



# Dennis Historical Society

## Newsletter

### July 2022

**Volume 45, No.07**

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**The next Board Meeting will be held on Tuesday, July 12<sup>th</sup>, 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](mailto:info@dennishistoricalsociety.org)

### *A Special Request*



I will have to delay the mailing of one copy of the July Newsletter to one very special DHS member so that this request remains a surprise. July 22<sup>nd</sup> is Phyllis Horton's 95<sup>th</sup> birthday. If any newer member needs a refresher on the dedication of one who, for decades, has worked tirelessly to preserve the history of Dennis, please go to [www.dennishistoricalsociety.org](http://www.dennishistoricalsociety.org), click on the Newsletter tab and scroll down to **November 2020**. Here is the request – please send a card to Phyllis with best wishes for a very **Happy Birthday**. It is a wonderful milestone for a wonderful lady! Her address is P.O. Box 275 (One Gage's Lane), Dennis Port 02639

**Thank you!**

### *Serendipity*

There are many rewarding things about editing the DHS Newsletter and checking the emails which come into our website. I will be sure to remember that line when, at some point, I am trying to pass both tasks on to some hesitant sucker! Occasionally, the tasks converge, and when they do, it makes it all worthwhile! Last month I received an email from previous contributor and DHS member Katharine Thacher Peace. You may remember from her article in last November's Newsletter that Katherine is the daughter of Nancy Thacher Reid, author of *Dennis, Cape Cod*.

*Hi Dave - Attaching a little story you might like for a future newsletter. I will run down there and take a photo of the graves as soon as I can. I walk the dog down that way almost every day.*

*Kate Peace*

### *The Nickersons of South Dennis*

*I live on Main Street in South Dennis. My 1892 Victorian style home stands next door to a beautiful Cape, painted yellow with black shutters. This home was built by Captain Israel Nickerson, Sr. (1709-1772) in 1748. His son, Israel Nickerson Jr. (1741-1791) was a lieutenant in the American Revolution. He married Elizabeth "Betsey" Doane. They settled into the Israel Sr. home and proceeded to produce a family of thirteen children between 1768 and 1789.*

*After the Revolution, Israel Jr. went to sea to make a living for his growing family. He sailed on a trading ship that ventured as far away as Asia during the glorious maritime heyday in the town of Dennis, and many other Cape ports.*

*These details I learned from my mother, Nancy Thacher Reid, expert in Dennis history, one summer day when I was about 12 years old. I had wandered down the street to the cemetery which was located, at that time, behind the Dennis Town Hall. I was after daisies, which grew in and around the little cemetery. As I collected the cheerful white blossoms, I stopped to read the etchings on the ancient grave stones.*

*One stone had a faded American flag, stuck in the ground beside it. I examined the medallion on the little flag pole, which indicated this man had fought in the American Revolution. It was the grave of Israel Nickerson, Jr. Sadly, he had died at the age of only 51, on 30 September 1791. I noticed that his wife, Betsey, whose grave was next to her husband's, had lived to the age of 89. She'd died in 1832, forty-one years after her brave husband left this earth, a long time to be a widow.*

*Behind the stones of Israel and Betsey was a solemn row of dark slate stones, and I bent to read them. As I had suspected, the name on the first was Nehemiah Nickerson, son of Israel and Betsey. But, sadly enough, Nehemiah had died only days after his father, on 11th October, 1791, and he had been only 20 years old. How tragic it must have*

been for Betsey to have lost her husband and son so close together. I wondered if it had been some kind of contagious illness that they had died from.

I bent to read the next stone - Another son of Israel and Betsey, Horace, who had died on 1st October 1791 at the age of 5. It had to have been a sickness that ravaged the Nickerson family in that ill-fated year. The final confirmation of this theory came with the next three stones:

Sally, died 4th October 1791, age 14

Betsey, died 12th October 1791, age 21

Hannah, died 14th October 1791, age 16

The enormity of this family tragedy was clear to me, even at my young age. I stood gazing at the stones, and imagined poor Betsey, following the bearers of a casket in slow procession to the cemetery, day after day, that bleak October, watching as each was lowered, next to the fresh graves of the father and siblings, and covered with the sandy Cape Cod soil. She must have been heartbroken. The remainder of her long life must have been marked with sadness by her colossal loss in the fall of 1791.



Betsy & Israel Photos by Katharine Thacher Peace Five Graves

When I returned home, I told my mother of my find. She remembered right away the tragic events that explained the many deaths in the Nickerson family that year. She told me that Israel had returned from a voyage that October. He and others were sick with a mysterious illness, and several had died before reaching port. Betsey took her husband home and set about nursing him in his sickness, praying for a swift recovery. Her husband died, despite her efforts. To add to her grief, several of her children then fell sick. She must have struggled mightily to nurse her ailing family as, one by one, they became ill and worsened as the days passed. One by one, the children perished. Betsey's immense grief can only be imagined.

My mother also recalled that Betsey and Israel were followers of the Baptist faith, not a common choice in these parts at the time. Baptists don't believe in having their children baptized as infants, but rather when the child reaches maturity and is able to understand and embrace the baptismal ceremony. When it became clear to Betsey that her whole family might succumb to the disease, she frantically sent word to the preacher, who was tending his flock on the north side of town, to come and baptize her youngest child, Horace, who was only five years old.

The roadways being as they were in those days, and travel being as slow as it was, by the time word got to the preacher, his best efforts to hasten to the Nickerson household were not enough. Little Horace lay dead by the time he arrived. It was said that poor Betsey was wracked with feelings of guilt that her child had not been baptized prior to his death, leaving the fate of his soul uncertain. No doubt these thoughts haunted her for the rest of her long life.

