



Dennis Historical Society Newsletter January 2021

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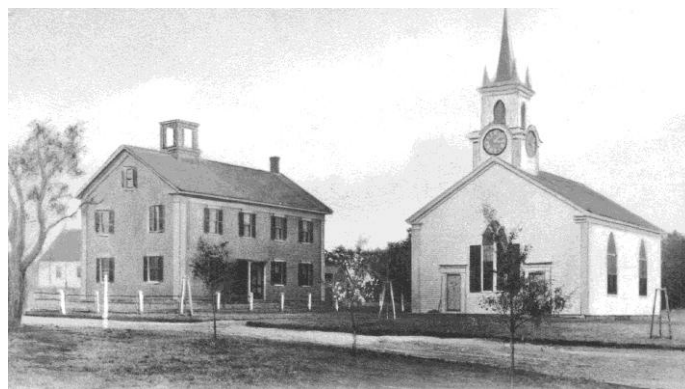
The next Board Meeting will be conducted by email on Tuesday, February 9th

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

The Graded Schools of Dennis

Recall, if you will, an image of school children standing in front of and on the roof of the *South Dennis Graded School* in the late 1880s. It appeared in a DHS newsletter last spring, May to be exact. Included was this information. “It was one of four such schools in Dennis. Only one, the *West Dennis Graded School* survives. There will be more about these schools in a future newsletter.” That moment has arrived. The information for this article was gleaned from Nancy Thatcher Reid’s incredible history of our town, *Dennis, Cape Cod*, and from the DHS Digital Archive.

First off, I was wrong, there were actually five such schools. Built between 1859 and 1867, the two story “graded schools” housed the town’s school children of all ages. The first was completed and opened in Dennis Village in November, 1859. According to *Dennis, Cape Cod*, “*The curriculum embraced many of the innovations which the academies had introduced in the previous decades. The children in the lower schools were still to spend their time on the ‘three Rs,’ but those who accomplished the requirements for the elementary level and move on to the grammar school would receive a much more liberal education.*”



Dennis Historical Society Digital Archive

These images show the first of the “graded schools.” It was located next to what was the Methodist Church at the time, now the Dennis Union Church. Note the cupola/bell tower, although its position on the roof varied, it was a feature common to all five of the schools. Carleton Hall can be seen to the left of the school in the second picture. A plaque marks the school’s former location to the right of the Dennis Fire Department Station #2. It is affixed to a fieldstone pedestal which supports the school’s bell. The casting of the bell, 1869, was 10 years after the completion of the school. The delay may have been caused by the shortage of castable metals during the American Civil War. The school was converted to a firehouse in 1931, and served as such until 1954. It was razed by the town in 1955.



Bell with Plaque



Plaque Enlarged



Bell with 1869 Casting Date

We turn once again to **Dennis, Cape Cod...** "After the first graded school was firmly established and accepted by the majority of the town's citizens, the committees of the two districts (Sesuit Neck and Quivet Neck) of East Dennis decided to follow suit. In January of 1862, it was announced that plans were being made to erect a new two story 'commodious' schoolhouse to be ready for occupancy in the fall." The school was built just to the west of Worden Hall on Main Street, now Rt. 6A/Old King's Hwy. The actual location was the X between Worden Hall and the town's community garden plots as seen in the satellite image.

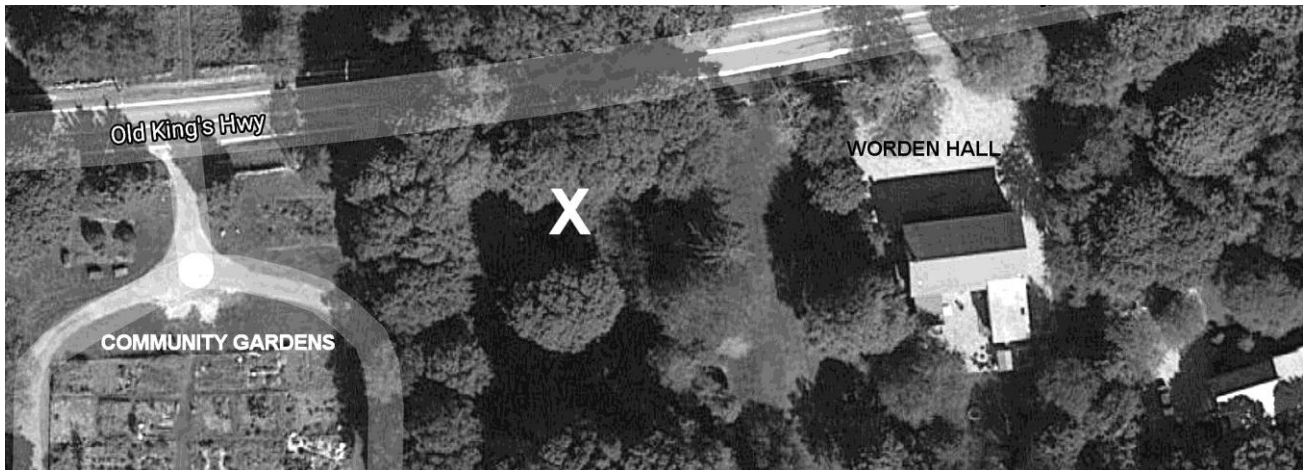
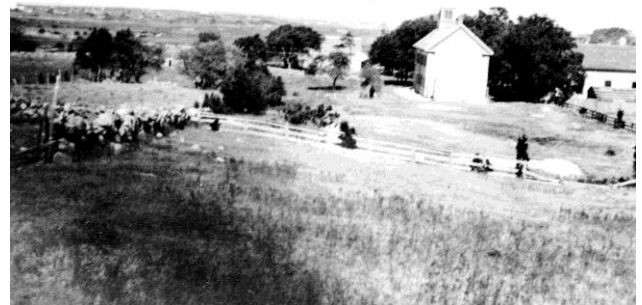


