



Dennis Historical Society Newsletter August 2025

Volume 48, No.08

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**The next Board Meeting will be held on Tuesday, August 12th, 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

The More Things Change....

During my years editing the DHS Newsletter, I have made it a point to emphasize the wealth of information which is available in past issues. If you haven't yet done so, please go to <https://www.dennishistoricalsociety.org/> and click on the Newsletters tab. This month, as an example of what's in store for you, we look back forty years to the August 1985 issue. Not only are these back issues informative, they give us a wonderful incite into the way we were, and in some respects how little we have changed! Our love of Dennis history is the constant.

DENNIS HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER
Vol. 8 No. 8 August, 1985
Compiled and Edited by Nancy Thacher Reid

Members of the Dennis Historical Society are hereby notified that the Annual Meeting and election of officers of the Society will be held on Tuesday, September 17, at 7:30 P.M. at Dennis Senior Center. Please plan to attend.

Also, a reminder that dues, of \$4 per individual or \$6 for family, are now payable to Isabelle Flynn, Box 607, South Dennis, 02660. If you wish a membership card, please enclose a self-addressed and stamped envelope. Or your dues can be paid at any of the upcoming events.

Ed. note - It is a wonderful coincidence that the June 21st reopening of the Jericho Historical Center for the 2025 summer season was entitled "The Women who Restored Jericho" and was a tribute to Elizabeth Reynard & Virginia Gildersleeve. I have taken the liberty of adding these two images to the 1985 newsletter which continues below.

GHOSTS WHO STILL WALK THE NARROW LAND

REMEMBERING
Elizabeth Reynard and Virginia Gildersleeve
Saviors of the 1801 Theophilus Baker House

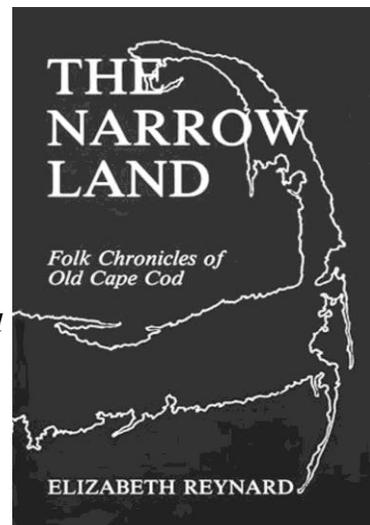
"JERICHO"
THIS OLD DENNIS HOUSE WAS GIVEN IN 1982 TO THE Town of Dennis AS AN HISTORICAL CENTER BY ALEXANDER OF CAPE COD Elizabeth Reynard

THE NARROW LAND
FROM CHRONICLES OF OLD CAPE COD THE WILKINSONS WILD THE SPOONERS' INN 1893 GENESEE HARRISON Dr. Virginia G. Gildersleeve

Exhibit opening Saturday, June 21, 1-4 pm
Captain Baker House, 90 Old Main Street, West Dennis
Visit thereafter: Tuesdays/Thursdays, 1 - 4pm, through August 28

DHS Poster by Kevin Keegan

"In a land where a live man fades from view, a ghost, poor soul, has but little chance of being noticed at all. Yet sometimes, Cape men walking in the salt fog have been taken for ghosts; similarly, it may be that Cape ghosts are taken for men". Thus writes Elizabeth Reynard, author of "The Narrow Land", a marvelous collection of folklore about Cape Cod. Kathy Swegart, well-known free-lance journalist, has studied some of the Cape's ghosts who still walk this narrow land and will share some of the strange tales she has accumulated in her research at our Dennis Festival Days evening program. We will meet at the West Dennis Community Building at 7:30 P.M. on Wednesday, August 28, and the meeting is open to the public at no charge.



