



# Dennis Historical Society Newsletter

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[Undated article, probably from the *Yarmouth Register* in about March 1888:]

## ANCIENT HOUSES.

A paper read before Cape Cod Historical Society,  
Feb. 22, 1888, by Capt THOMAS P. HOWES.

Coming into Dennis, I can remember some twenty old-fashioned two-story houses. They were built from the timber grown in our own woods, oak and pine. The boards and shingles were imported; bricks were made at our own kilns. The framing differed somewhat from that in vogue in these days. In the construction of the two-story houses, the timbers that supported the garret floors projected beyond the front of the building, and the rafters were tenanted into them, so as to form the heavy jet, and also binding the frame firmly together. A huge piece of timber, called the "summer tree," formed the support for the sleepers of the chamber floor. As most of the old houses were upon somewhat low ground, it was not safe to dig a deep cellar, and so to give convenient height to the walls, the floor was raised some few feet, and a bedroom built over the cellar. This was called the "stair bedroom," and was common to most of the houses built in the last century. If there was a maiden lady in the family it was usually her private apartment, and here were stored the heirlooms of the family – the ancient chest of drawers, and the old looking glass of some grandmother and other precious articles of inherited household goods.

Along on both sides of the brook which runs through the ancient village of the Nobscussetts, stood, within my recollection, eleven of these old homes of the father, – Halls, Crowells, Vincents, Eldridges and Howeses had erected dwellings on the low ground where water was plenty and the soil good. In one the minister resided, the Rev. Josiah Dennis, a name still fragrant with pleasant memories. This house is standing and can boast of a "stair bedroom."

Our first minister in the east precinct, as every one knows, was the Rev. Josiah Dennis. He endeared himself to the people of his charge by his upright character, uniform kindness and mirthfulness of disposition. Many anecdotes have been preserved of his quiet humor. He once gave one of his neighbors who was going to Boston, in a vessel, a memorandum of some articles to be procured. When this person came to consult his list he could make nothing of it. He brought it back to Mr. Dennis, who himself could not read it. "Well," he said, "I did not write it to read myself, I wrote it for you to read." Another time, returning from a marriage, where the contracting parties were a Mr. Robbins and a Miss Crowell, he met a friend who inquired where he had been. "Oh," he said, "to marry a Robin to a Crow." It seems he kept a small store in a part of his house, where the rats had gnawed a hole through the floor. The simple hearted old divine had placed a bag of shot over the hole to keep the rats out. The result was the loss of his shot down the hole. When Mr. Dennis saw how the experiment had turned out, he good naturedly exclaimed, "I have shot a rat." Going to Eastham to exchange, he found upon his desk, or in the pulpit, a large number of notes – as they were called – of persons about to leave home for a voyage to sea. Looking them over he noticed there were only two names among them, so holding them in his hand, as he rose to pray, he said, "Here are a parcel of Cooks and Cobbs desiring prayers of this church and congregation, being bound to sea." Mr. Dennis and his successor, the Rev. Nathan Stone, were men of the highest character, and their united labors covered three-fourths of a century. The ashes of both, as well as the Rev. Caleb Holmes, who had a comparatively short ministry, rest in the cemetery at Dennis. There does not seem to have been any great disturbing questions in theology to trouble the peace of the church during the ministry of these devout and blameless men. Whatever we may now think of the dogmas held by the churches of their day, there can be no doubting the value of the practical teaching of the pulpit in forming the character of the people.

Burt Derick

## An Unusual Find

Tucked in among the 350+ items from the Gertrude (Geta) Crowell Collection was a unique document. It is a deed for a pew in the East Parish Church of Yarmouth.

The Town of Yarmouth was settled in 1639 and included all of present day Yarmouth and Dennis. One of the first obligations of those first settlers was erect a place of worship. It was built in present day Yarmouth Port about where a playground now sits on Route 6A. Everyone was required by law and by their own consciences, for they were staunch Puritans, to attend church. Failure to do so would bring a fine.

Towards the end of the century the second generation to be born here plus new families that moved here increased the population to where the old meeting house was severely strained for space. The folks in Nobscusset (now Dennis) were thinking that a new church closer to home would be fine with them.

By 1716 feelings were running so high on whether there should be one church or two and where it should be located that it was decided to get an outside committee to hear the pros and cons and make their decision. The townspeople would abide by their findings.

