



# Dennis Historical Society Newsletter April 2025

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**The next Board Meeting will be held on Tuesday, April 8<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)

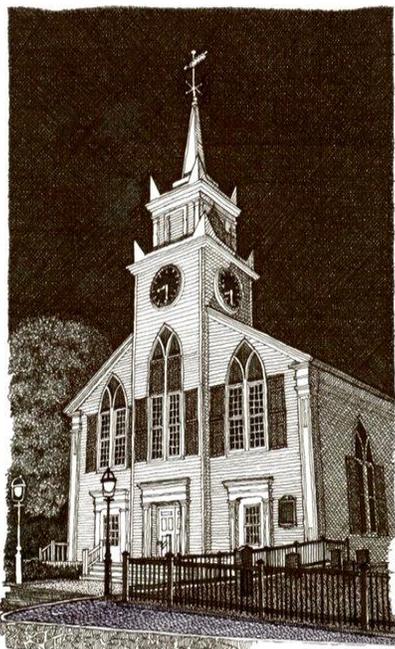
## *Serving Notice*

The membership renewal mailing was sent at the end of February. Within the mailing were two important statements. First - *It's a time to think about what your membership means to you, and what it means to your Society!* Followed by - *DHS depends on its members!* Many have already responded to the mailing, some the day it was received – **thank you!**

There are some reading this newsletter who should have been culled from the mailing list last year. You have, however, continued to receive it in the hope that you would renew soon after this year's renewal mailing was received. Please don't wait...do it today!

## *Humanitarian Effort Turns to Tragedy*

Once again, we are grateful for the knowledge and research expertise which DHS member and noted Cape Cod author Jack Sheedy brings to our society. This month Jack provides us with another insight into our history by providing us with this intriguing story!



Pen & ink by Howard Bonington

*Each time one drives through the villages of Dennis, history is encountered at nearly every turn.*

*Today's drive brings me to a 19th-century church, or rather, to the cemetery behind the church. It is a cemetery populated by old headstones and with chiseled words which call out across the years. The church is the Congregational Church of South Dennis, and its cemetery contains a particular stone. It is in the form of a white obelisk and has a story to tell of a Dennis connection to an ill-fated voyage to Ireland.*

*The monument rests about 46 paces from the back of the church building. Etched upon it are words which point to a 19th-century humanitarian effort, forever linking two Dennis men with the Emerald Isle. It reads: "This monument is erected to the memory of Jonathan Nickerson, Jr., Master, and John S. Nickerson, First Officer, of the Schooner Sarah Adams, bound from Baltimore to Loch Foyle, and shipwrecked on the coast of Ireland and all on board lost in April, 1847." Lough Foyle is an inlet that rests between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland.*

*Jonathan Nickerson, Jr., born in May 1807 to Jonathan and Hitty Nickerson, was nearly 40 years old at the time of the disaster. He was the older brother of John S. Nickerson, born in June 1819. The brothers were sailing to Ireland with 6,000 bushels of corn to help feed those suffering during the catastrophic potato famine.*

*The August 11, 1847 **Barnstable Patriot** marine news column referred to the Sarah Adams – which left Baltimore on March 24 according to the newspaper – as "missing." The article stated that the crew of another vessel which had*



Image courtesy of Find a Grave



Image courtesy of Find a Grave

successfully arrived "at a port in the North of Ireland" had met up with the Sarah Adams just six days prior to their arrival. At that time, either "Capt. Nickerson or his brother went on board in the schooner's boat" to visit. Two days later, as the captain of the other vessel surmised, the Sarah Adams was wrecked in a gale. Or, as the article put it, the schooner "must have gone ashore on rock-bound coast, and have gone to pieces, all on board perishing."

The article went on to say that the 150-ton schooner Sarah Adams, of Providence, was built at Bridgeport, Connecticut only the year before, was "valued at \$8,000" and was part-owned by Jonathan Nickerson, Jr. The Nickerson brothers were described as being "greatly esteemed, as good men and active, enterprising citizens". Incidentally, the article listed John S. Nickerson as the master of the vessel and "elder brother" Jonathan as first officer, which is contrary to what appears upon the monument in the South Dennis cemetery.