Jacket Image Courtesy of Amazon

A TRIBUTE TO ELIZABETH REYNARD

Whether or not you are interested in Cape folklore about the supernatural, you should be interested and know something about Elizabeth Reynard. It was she who was largely responsible for our town having the Historic Center which we call Jericho. The name itself was given to the house by Miss Reynard when she bought it in 1955, because the walls were tumbling down. Miss Reynard was an assistant professor of English and American studies at Barnard College, an author and a poet of some talent, although much of her poetry has never been published. The story of her association with Jericho House can be found in a booklet entitled "The Story of Two Houses", by W. Jeremiah Burke, which details the acquisition of Jericho and the Josiah Dennis Manse as well. This pamphlet is available at both historic houses (for hours, see calendar), and will also be available at our August 28th meeting. Copies of Miss Reynard's collection of Cape folklore, "The Narrow Land", are available at most local bookstores, as republished by the Chatham Historical Society. Ed. note - Currently out of print, The Story of Two Houses was published in 1976 by the Dennis Historical Commission.

For a bit more background, from the May 2018 DHS Newsletter, we learn - *Elizabeth Reynard and her cousin Virginia Gildersleeve are ladies very important in the founding of the Dennis Historical Society. Elizabeth was a retired Barnard College professor when she purchased the Captain Theophilus Baker House and Buildings at the corner of Main Street and Trotting Park Road in South Dennis in the 1950s. She named the house "Jericho" after the city in the Bible whose "walls were falling down." Following her death in January 1962, the restoration of the house and grounds was continued by Virginia Gildersleeve, Dean Emeritus of Barnard, who then gifted the property to the Town of Dennis in 1962. The Town then completed that restoration work. This gift was instrumental in the formation of the Dennis Historical Society.*

IF ONLY THIS HOUSE COULD TALK

Have you seen what they are doing to Church Eleazer's house? Oh, not bad things, but good things. For those of you not acquainted with the south side of Dennis, first let me locate the house of which I speak. It stands on Main Street, directly opposite the South Dennis Congregational Church. Church Eleazer Nickerson was its third owner, having inherited it from his father, Eleazer, who in his turn had inherited it from his father, John Nickerson. In Church Eleazer's time, there were three Eleazer Nickersons living on the main street of South Dennis. They were distinguished from each other by using the location of their dwelling houses. Thus, Church Eleazer lived opposite the church. Brook Eleazer lived by the brook from Fresh Pond to Bass River, and Bridge Eleazer lived on the corner of High Bank Road, which led to the bridge. Church Eleazer's house is being totally renovated and restored, and I am so happy to see the care that is going into it. The house was built about 1744, and is among the South Dennis Historic District's oldest homes. When it was new, its small-paned windows did not look out upon the graceful church that stands across the road from it today, but it did see the construction of the first south meeting house in 1795, and the present one in 1835. But if I could ask questions of this house, it would not be about the church or even about Church Eleazer, but about old Eleazer, who occupied the house from his father's death in 1745 until his own passing in 1800, at the age of 82. In the diary of Benjamin Bangs of Harwich, on 15 December, 1760, I have read this entry: "I sold my negro Oliver and very glad to get rid of him for thirty-nine pounds of lawful money to Eleazer Nickerson of Bass Ponds and he is gone this day; this is ye seventh master he has had; good riddance to bad rubbage". Eleazer is, therefore, one of several men of otherwise sterling character in the early community who is known to have owned a slave. It would be most interesting to know how this valuable and righteous citizen solved the moral problem of slave ownership. What were Oliver's duties? How was he treated? And did he prove to be, in fact, "bad rubbage" as Capt. Bangs had said? If only Church Eleazer's house could talk, we would gain a great deal of insight into a part of our history which is very difficult for present-day society to understand.