Image Courtesy of Google

The next two images are of the graded school in East Dennis and Worden Hall. They were taken from the fields behind the buildings. Main Street, Rt. 6A/Old King's Hwy is on the far side of both structures running west to east, left to right. Unlike the school in Dennis, this school's cupola/bell tower is at one gable end.



Dennis Historical Society Digital Archive

The graded school in East Dennis served area students until 1931. You will find out why later in this article. It was "demolished" in 1933.

The third graded school was in Dennis Port, the first one on the south side. Formerly the Unitarian Meeting House on Nantucket, the building was disassembled (flaked) and brought across the sound in 1865. It was located on Depot Street, just south of Main Street (Rt. 28) on the west side. Unique to this schoolhouse was its clock. It had one because Dennis Port was the only one of the Dennis villages without a church and clock. The school burned in March 1930.



Dennis Historical Society Digital Archive

At Town Meeting in 1867, it was voted to complete the graded school system so that each village would have its own. One would be constructed in South Dennis and another in West Dennis. The plaque at the former location of the *South Dennis Graded School* reads “1867.” If completion and opening actually occurred that fall, the construction must have occurred at a frenetic pace having just been approved at the town meeting. It continued as a graded school until 1931, doubling as the Dennis High School from 1915 to 1931. Thereafter, it served as the Town’s first Fire Station (#1) until 1949, and as a Highway Department Garage until 1956, when the property was sold and the building taken down.



Dennis Historical Society Digital Archive

The last graded school was built in West Dennis. It was also to serve as a school until 1931. In that year, the classes of the five graded schools in Dennis were consolidated into one building. At first called *The Dennis Consolidated School*, it was later renamed the *Ezra H. Baker School* honoring the man who donated the land on which the school was built.



Dennis Historical Society Digital Archive

Built almost concurrently from the same blue prints, one can see from the two sets of images that the South Dennis and West Dennis schools were nearly identical. Taken over 100 years apart from almost the same angle, the right hand of the two lower images of West Dennis shows that a chimney was removed from the left gable end. This occurred during the renovation which was completed in the year 2000. For more information about the *West Dennis Graded School*, please visit the DHS Website at www.dennishistoricalsociety.org. Click on the Newsletters tab, then select November 2000. There you will find a fascinating article about the school by our own Phyllis R. Horton.

This photo was emailed to me in November by DHS Board Member Ann Croston. The email was entitled, “stumped on a picture.” With all the research that Ann has done on the houses for her *Dennis Village Walking Tour – History Revisited*, I was surprised that there was anywhere in the village that she would need help indentifying. If any of our readers can identify the location from which the photo was taken and the structures depicted. Please email me the information to info@dennishistoricalsociety.org Thank you!



Dennis Historical Society Digital Archive

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The 2020 DHS Annual Appeal

By now, members will have received their Annual Appeal letter asking for support for wish list items for each of our three museums. If you haven't yet done so, please give generously! Your donations will greatly assist our museum volunteers in fulfilling our Society's

Mission Statement:

To Preserve, Protect & Promote the history of Dennis, Massachusetts

Looking for a Special Present?

Have you visited the DHS online Bookstore?

Type www.dennishistoricalsociety.org in your browser and then click on Bookstore. You will find a great selection of what might be the perfect gift for a birthday, graduation, or to tuck away for the next holiday season. Highly recommended is *Dennis, Cape Cod*, the definitive volume of Dennis History!

Happy New Year!

May the good in 2021 be better than the best of 2020, and the bad of 2020 fade quickly from our memories