Thankfully, there were seven siblings, some of whom were older and had not been living in the house at that time, who escaped the deadly sickness. So, old Betsey did indeed have grandchildren to brighten her aging years, and they had children and they had children.....some of whose descendants live in the town to this day and had even married into my mother's family.

I wondered when the last time was that Betsey Nickerson had visited the graves of her husband and children. Did her surviving children bring her there in 1832 to pay her final respects before she too passed away? Did they continue to visit the graves of their parents and siblings in the years that followed? Certainly, it had been many, many years since anyone who knew the tragic story had paid a visit to the cemetery in their honor.

I returned to the cemetery a few days later to pick some more daisies. But this time, they were bound up in little bunches and tied with long pieces of timothy grass along with a few yellow buttercups to form mini-bouquets. Each bouquet was laid at the stone of each long-dead member of the Nickerson family. For the few days that those bouquets lay fresh beneath the gray slate stones, the Nickerson family's sadness was revived and honored, their story having been told, and their lives and deaths, nearly two centuries later, were not forgotten.

**Thank you Katharine for this touching story!**

## From a New Member

Soon after receiving and responding to a new DHS membership which came into our website,  
I received the following email –

*Thank you very much for your welcoming email. I found the Dennis Historical Society website because I have been researching my ancestor, John Hall. I would like to find his burial place, even if it is not marked. He is not listed as having been buried in the "Hall Family Burial Ground" but as having been buried on his "nearby farm." Briefly, the information I have is that John Hall died 23 July 1696 and was buried on his farm of "147 acres in Conny Furlong, at Nobscusset." His wife was Bethia, died 1 Feb 1683. Do you think the Historical Society has any information about the location of the farm where he was buried? I think I read (quite a while ago) that his farm is now a cranberry bog. Is that possible? Thank you again - I am looking forward to this new membership!*

Editor's notes – According to the excerpt below from a spreadsheet of all the cemeteries on Cape Cod, John Hall was buried as suggested in the email. I learned from Henry Kelley that owning "147 acres" did not mean that they were contiguous. A subsequent email said that *Conny Furlong* might possibly have been *Coules, Canny, or Cunningham*.

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L
1	Name	Given	Surname	Comments	Died	Date	YoD	Age	Birth	Order	Cemetery	Town
2	Marcy Winslow (photo)	Marcy	Winslow		1688 - September 22	September 22	1688	48	1640	616412	Worden	Dennis
3	Thomas Winslow (photo)	Thomas	Winslow		1689 - April 6	April 6	1689	17	1672	616611	Worden	Dennis
4	John Hall	John	Hall	(buried on his nearby farm)	1696 - July 23	July 23	1696	85	1611	619273	Den Hall	Dennis
5	Bethiah Hall (photo)	Bethiah	Hall		1696 - October 15	October 15	1696	55	1641	619355	Den Hall	Dennis

After a couple of more exchanges, the subject generated enough interest on my part that I asked if it might be a good idea to share the quest for John Hall's farm and burial site with the membership.



Map of Dennis Village Showing the location of the Hall Cemetery

I have read that his farm and burial place is now a cranberry bog.

Here are some sources I have found:

Cape Cod Gravestones:

<http://www.capecodgravestones.com/dennishall.html>

Historic Cemeteries in Dennis MA:

<https://www.town.dennis.ma.us/sites/g/files/vyhlf3016f/uploads/denniscemeteryhistory.pdf>

Cranberry Info about Hall family:

<https://www.cranberries.org/our-berries/meet-our-growers/annie%E2%80%99s-crannies>

Robert Charles Anderson, *Great Migration Begins: Immigrants to N.E. 1620-1633, Vols. I-III*, pg 841-844.

*Barnstable Families, A Reprint of the Amos Otis Papers, Vol. 1, published about 1885.*

Thank you again for your help.

If there are any history detectives out there who would like to delve into the location of the burial plot of John Hall and share the information with the membership, please email your research to Dave Talbott at the DHS Website – email: [info@dennishistoricalsociety.org](mailto:info@dennishistoricalsociety.org). I will pass it on and place what was learned in a future newsletter.

**Thank you!**

*Dave, I think an inquiry in the newsletter might be very helpful!*

*Here is my question:*

*I would like to find the burial place of my ancestor "John Hall of Yarmouth" - even if he does not have a marked grave.*

*The information I have is that John Hall died 23 July 1696 (Yarmouth VR, p129) and was buried on his farm of "147 acres in Conny Furlong, at Nobscusset." His wife Bethia died 1 Feb 1683.*

*John Hall is sometimes listed as having been buried in the "Hall Family Burial Ground" in Dennis MA, but other sources say that he was buried on his nearby farm or homestead.*

**Dennis Historical Society**  
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**DENNIS  
MARITIME  
MUSEUM**

at the West Dennis Graded School House



Opening for the season: Saturday, July 2, 1 - 4pm,  
then Wednesdays and Fridays, 1 - 4pm  
through September 9.

**FREE ADMISSION** (donations gladly accepted)

**Saturday, July 9, 1-4pm**

**WEAVING  
ON THE LOOM**

Join Dennis  
Historical  
Society's  
Susan Kelley  
for a  
one-day-only  
special event  
at the

**1736 JOSIAH  
DENNIS  
MANSE**

61 Whig Street  
in Dennis Village

**FREE  
ADMISSION**  
(Donations  
gladly accepted)



*Wishing Everyone a Safe & Happy Independence Day!*

