



# Dennis Historical Society Newsletter

Volume 28, number 12

December 2005

**DHS Board Meetings** are open to all interested members. Our next board meeting will be on **Wednesday December 14 at 3P.M.** at the Josiah Dennis Manse.



The Historical Society of Old Yarmouth invites you to join them **Sunday, December 4** from 1-4 P.M. for their **Christmas Stroll** Along Route 6A in Yarmouth Port



**DHS Christmas Open House at the Manse**

**Sunday, December 11  
Noon-4:00 P.M.**

Festive decorations of winter greenery and berries transform the Josiah Dennis Manse into a Colonial wonderland. Costumed interpreters share the history of the house.

Refreshments.

77 Nobscusset Road  
Dennis Village

## *Searching for Santa*

**I know Santa was here in 1933 because Betty Dean Holmes wrote:**

*We lived in Dennis Port. Our house and connecting store were right on Main Street in the center of town. ....Our Dad had put colored lights on the evergreen trees outside our house and in the store windows....Dad put a speaker in the doorway outside his radio and record store and played records of Christmas music for the Dennis Port shoppers to hear all over Main Street.*

*We four little kids, Sally, Priscilla, Betty and Louis, Jr., ages seven, six, five and three, could hardly wait for Santa Claus. We had a very tall Christmas tree in the bay window of our living room. For security, Dad nailed the tree base to the floor. We mixed up flour and water to make paste for red and green construction paper chains to put on the tree. We made cranberry and popcorn garlands, too. When Christmas Eve came we finished decorating the tree, finally putting on tinsel, and we were very excited. We left out our long tan cotton stockings that we wore to school in winter. We had no fireplace, so we just laid the stockings over the back of a chair near the Christmas tree. We put out milk and cookies for Santa before we went to bed ....*

*Our bedroom had no heat so we had flannel sheets and several wool blankets on our beds. We took hot water bottles to bed with us. We wore flannel pajamas and on very cold nights a sweater over our pj's. (On bitter cold nights we might even put on a stocking cap for extra warmth. If it was zero outside, it was zero in that north bedroom.)*

*Christmas morning finally arrived. By about five A.M. we were clamoring to see if Santa had come. Dad said we must wait till Mother was seated in the living room and he had stoked the fire for warmth. At last we rushed into the living room and saw the lighted tree. Oh, it was a magical moment. And Santa Claus had left lots of presents for us. There was a new dy-dee doll for each girl. We received tiny clotheslines and clothes pins for the flannel doll diapers..... Louis, Jr. got a bouncing horse he could ride and a new red wagon.... In our lumpy stockings Christmas morning we found ten shiny pennies, a lovely orange in the toe, and small presents including a box of new crayons, drinking bottles for the dolls, and a few walnuts in the shell, and a big peppermint candy cane sticking out of the top of the stocking.*

Proof positive, you see, that Santa was right here in Dennis in 1933!

### ***Searching for Santa, cont.***

Nancy Reid notes in her *History* (p. 204) that *The Stone diaries* (Nathan Stone was minister from 1764-1804) tell us a great deal about the life of an orthodox Congregational parish in eighteenth century New England. Stone makes no mention of either Christmas or Easter throughout his long ministry, although both are mentioned in the *Low Almanac* in which his daily notes are interleaved. Each year at the end of November or the first week in December, a Day of General Thanksgiving was held. We know that Puritans passed an anti-Christmas law in 1659, but it was repealed in 1681. Though it may have been repealed, there was no celebrating here in Dennis. Miriam Howes Crowell Westwood wrote her family memories in a booklet *Dennis Days Gone By*. She notes (p19): *When Father* (Aaron L. Crowell, 1848-1919) *and Aunt Mary were children, school was kept on Christmas, and no celebration was held in the churches. It "savored of popery", but Thanksgiving was the big day of celebration.*

#### **So where was old Santa then?**

According to B. K. Swartz, Jr. in his research of *The Origin of American Christmas Myth and Customs*, "St. a Claus" was made an important figure (Saint of the City of New York) by English Americans and first mentioned in the *Riverton Gazateer*, New York, December 23, 1773. There seems to be no further mention of Santa Claus until 1793. Mr. Swartz speculates that he may have "gone underground," being an anti-British figure during the Revolutionary War. *He may have been the precursor of Uncle Sam who first appears during the War of 1812. Americans may have chosen the figure of St. Nicholas to oppose the British symbolic leader, St. George. It is interesting to note that in the first illustration of Santa Claus by Nast in 1863—Civil War, he is attired in a star spangled jacket and striped pants. But that's not the Santa we're looking for!*

Can we find him still in New York? In 1804 John Pintard and others founded the New York Historical Society, Pitard making St. Nicholas the society's patron saint. ... Washington Irving joined the society the following year and attended the annual St. Nicholas day banquet. In 1809 Irving mentions hanging up a stocking on the chimney. An 1815 poem asks Santa to bring gifts for children's stockings. **Hmmm.**

In 1821 William B. Gilley in New York wrote *A Children's Friend*:

*Old Santeclaus with much delight  
His reindeer drives this frosty night  
O'er chimney tops, and tracks of snow  
To bring his yearly gifts to you.*

The better-known classic, *'Twas the Night Before Christmas*, by Clement C. Moore was written for Christmas in 1822 and published the next year in the Troy, New York *Sentinal*. An illustrated book of the poem was published in 1848. So Santa is becoming more well-known. And he's getting closer! Feminist Katherine Lee Bates (1859-1929), who was born in Falmouth right here on Cape Cod, joined the Santa chorus around 1890 with her poem *Goody Santa Claus* :