Capt. Thompson of Middleboro, John Bacon of Barnstable and Chillingsworth Foster of Harwich decided in favor of one church to be built near the original one. They also recognized that the major portion of the population lived in the eastern part of town and that, if conditions remained the same in ten years, those families would be allowed to form a new precinct and parish with the town to help with financial aid.

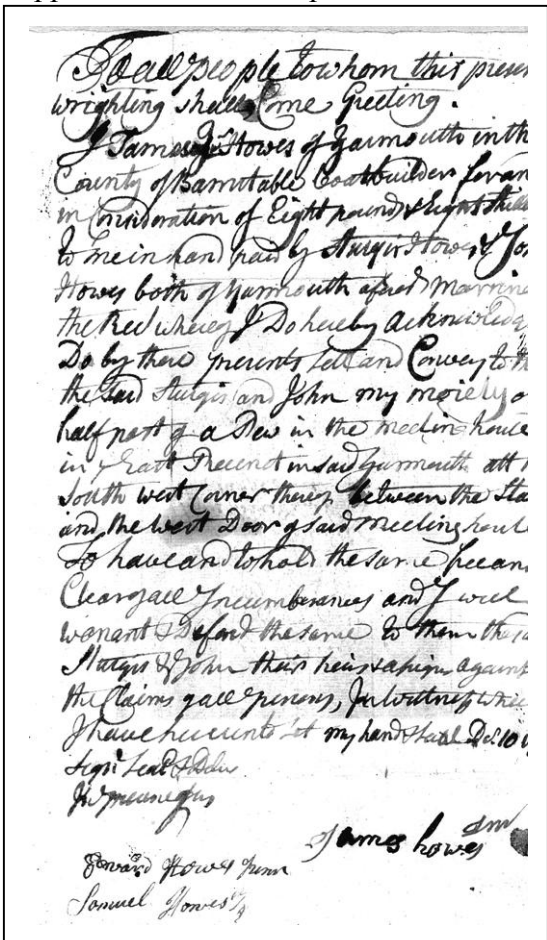
A new larger meeting house was built and in 1721/2 the Town Meeting voted to divide the town into two parishes, five years earlier than had been agreed on.

The last day of February 1721/2 the East Parish was formed and Judah Paddock (1691-\_\_\_) was appointed clerk of the precinct. A meeting called for March 7 elected the precinct officials and voted to build a meeting house "this present Year". It was to be "fifty feet by

sixty feet with galleries on three sides and an elevated pulpit as high as the galleries". It was to be placed south of the Training Field in the middle of the present day ancient burying ground and it was to be completed in less than a year.

Once the new meeting house was built it was necessary to find a minister. The first invitation went out to Rev. Daniel Greenleaf minister of the First Parish Church of Yarmouth. He declined as he was unhappy about his church being divided. The second call was to David Deming of Medway. There is no record that he ever came here. The third call went out to Samuel Dexter. He preached here numerous times and called on every family in the parish but they seemed reluctant to hire him. He finally responded to a call from Dedham but wrote in his diary that he felt "more inclined to Nobscusset than to Dedham". Next was Barnabas Taylor of Yarmouth who applied for the position. He was given a temporary term of three months which was renewed two more times when the parish voted to hire him and he turned the offer down. The fifth candidate was Josiah Dennis—and the search was over. He preached here for thirty-eight years until his death in 1763. He was so beloved by his parish that our town was named for him when it was incorporated in 1793.

Every man was required to purchase a pew or part of a pew for his family. If he could not afford one his family sat in the public section with men on one side of the building and women on the other.



Our deed, dated December 10, 1770, transferred ownership of his “one half part of a Pew in the Meeting House in ye East Precinct in said Yarmouth at the South West Corner thereof between the Stairs and the West Door of said Meeting House”. James G. Howes sold his half pew to Sturgis Howes and John Howes for the sum of Eight Pounds and Eight Shillings. The deed was witnessed by Edward Howes, Junr and Samuel Howes.

This deed has now been archivally framed with a transcription by Burt Derick. The old writing is difficult to decipher.

DHS will put this deed on loan to the Dennis Union Church the successor to the East Parish Meeting House. The church is open week days. Stop at the Secretary’s office and she can direct you to its location. It is an interesting piece of our history.