"GREAT YEARS, GREAT EVENTS. GREAT MEN"

When you visit the Manse this summer, be sure to allow enough time to examine the Shiverick exhibit now on display in the Summer Kitchen Ell. It is a collection which tells the story of the Shiverick Shipyard, which flourished in East Dennis from 1816 until after the Civil War. The high point of Cape Cod shipbuilding, and the glory of that shipyard, were the eight ships built from 1848 to 1862. The exhibit includes half models from which these beautiful vessels were built, actual ribs excavated from Sesuet [sic] Harbor, where the shipyard stood, treasures owned by local families, brought back from foreign ports on these ships, which were manned almost totally by local men, and other mementoes of the great days of sail. It tells the story of a local enterprise which, by dint of hard work and ingenuity, proved a financial boon to the entire community. The eight ships built at East Dennis all had distinguished careers and earned world-wide respect for our town and her craftsmen. Help us to preserve the memory of their excellence by visiting this exhibit.

CALENDAR

August 4 Cape Cod Art Museum Historical Art Show, home of the Abrams, Whig Street, Dennis.
See Dennis Register for details.

DENNIS FESTIVAL DAYS AUGUST 25 - SEPT.

Detailed schedules available at your Post Office and Chamber of Commerce.

August 27 10 A.M. Cinema 28, Dennis Port. Meet for guided bike tour.

August 28 7:30 West Dennis Community Building. Talk by Kathy Swegart on Ghosts of the Cape.

Jericho open Mon., Wed. and Fri. all month, 2-4:30. Special quilt exhibit during Festival Days.

Josiah Dennis Manse open Tues. and Thurs. all month. Special Shiverick exhibit.

Village Garden Club Flower Show during Festival Days.

August 30 1 P.M. Old Fashioned Game Day on the Manse Lawn.

THE FLYING SPOUSE - A SEA YARN

One Shiverick vessel which is not represented in the exhibit at the Manse is the ship Flying Spouse. I will tell you its story, which is recounted in E. Reynard's "The Narrow Land". It seems that old Asa Shiverick really outdid himself on that vessel. When she was launched out of Sesuet [sic] Harbor, she proved to be too long to turn around in Cape Cod Bay, Asey tried to shorten her a bit - first he sawed off the flying jib-boom, a task which took him three years. Still she could not be turned in the Bay. So he spent the next five years sawing off her dolphin striker and whisker boom. But the Flying Spouse wouldn't budge, so poor Asey spent the next ten years, daytime and Sundays, sawing off the jib boom and bowsprit. Even then, when he pushed her helm hard-a-lee, she wacked her nose on Billingsgate Island and caused it to disappear. Then he tried to get her out stern first, and sure enough she cleared the Cape's tip and was ready to sail. One of the problems with the Flying Spouse was that her sails were so heavy that no crew of men could bend them on, so, Asa had to take along a team of mules. In fact, with the huge spread of canvas required to sail that ship, Asey had to take along so many mules that there wasn't any room for cargo. But wily, old Asey, he knew how to turn his ship to profit. He bet with Captain Obed Paine of Eastham that he could sail his ship to Ireland and back in 6 days and be in East Dennis for church on Sunday. Capt. Paine took him on, and resolved to go along on this maiden voyage, to keep old Asa honest. The mules hauled up the anchor on Monday morning. Capt. Obed had reckoned that, large as the ship was, she couldn't sail any faster than the wind, but he hadn't calculated on the fact that, when the stern was three days out of port, the bow was already in Ireland. But now Asa had another problem. How was he to get that durned ship out of Queenstown Harbor and turned around to head her home? But don't you count old Asey out of this one. He climbed up one of the masts, sat himself on a yard arm and hollered at the top of his voice, "God Save the King and Hooray for the British Parliament" Now, that made those Irishmen so mad that they shoved that vessel out of the harbor hard enough to make her glide clean across the Atlantic and strike up against the Clay Pounds in Truro. Well, sir, Capt. Obed knew that he'd been licked fair and square. Asa demanded that Obed hand over his old lady's recipe for quahog fritters as payment of the debt, and he ate a batch of them for Sunday breakfast. 'Tis said that those fritters got his stomach so "upsot" that he ordered the Flying Spouse scuttled that very day. And that's why Asa Shiverick's biggest vessel is not in the Manse exhibit - but I can give you the receipt for quahog fritters, if you've a mind to try them!

