



Dennis Historical Society

Newsletter

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**The next Board Meeting will be held on Tuesday, September 14th, 2:00 pm at the Dennis Memorial Library
1020 Old Bass River Road, Dennis Village
Members Welcome**

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

Historic Documents

Presently, the North East Document Conservation Center in Andover, Massachusetts, is conserving and digitally imaging three documents recently acquired by your Society. One of these, of particular importance to Dennis history, is being restored and archivally reproduced. There will be much more about these documents in a future newsletter. In addition, similar work is being done on two documents from the DHS collections which have been displayed at the Josiah Dennis Manse Museum. One of these, according to the description which appeared with it at the Manse is “a document describing the division of land of Thomas (1) Howes by his three sons and heirs. The deed was recorded at Plymouth Colony in January 1667.” Because of his familiarity with so many aspects of Dennis history, and his personal involvement in acquiring the original document, I asked longtime DHS member and newsletter contributor, Henry Kelley II, if he would write an article about the document’s history. Fortunately for all of us, Henry agreed!

The Plymouth Parchment

WHACK went the auctioneer’s gavel as he announced. “That Plymouth Colony document now will return to Dennis where it belongs!”

The Document’s Origin.

In 1639, Plymouth Colony magistrates authorized a new township called Yarmouth. They empowered three men, Thomas Howes, John Crow and Anthony Thacher to organize the community and to grant to each settler a portion of land according to his social standing. However, many new arrivals complained about the unfairness of those distributions.

By 1648, the magistrates, tiring of the persistent disputes, dispatched the fabled Miles Standish, their chief military officer and notorious “enforcer”, to go to Yarmouth and settle the matter. As a result, the expansive holdings that Howes, Crow and Thacher had given to themselves were significantly reduced.

In payment for his services, the Colony awarded Standish fifty acres of land nearby, thereafter commonly known as “The Magistrate’s Lot”. Some years later, his widow, Rose Standish, sold it to Thomas Howes, whose homestead it bordered.

The Howes – Prence Connection.

By 1667, Thomas Howes had died and his heirs requested that the Colony confirm the boundaries of the former Magistrates parcel. That document, written on parchment in great detail, was signed by Governor Thomas Prence. Incidentally, the Governor’s daughter, Sarah, was married to Jeremiah Howes, a son and heir of Thomas Howes. Even more unusual is that when Governor Prence became a widower, he married in 1668, the widow of Thomas Howes, Mary. The following year, their respective children produced a new grandson-in-common, aptly named Prence Howes.

The Modern Emergence.

Some years ago, a certain Mr. Howes of Connecticut knocked on my door. He had inherited the parchment document and asserted he therefore owned fifty acres of land in Dennis! He proposed to share the windfall if I would find its location. I advised him that owning the document was not the same as owning the land. Much agitated, he departed amidst a cascade of colorful language!

Mr. Howes remained in Dennis for two years, fruitlessly pursuing his dream. When leaving,, he placed certain possessions, including the ancient document, into a nearby storage facility. Later, failing in his rent payment, the

ownership defaulted to the storage house which consigned the contents to a local auction gallery. Having seen the auction notice, and reporting it to the Dennis Historical Society, it dispatched me to attempt its acquisition. There the Dennis Historical Society rescued it after more than three centuries.

The Rescue.

On arriving at the auction, I spied a prominent dealer in historic documents already seated in the front row. After a moment's hesitation, I greeted him with a broad smile and spoke excitedly that I was here for the Plymouth Document on behalf of the Dennis Historical Society. I sat down next to him and asked if he could "coach me on the bidding process." Before long, the prize was the Society's. During the bidding, the dealer had sat there as silent as a sphinx.

Where is the Magistrate's Lot?

Although the parchment itself is in very good condition, much of the wording is difficult to read. Hopefully, modern preservation techniques will enhance its legibility. However, based on its present condition and other circumstantial evidence, I can only conjecture that the "The Magistrate's Lot" was located along Chase Garden River (anciently called "Nobscusset Brook") outboard of New Boston Road, perhaps to the rear of the "Old Fort Field" where Thomas Howes dwelled. It likely included the neighborhood along Hall Street on Simpkin's Neck. There, Prence Howes built his house ca. 1700, which was a town landmark until razed in 1957.



Image from the DHS Digital Archive

That site is now a vacant lot at 15 Hall Street in Dennis Village. Directly across the street and downhill at the marsh's edge was a fresh water spring, the traditional water source for the many generations who dwelled there. This was pointed out to me by the last resident of that historic habitation, Steve Hall, who passed away just ahead of the house itself. Note – Prence Howes' house is the large one right of center with the barn behind. This 19th century photo was taken from New Boston Road and is from the – Florrie Collection/Album 4. The photographer stood just before where Chase Garden Creek passes under the road. Read more about this house in the February 2018 issue, available on the DHS Website.

Thank you so much Henry – from all of us!

TIME WARP

Honoring Nine Revolutionary War Patriots Buried in the Ancient Sears Cemetery by Barbara (Bo) Eastman Durst

Saturday morning, May 15 (2021) was a warm, sunny day in East Dennis, MA. Just before 11 a.m. I decided to take a break from my chores and walk over to the (now Ancient) Sears Cemetery (now in Brewster since the town line change) to pay my respects to some of my relatives. I strolled along Old County Way in my simple house dress, and as I neared the cemetery there were many strange horseless carriages lining the road and even along the old Indian path (now Airline Rd.) I know not where their horses were. Had I entered a time warp?

