



Dennis Historical Society

Newsletter

March 2021

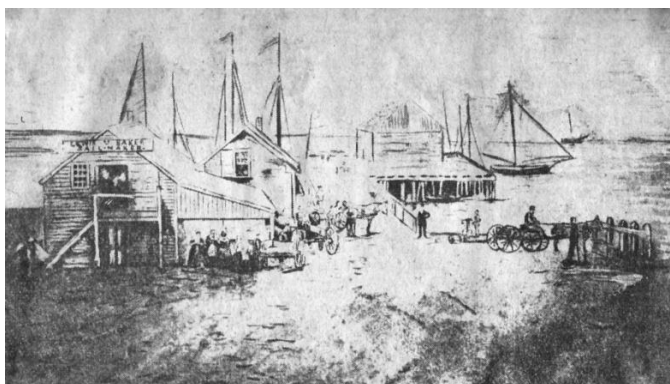
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The next Board Meeting will be conducted by email on Tuesday, April 13th

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

Imagining the Past

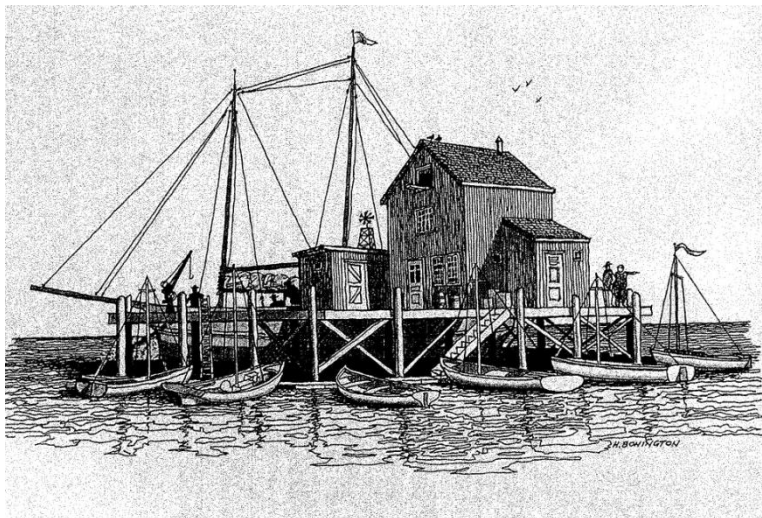


The Dennis Port wharf in the late 1860s. This scene depicts the activity at the end of Sea Street. The original, unsigned, hung in the home of Mrs. Z. H. Small of Dennis Port 75 years ago.

The April 2018 Newsletter, featured an article by Phyllis Horton about the search for a picture of the “wharves at Dennis Port.” Phyllis wrote, “When Nancy Thatcher Reid was going full-bore on writing the history of Dennis, she started a search for a picture of one of the wharves for her book, *Dennis, Cape Cod*.” Too late for Nancy’s book, the depiction seen here was found in a scrap book belonging to Michael Lincoln, who married Phyllis’s niece Janet Snow. The scrap book was made by Mike’s grandmother, and its existence was recalled by Mike’s father Fred. Finally, there was proof of one of the three 600’ wharves which stretched out into Nantucket Sound and gave Dennis Port its name.

It is amazing that after all those years and all that searching that a drawing of one of the wharves in Dennis Port should finally be found. But what if none had been? How would we know what the waterfront looked like over 150 years ago?

Recently, I received an email from local artist and long time DHS member Howard Bonington. Howard is famous for his pen and ink drawings of the historic homes and landmarks of Dennis, as well as the lightships and lighthouses of Cape Cod. In the email, Howard told me that he was fascinated by discussions he had with Yarmouth historian Bob Kelley. Bob is a long time member of both the HSOY and the DHS and is renowned for his knowledge of the history of the saltworks of the Cape. In addition, Bob has made a scholarly study of the history of the Bass River which separates much of Yarmouth and Dennis. From his discussions with Bob, Howard learned of the existence of *Crowell’s Pier* which once stood at the mouth of the river. Intrigued by the information in the email, I asked Howard if he would be willing to write an article about it for the newsletter. Howard did one better! Not only did he collaborate with Bob Kelley for an article, he created this image of a place which hasn’t existed for almost 200 years. What an incredible example of *imagining the past*. Here are Howard’s rendering and article.



Crowell Pier by Howard Bonington

Earlier this year, I had the opportunity to meet several times with Bob Kelley of the Historical Society of Old Yarmouth. He generously made available much information about his research into early developments along the Bass River that is certainly relative to our local history. The following article is based solely on the information contained in his written and oral description of the former free-standing pier that was located at the Bass River’s outlet.