Phyllis Horton

[1770-12-10; a framed deed of transfer of a pew in the Yarmouth East Meeting House from James G. Howes to Sturgis & John Howes:]

To all people to whom this present wrighting shall Come Greeting.

I, James G. Howes of Yarmouth in the County of Barnstable boatbuilder for and in Consideration of Eight pound & Eight Shillings to me in hand paid by Sturgis Howes & John Howes both of Yarmouth aforsd Marriners the Rec<sup>t</sup> whereof I Do hereby acknowledge Do by these presents Sell and Convey to them the said Sturgis and John my moiety or half part of a Pew in the meeting house in y<sup>e</sup> East Precinct in said Yarmouth at the South West Corner thereof between the Stairs and the West Door of said Meeting house To have and to hold the same free and Clear of all Incumbrances and I will warrant & Defend the same to them the said Sturgis & John their heirs & assigns against the Claims of all persons, In witness wherof I have hereunto Set my hand & Seal De<sup>c</sup> 10 1770

Sign<sup>d</sup> Seal<sup>d</sup> & Deliv<sup>d</sup>

In presence of us

James howes Jnr [seal]

Go[---]rd Howes Junr

Samuel Howes

### ***Congratulations to our Members***

We have had a wonderful response to our annual membership renewals. The sincere thanks from the Board of Directors to all of those folks who have renewed their memberships. And we send our very special thanks to our Lifetime Members who responded to our request for a contribution with an absolutely wonderful donation of \$1,990. Here’s our membership overview:

Contributing Membership	8
Family Membership	80
Individual Membership	94
Lifetime members	67
Supporting Membership	21
<b>Total</b>	<b>270</b>

### **Manse Update**

Manse repairs are in the final stretch with interior carpentry, floor sanding, painting and the like underway. Our estimate is contractor completion in December. Fill and landscaping are underway, but the loam and grass seed will wait for April when it is warm enough for grass to grow.

### **Board Meetings**

All members are invited to attend monthly DHS Board Meetings. The next meeting is at 7 pm on December 8<sup>th</sup> at the Jericho Historical Center, 90 Old Main St. West Dennis.

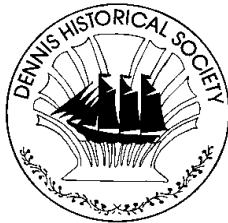
#### ***PLEASE NOTE – THE NEWSLETTER CANNOT BE FORWARDED***

Have a Seasonal address? Moving? PLEASE NOTIFY US at [dennishs@cape.com](mailto:dennishs@cape.com) or send us a note! The Post Office Will **Not** Forward Your Newsletter. You lose a newsletter and the USPS charges us \$\$\$.

When your newsletter is returned we have to remove you from the mailing list until we learn where you are.

Don’t miss a copy! Emailed Copies & Address Changes – We will *gladly* change your newsletter delivery to email *instead of* snail mail. Just drop a note to us at [dennishs@cape.com](mailto:dennishs@cape.com) with “Newsletter” in the subject line – or by regular mail. This is a wonderful way to keep your newsletter coming, especially if you’re a snowbird.

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



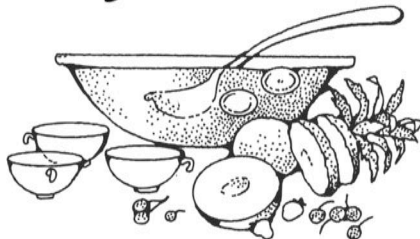
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RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

## Mark Your Calendars – Upcoming DHS Events

### *Christmas Open House*

*At Jericho Historical Center  
Saturday, December 18, 1-4*



- ❖ “Here We Come A Wassailing.....”
- ❖ Holiday Decorations And Refreshments
- ❖ Music by “**Cellobrations**”

90 Old Main Street  
West Dennis

### *~GIFT IDEAS~*

- GIVE A GIFT OF MEMBERSHIP TO  
*The Dennis Historical Society*  
*Keep Our History Alive*
- **Book Suggestions**  
*Scuttle Watch*  
*They Built Clipper Ships in Their Back Yard*  
*Cape Cod Remembrances*  
*Privateers, Pirates & Beyond*
- **Family Trees**  
*Howes*  
*Sears*

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