moments before, "the trainman blew the whistle"....*The Last Whistle!*

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Sadly, because of the coronavirus, all of the remaining events on the DHS 2020 Calendar have been cancelled.

Coming soon, Dick Howes sets the record straight about September's *Image from our Past!*