Sadly, the white obelisk in this South Dennis cemetery provides even more tragic news, with grief on each of its four sides. During the previous year, John's wife Minerva Ann and their infant child both died. Additionally, John and Jonathan's brother Scotto B.

Nickerson, master of the schooner Abner Hall, was lost at sea along with his crew off Montauk Point in December 1847. According to the monument, that crew included first officer Job Chase, 2nd, a grandson of Jonathan and Hitty Nickerson. So much loss. So much tragedy.

Nearly 180 years later sunlight shines upon the names chiseled into stone, and remembers the story of a humanitarian effort that was not to be.



Schooner shipwreck image courtesy of Google

**Thank you Jack!**

## ***Unknown No Longer***

The March Newsletter included this picture from the DHS Digital Archive. The source of the photograph was known, but nothing about the house pictured was. The newsletter was mailed on February 25 and was delivered to on Cape mail and post boxes on the 27<sup>th</sup>. At 3:49 pm on the same day as the delivery, the following email appeared in the Society's Inbox from Edmond Rhodes Nickerson, South Dennis.



DHS Digital Archive

*This house stood at 524 Main Street, South Dennis, and was originally the smaller homestead of Capt. Shubael Nickerson. It was inherited by his son, Capt. Frederick Nickerson, Proprietor, who greatly enlarged it in 1874 into a hotel called "Nickerson House." An advertisement in The Yarmouth Register read as follows:*

*"Situated a few rods from the Depot, on a beautiful eminence, commanding a fine view of the river and Vineyard Sound, it offers unequalled facilities to the business traveler or business seeker. The building is large and commodious, will accommodate fifty guests, is fitted with the latest improvements, and no pains or expense has been spared to make this the model house of Barnstable County."(At the time, not a tree stood between Main Street and Bass River.)*

*The house was sold to Ambrose Rose who continued to operate it as the "Riverview Hotel" until it was sold to Leon W. Hall in the 1930's, razed in 1934, and a new full Cape was erected on it shortly thereafter by and for Mr. & Mrs. Hall, owner of Leon W. Hall, Inc., known today as the Mid-Cape Home Center. The house in the background was built by Town Clerk Benjamin F. Sears, and was moved to 206 Upper County Road, South Dennis, diagonally opposite Pro Fence Company, where it stands today. I responded - Thank you Edmond...your response is terrific information and really appreciated! What a wonderful piece of Nickerson family and South Dennis history!*

*May I have your permission to use your email in the April Newsletter? Thankfully, the answer was yes!*

**Thank you Edmond!**

## ***A look back at a DHS Newsletter from thirty years ago***

In many past newsletters, I have encouraged readers to avail themselves of the treasures in back issues by going to the DHS Website and clicking on the Newsletter tab. There is an absolute wealth of information on Dennis history! The following article is printed with credit and appreciation to our beloved Curator Emeritus. It is from Vol. 18 No. 4, April 1995, compiled and edited by Phyllis Robins Horton. **Thank you Phyllis!**

### ***"BEST DAMNED CASKET IN DENNIS PORT"***

*Leeza Crowell's Corner, do you know where it is? Perhaps only a handful of old Dennis Porters can answer that question. It is the corner of Upper County Road and Depot Street. Captain Eleazer (Leeza) Kelley Crowell owned the entire area now occupied by the Church of Our Lady of Annunciation. His substantial house with barns and outbuildings faced Depot Street. The rest of the property was pasture except for a cooper shop on the south end of the Sea Street side where James Frizzell made barrels for the captain's cranberry crop. Eleazer was born in 1836 in West Dennis, son of Freeman and Mehitabel (Paine) Crowell. He went to sea at age 12 in the fishing business, as did his brother Perry, to help support their widowed mother who was not well, and their two sisters. Leeza enjoyed going to sea and became proficient in all aspects of seamanship. At 18, he was a mate and at 21 became a captain, a position he held for 40 years retiring in 1882. Captain Crowell had the reputation of sailing in the coastal and foreign trade without an accident or loss, having never asked the insurance companies for a cent. After retirement, he used his expertise to buy and sell vessels and cargos—sometimes sailing as part owner. Ashore, he was just as ambitious as he had been at sea. He had married Laura Ann Kelley, daughter of Bangs and Priscilla Kelley who lived across the street where Salt Works Village II is now. This entire area was known as the Kelley neighborhood, and it's quite possible that Laura's dowry was the property where she and Eleazer built their house. Their only son died in 1870 at 15 months and Laura died in 1879. Eleazer then married Mary D. Chase of Harwich. He kept a fine pair of carriage horses, a pair of work horses, a fair-sized herd of cows and a bull.*