*Santa, must I tease in vain, Deer? Let me go and hold the reindeer.  
While you clamber down the chimneys. Don't look savage as a Turk!  
Why should you have all the glory of the joyous Christmas story,  
And poor little Goody Santa Claus have nothing but the work?*

Also about 1890 a Mr. James Edgar of Brockton, Mass. became the first store Santa Claus and in 1897 Francis P. Church in the *New York Sun* assured Miss O'Hanlan—**Yes, Virginia. There is a Santa Claus.**

**Now we're getting somewhere!**

Can you believe it? **The Santa we know today** arrived as an advertising promotion in 1931 for Coca-Cola. (Oh, dear, were they right about all this commercialism and Christmas? After all, a 1939 pamphlet which introduced Rudolph the red-nosed reindeer, was thanks to Robert L. May and Montgomery Ward, Chicago.) In Swartz's *Christmas Myths and Customs* he writes: *Gift giving in colonial America was based on class differences, the poor accosting the rich and demanding food, drink and money. In the 1820's, borrowing from the New York Dutch, gift giving was transferred to gifts for the children from the parents. Moore's poem may have been a factor in this. This started Christmas commercialization. Christmas shopping was encouraged to overcome the 1839-40 depression. So is this what Santa is really all about? I don't think so, Virginia. Go back to page 1 and read again the joy and happiness surrounding the family memories of a 1933 Christmas morning in Dennis Port. I think you'll find the real Santa there! (And take heart! I just heard that Coca-Cola has replaced Santa in this year's ads with a polar bear!)*



Hadden H. Sundblom, illustrator

## Member News

Yes, Friends of DHS, **there is a Santa!** **The spirit of giving is alive and well, and we are most grateful for it.** Many of our **Life Members**, hearing that our General Fund had ended in the red for the last fiscal year, sent us a special gift this year for programs and newsletters. Thanks to

**Ruth Baxter**

**James Coogan**

**Seth Crowell**

**Virginia Devine**

**Susan & Henry Kelley**

**Barbara McNear**

**Judith November**

**Mary & William Raycraft**

**Pat Rothermel**

Also thanks for a surprise donation from **James G. Holmes** from Danville CA. He came to Dennis to research his ancestor **Elnathan Eldredge** who died at sea on Dec. 12, 1837. And a most gracious thank you to the **Howes Family Association** for a special donation as well.

Welcome to new members **Eric & Lynn Anderson** of East Dennis and **Patricia Kelley-Staab** of Meadview, AZ.

Our deepest sympathy goes to the family of long-time member **Ann C. Chalmers** who died at 94. She gave many hours over many years to the 1801 Jericho Historical Center in W. Dennis.

### You're going on a bus tour, where?

Those were the incredulous words of member **Rosemary LoVuolo's** children when they heard that the tour was around **Dennis**. After all, the LoVuolos had been coming here since 1972 and had moved here permanently in 1988. What more could **Rosemary** possibly want to know about Dennis? I think they were pleasantly surprised to find out. **Nancy Reid** was the bus tour guide and **Rosemary** reported that she'd heard stories about Dennis that she'd never imagined! Lunch at the Manse instead of the picnic that had been planned made it even more special, thanks to **June and Pete Howes** who managed to set up tables and chairs in the nick of time.

**Dennis Historical Society**  
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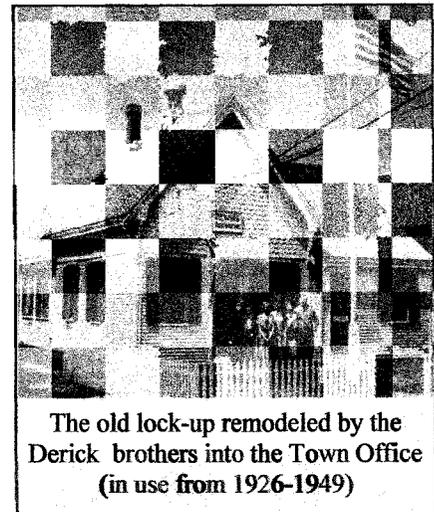
## The Way We Were — Bus Tour 2005

*by Fred H. Jones*

I am the third generation of my family to **take up residence at the 'old homestead'** here in Dennis, and I thought that I had a pretty **good idea of the history of the town.** This **narrated** tour sure opened my eyes!

It was **raining on Saturday morning, October 29<sup>th</sup> as we boarded our busses.** Everybody was **anticipating the tour and just ignored the rain.** The tour was a **4+ hr trip back into the past, and we meandered our way across the Cape, from village to town and back.** As we passed the still standing homes of our past, our guide gave us an **informational talk on each and it's place in history.** Due to the inclement weather, we were all treated to a **box lunch at the Manse and served by some of the 'local wenches and boys'.** It was a fine opportunity to **again view this magnificently restored and maintained part of our past.** After lunch it was off again to **tour the north side of town and then back to the Dennis Senior Center right on schedule.**

A few of my favorite pieces of history—the fact that so many of these buildings were picked up and moved to other locations in the town - and at a time when there were only strong backs and horses to provide the power; and the old Burying ground behind the Town Offices - I never before noticed the cemetery - must have too many cars in the parking lot.. Also, I had no idea there were so many 1700's buildings still standing and in use in the town! Another stunning revelation was a description of the 1944 Hurricane which devastated the south coast of Dennis - what 1944 hurricane? Guess you will have to take the tour the next time to find out.



The old lock-up remodeled by the Derick brothers into the Town Office (in use from 1926-1949)

*Do you know where this building is now?*