BICYCLE RIDE IN DENNIS PORT - FESTIVAL DAYS, 1985

The Dennis Port Historic District Study Committee is diligently surveying, documenting, and dating the older buildings in that village with the hope of calling attention to, and preserving their history. Once a busy port, with large wharves extending far into the Sound, it is now the heart of the town's tourist industry and is struggling to revive and revitalize its business center. Many facets of the town's historic life can be learned by bicycling through the side streets of this busy village. We invite you to join Isabelle and Bill Flynn and others who are familiar with the Port's history, to bicycle for an hour or so to some of the interesting sites, and hear about Dennis Port in days gone by. Join us in the parking lot of Cinema 28, at 10 A.M. on Tuesday, August 27. Non-bicyclers are welcomed to follow the tour in cars.

Thank you Nancy for this and so many other wonderful DHS Newsletters. Thank you Burt Derick and Pete Howes for having the foresight to scan and save so many issues. And thank you to Brian Cook who created the website for the Society which allows easy access to them. Each January, the previous year's newsletters are added to the website.

The first was written on September 12, 1977, by William Jeremiah Burke, Librarian. It became the January 1978 Newsletter. If his name seems familiar, look back at who wrote "*The Story of Two Houses*".

Dennis Historical Society
P.O. Box 607
South Dennis, MA 02660-0607

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Don't miss Colonial Day and don't miss these opportunities to help your Society!

Docents are needed at the Josiah Dennis Manse Museum!

If you are interested in Dennis history, want to learn more and enjoy interacting with people, a special opportunity awaits those who volunteer in the 18th century home of the town's first minister, for whom the Town of Dennis was named! No experience is required, only the willingness to learn. Despite what you may have heard, period costumes are not required!

Interested? Please contact Dee, the Volunteer Coordinator by emailing her DHSVolunteerCoordinator@gmail.com



COLONIAL DAY IS BACK!
Saturday, August 16: 10am - 3pm at Josiah Dennis Manse



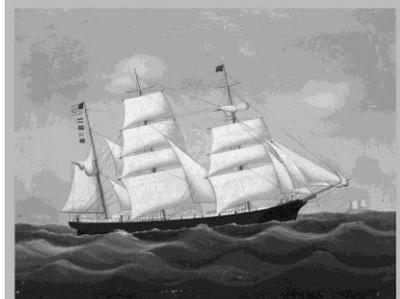
FREE ADMISSION AND FUN FOR THE WHOLE FAMILY AT THIS SPECTACULAR SUMMER EVENT

Step back to the 1700s as you visit the restored Old West School House and the 18th century home of the town's namesake minister.
61 WILG STREET IN DENNIS VILLAGE

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

Dennis Maritime Museum

West Dennis Graded School House, 2nd Floor



MEET PEOPLE, HAVE FUN, AND SHARE DENNIS'S RICH SEAFARING HISTORY

Wednesday or Friday, 1 - 4 pm in July and August
One hour training/overview provided by DMM staff
interested? info@dennishistoricalsociety.org

Mark your Calendar - A dedication, hosted by the Dennis Historical Commission, will be held on Sept. 20 at 1 pm, Howes Cemetery, 48 Bramble Lane in Dennis. David Schafer, President of the Cape & Islands Chapter of the Sons of the American Revolution, will dedicate a bronze plaque on a flush granite marker in front of the Howes Obelisk. SAR Chaplain Bruce Bassett, Rev. retired, will do the invocation & benediction, and the SAR Color Guard will join them. The memorial is funded by the Howes Fund of the Dennis Historical Society and members of the Howes Family will attend. The plaque honors 3 descendants of Thomas Howes who died in the defense of Boston during the American Revolution.