*Leeza was an extensive cranberry grower having 30 acres of his own under cultivation and managing several bogs for others. He gained fame experimenting with a spray made from tobacco to combat the fire worm—a scourge of early cranberry farming. Deyo's History of Barnstable County also describes Captain Crowell as a director in the Harwich Savings Bank, member of Mt. Horeb Lodge, a strong supporter of the Baptist society, the Republican party and of every good work in his town"....quite an accolade for a Dennis boy who went to sea at age 12. Needless to say, he was a man of considerable means. Two incidents in his retirement may have made him wonder why he ever left the sea. The first occurred out in his pasture. The captain was walking across the pasture, perhaps going to or from the cooper shop and stopped to admire his fine herd. The bull took offense to his being there, came after him, and cornered him by the fence. Leeza grabbed the bull's horns and after a brief struggle the bull threw his head up and a horn caught Leeza in the eye. He was taken to Dr. Richard Ginn, he being the only doctor in Dennis Port. After that the captain always cocked his head to one side when he talked with anyone. Some of the less respectful called him "Old Cockeye" - but not within his hearing!*

*The second incident took place at the North Harwich depot where Leeza made regular trips to pick up freight. He was sitting in his wagon alongside the tracks conversing with other friends who were also waiting for the train. When the train arrived with bells clanging, brakes squealing, and steam hissing the horse reared and took off in a mad dash along the right of way. The captain could do nothing but hang on for dear life. Suddenly, the horse swung across in front of the moving train. The horse made it across the tracks, but not the wagon or the captain. When the dust had settled, the wagon was in pieces, the captain was pretty well banged up, but conscious and cussing and the engine—was off the track! That meant another trip to Dr. Ginn's to have broken ribs repaired. For the remainder of his life he walked with a limp, but he was proud of his brush with death saying, "Only man in a horse 'n' wagon to knock a damned train off its track!"*

*These incidents, plus the death of his beloved Mary, made the captain mindful of his departure for the "Other Shore," and he decided to have his coffin made and ready for that event. The local undertaker was Charles Young, minister of the Reformed Church of the Latter Day Saints in Dennis Port. He made the caskets from local cedar, and his wife, Mary Charles, a dressmaker, made the linings. She paid local boys one cent a bag for dry, clean pine needles to use for stuffing. All this for \$6.00! Captain Eleazer, however, decided he wanted something a little nicer, as befitted his station in life So, he hired Alonzo Capron to make one, hand rubbed, with hinges special ordered from Boston. For quite a few years, it was stored up in the hay loft of his barn, and on occasion, he would take visitors up to the loft, uncover his casket and climb in so they could see what he'd look like when he was laid out. He'd say, "Casket cost me \$25.00....best damned casket in Dennis Port! Yes sirree, comfortable as hell! "It was not until his 82nd year that Captain Leeza felt called upon to ask someone to bring his casket out of the loft as he was "getting ready to make sail".*

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Although not an event co-sponsored with DHS, this program will be of interest to all!

***“A day in the life of the Lagoda  
and a Whaling Voyage”***



Image courtesy of the New Bedford Whaling Museum via Google

**Please join us at the Dennis Memorial Library  
for a very special program presented by the  
New Bedford Whaling Museum**

**Saturday, April 5<sup>th</sup>, 2:00 pm**

**1020 Old Bass River Road, Dennis Village**

The talk by museum docents Captain Michael Taylor and Nancy Gentile will include a PowerPoint presentation and a display of artifacts & memorabilia from the whaling era.

The program is free, but the seating is limited to 75 people.  
Please pick up a complimentary ticket at the library desk  
before they're gone!

***It's Membership Renewal Time!***

Don't just renew your membership; give a membership to a family member, or friend.

What a great gift!

Not only will that membership be appreciated,  
it will help us grow!

Please include a note with the name and  
mailing address of the gift recipient along with  
your payment.

You can do so online using **PayPal** at  
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***Thank you!***