As I climbed the few steps to the cemetery and entered through the gate, a gentle breeze rustled through the trees. I encountered some former camp followers, the Yarmouth Minutemen and some militia. Why were the the militia here? Was a skirmish threatened?



A rifle salute to the Revolutionary War Patriots by the Yarmouth Militia

All seemed calm and they were mostly standing around looking out over the pond below at the swans. Then I noticed there were others there in strange dress, one of whom handed me a program that announced they were there to honor some of our forefathers, including two of my direct line.

We were asked to watch as Henry Knox of the Minutemen presented the colors—our new flag. Everyone put his right hand over his heart and recited a pledge of allegiance to the flag. A gentleman by the name of Robert Gifford welcomed us. He was a member of SAR (which I was to learn stands for Sons of the American Revolution—although they were much too young to be sons of the deceased!) There were also some DAR members which was apparently the women's branch “Daughters” of this organization. Then there was a prayer. Mr. David Martin introduced some of the special guests, one of whom was my cousin L. Ray Sears. I was surprised to see him here as he lives out in the Western Territory. They then sang a lovely song they all seemed to know that asked our God to bless America. It was very moving.



My cousin spoke of the 9 Sears' buried here who had fought in the Revolution. There were lovely markers by each grave indicating their service in the war. They wanted to put our 13 colony flags on all these markers and Cousin Ray asked me to put a flag on my ancestor, Joshua Sears' grave. My, what an honor! Those honored were Remick Freeman (his wife was a Sears so he was able to get into the Sears Cemetery!), Lt. Micajah Sears, Noah Sears, Edward Sears, “Sleepy” John Sears, Edmund Sears and 3 of his 4 sons—Edmund, Joshua & Elkanah. The 4th son also served but is buried elsewhere. Both Edmund Sr. and his son Joshua are my direct line and Cousin Ray descends from Elkanah.

Grampa Edmund was a sea captain. On December 16, 1773, he had just pulled into Boston Harbor, and as his ship was being unloaded, he heard a commotion down the pier. Being nosy, he went to see what was going on. Three British tea ships had arrived in the harbor. They were charging us a tax on the tea, and we weren't happy about it. Samuel Adams had a band of his Sons of Liberty dressed as Mohawk Indians preparing to board the 3 tea ships and relieve them of their tea. Grampa Edmund, feeling strongly about this unfair tax, joined them and

Bo at the Ceremony; she provided both photos commenced helping to throw the boxes of tea into the harbor.

The next day, he sailed directly to Quivet Neck and without so much as a welcome to his wife, he proceeded to the pantry, grabbed their teapot & tea and threw them out into the garden. He then told his stunned family that they were never to drink any English tea nor wear any clothes or cloth of English manufacture. I dare say they thought him gone mad. Certainly his wife and 5 daughters were not happy since that meant they had to spin, weave and make all the clothes for the family of 11! He was too old to serve in the war but when he heard a landing was threatened on the Cape, he mounted his horse and galloped to the spot to offer his services.

His son, Grampa Joshua, a seaman, served in Lt. Micajah Sears' Company at Dartmouth and Falmouth. He then shipped in the ship “General Putnam” under Capt. Daniel Waters for naval service July 12, 1779. At some point he was taken prisoner and shipped to Forton, England and committed to Forton Prison. He was imprisoned for several years under harsh conditions and hard labor. While there he contracted smallpox. Between that and other conditions he nearly died. After the war he was finally released and was well enough to return home and commence farming. No more sea life for him!

After flags were placed, Mr. Joseph Mongelli blew taps on his bugle. The militiamen loaded their muskets 3 times and fired 3 volleys. I was very impressed they were honoring our local heroes thus. There was a prayer and then they all left.

I soon found myself alone on that beautiful knoll wondering if I had been dreaming—but, no the markers and flags were really there.

Thank you Bo for writing this thoughtful and touching narrative!



Courtesy of Google Maps

The Sears Cemetery is located off of Airline Road in East Dennis. Turning onto Airline from Rt.6A there is a small conservation parking area on your left just beyond Old County Way. From the parking area, there is a path to the cemetery. It is a beautiful spot!

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AUTUMN AT THE MANSE
Saturday, September 25, from 1-4pm

Time travel to the 18th century for a very special one-day-only event at the 1736 home of the minister for whom Dennis is named

JOSIAH DENNIS MANSE
61 Whig Street in Dennis Village
FREE ADMISSION (donations gladly accepted)

Mark your Calendar

**The 2021 Apple Pie
Baking Contest**
October 9th, 1-4 pm
At the West Dennis
Graded School
67 School Street
West Dennis

*We hope to host this event again
this year, COVID-willing!*



Coming in October

Howard Bonington is at it again

Imagining the Past!

This time it's the late 19th century
race track that was in West
Dennis.

We'll learn the fascinating story
of

Riverside Trotting Park.

And

We will get in the spirit of
Halloween early with a look back
into our past by Carole Bell.

Witch One is Yours