As the Bass River divides Dennis and Yarmouth it should be of interest to the residents of both towns to know that there was once such a pier in Nantucket Sound very close to the outlet of the Bass River. It was known as Crowell’s Pier. The pier was

constructed, circa 1795, by Captain Silvanus Crowell as a commercial venture. It isn't there anymore, but its location is shown on an 1830 Yarmouth Coastal Map.

Captain Silvanus Crowell owned one or more other piers on the river's bank somewhat north of its mouth. These were usable as transfer points for cargo from shallow draft boats, but it was difficult or not possible for deep-draft ships to venture that far upstream due to the shallow depth of the water. Therefore the large freighters had to anchor out in the open water in a natural deep water hole immediately south of the river mouth. This open area was known as Bass River Harbor or Deep Hole. The small river craft could then reach the anchored ships. Transfers of cargo had to be made vessel to vessel, which was not as efficient for the multiple, simultaneous distribution that could be provided by a pier.

Rather than transfer cargo from two floating craft, Crowell came up with the idea of building a fixed pier structure at the deep hole at Bass River Harbor. There a freighter would be able to tie up and safely transfer its cargo to/from a large group of shallow draft vessels at one time. Crowell, being a local businessman in South Yarmouth and a ship owner, must have looked on it as a profitable undertaking due to the advantages it provided. When constructed, it was probably a very busy place. Among other users, the saltworks was nearby up-river and its barges could easily reach the pier. Crowell could view the pier from his house in South Yarmouth and thus could monitor its activities.

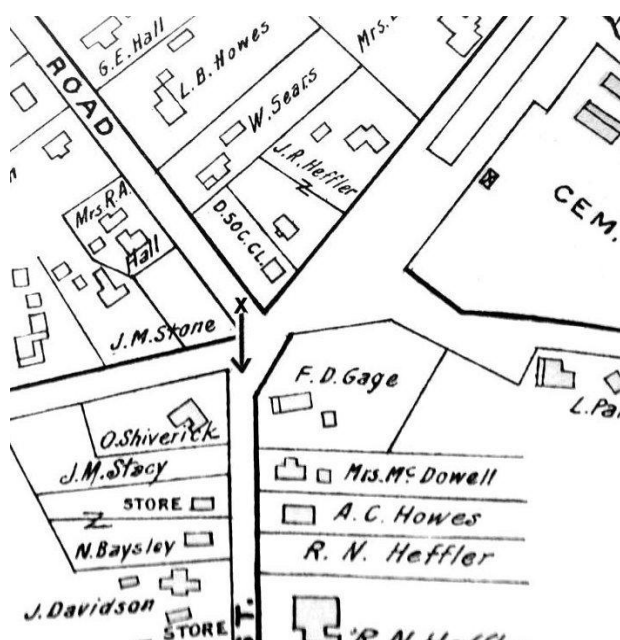
There are no known actual graphic depictions of the pier. Contemporary observers described it as a platform structure about 40 feet square, raised on piles driven into the sand, with a store on it. There is no description of the size or arrangement of the building. The height of the platform above water level would vary with the tide. Therefore, my drawing of it is not based on actual observation, but rather on an artist's imagination that, hopefully, captures the spirit of that point in time.

Thanks are due to Bob Kelley for all his work in researching, documenting and making the information available.

Thank you Howard!

Brimstone Corner

It wasn't long after the January Newsletter appeared in member's mail and post boxes before responses to the location of the scene sent in by Ann Croston began to come in. The first two, not surprisingly were from fonts of local history, Josh Crowell and Scott Walker. Scott's email contained this map which shows the location from which the photo was taken (X marks the spot). Both he and Josh knew some fascinating history of the location. Here is Scott's take:



Map by Ann Croston

This picture (in postcard format dated 1918) was loaned to me by Dick & Nancy Howes of Corporation Road and is found in my postcard book on page 31. I assume that Dick will weigh in on this picture and would be surprised if he does not. Attached is one of Ann Croston's map images showing where the photographer would have been standing (X) on Nobscussett Road near the present day DPM intersection. and an arrow showing the direction he's aiming the shot down Route 6A toward Yarmouth. New Boston Road is the road in the photo off to the right. Dick can identify many of the still standing buildings, such as "The Davidson's Store" which you can also see on Ann's map. The thing I found most interesting was Dick's claim that this small stretch of 6A from DPM to Signal Hill Road was called North Main Street, because it is a perfect North-South line on the compass. Who among us will resist a drive and peek at our GPS to see if that is so, because it just doesn't seem possible? Maybe he said it was called South Main Street...I cannot quite remember which. Hard to imagine with a road which one would think is E-W. Dick is absolutely right about the N-S section of 6A. It is incredibly deceiving!

Notice the "D.SOC.CL" just to the right of the "X". In a mid-January phone call from Josh, here is what he had to say about it, and why this convergence of roads was once known as "Brimstone Corner": *There was a house on the property which is now the park. The house was a "gentlemen's club," where during Prohibition, men gathered with the curtains drawn and the shades pulled down to drink and play cards. This activity caused much distress in the village, especially among the women folk and members of the church, resulting in the name, "Brimstone Corner"....* perhaps signifying that retribution was coming for the behavior of those involved.

Much additional information has been sent to me about buildings, businesses events and people associated with this intersection which will appear in future newsletters. Here is an example provided by Board Member Ann Croston. Please refer to the map on the previous page to see the location of "F.D. Gage" property.

In 1905, Fred D Gage acquired the property at 653 Main Street and established the Farmers' Exchange. "He has worked his way up to comfortable pecuniary circumstances. He has shown remarkable business ability."

July 14, 1913 Yarmouth Register, "On the night of Tuesday, July 8, a fire destroyed the house and barn of Mr. Fred Gage of this village and the store occupying the lower story of the house. The fire originating in the barn, when it was discovered by a neighbor, it was already too late to save the horse, highly valued by Mr. Gage and only a few things could be rescued from the house and store. But for a timely lull of the breeze which has been so gratefully constant of late and for the dew on the grasses, the whole village might have been wiped out. Bells and telephones did their work, rousing every able-bodied individual from deep sleep; and autos sped them to the work of rescue. This store was built by William Crowell Jr. where he conducted a grocery store. When Mr. Crowell went into the cranberry business more extensively, he gave up the grocery business. Fred D Gage acquired the property and established the Farmers' Exchange. He has worked his way up to comfortable pecuniary circumstances. He has shown remarkable business ability. The loss of Tuesday night was a severe blow to him. But he will weather the misfortune. He never looks back. You will see him on his feet again and when the ashes of the burned buildings cease smoldering this man of energy will be busy planning for the future."

Do any of our readers know whether the prediction of the *Yarmouth Register* proved to be correct? Like the Phoenix, did Fred Gage's business rise from the ashes? If yes, how long did it last? What other businesses occupied the site before it became the *Dennis Public Market*. Please email your information to: info@dennishistoricalsociety.org

Thank you!

Winners!

The *Old House Scavenger Hunt* featured in the February Newsletter was a big success. It was also quickly won! John and Sue Schofield of Dennis combined their local knowledge with keen powers of observation to be the first to respond with all 15 houses correctly identified. Second place goes to Phil Catchings of East Dennis. Phil also had all the houses correct. One could argue that he had a bit of a leg up, living in one of the houses in the hunt. Third place goes to Mary Kurtz, also of East Dennis.

Honorable mention goes to John Howe of Cambridge. True, one of the houses featured was his family home, but John was in Cambridge when he received his newsletter and could not return to join in the hunt. Said John in his email to the DHS website, "*just spent a very pleasant hour reviewing the pictures -- six or eight were instantly recognizable and, by pecking around in Google Street View, I was able to locate a handful more.*"

The second part of the contest was also won by the Schofields. Not only do John and Sue know Dennis, they also know their architecture. They were the earliest responder with the highest degree of accuracy in naming the architectural styles represented in the 15 houses.

The enthusiastic response from readers and their positive comments ensure that even when the pandemic is over, the *Old House Scavenger Hunt* will be repeated! Thank you again Kevin!

2021 Museum Update

On January 7th, a masked and socially distanced meeting was held by the DHS Steering Committee. The committee is comprised of board members, Betsy Harrison, Dave Talbott, Larry Symington, Bob Poskitt and Phil Catchings.

The meeting was called to discuss what type of events might be possible for the upcoming season. Representatives of each the museums were asked to attend. Included were board member and chair, Dawn Dellner for the Jericho Historical Center; board member and chair of the Maritime Museum, Pat Corcoran and board member and docent coordinator for the Josiah Dennis Manse Museum, Terri Fox. Terri is also the planner and speaker for the walks in the villages' cemeteries.

Many possibilities were discussed and ideas floated, primarily focused on outdoor events. Because the lack of any definitive forecast of the status of the pandemic in the months ahead, it was decided that there would be another meeting in April. Everything will depend on the success of the vaccine roll out and the possibilities would be revisited on the basis of newer information.

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02664**



Image provided by James Bryant, Newton Massachusetts

Location Unknown

This month we have a request to provide information about the house pictured. The image was sent to the DHS Website with the following: *“I was wondering if you could help me identify an old photograph I have. The back of the photo says ‘Constant Sears then Isaiah Sears House.’ I posted it on a Sears Family website and someone thought that it might currently be for sale. I didn't know that it even still existed.”* No other information was available. If you know anything about this house or the property, please email it to: info@dennishistoricalsociety.org

Thank you!