



Dennis Historical Society

Newsletter

October 2025

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**The next Board Meeting will be held on Tuesday, October 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

Repeating the Notice!

The Annual Meeting will not include a luncheon this year. When the 2025 DHS Calendar was enclosed with the April Newsletter, the date was set – Saturday, October 25th. Members and their guests will still meet on that day, but the time is 2:00 pm and the place is the Dennis Memorial Library. After a brief meeting which will include the election of officers, elected directors and appointed directors, attendees will be treated to a talk by the retired Director of the South Dennis Free Public Library and scholar Anne Speyer. Anne will present a program entitled *Women in the American Revolution*. The program is free, but \$5.00 donations will be gratefully accepted, and at Anne's request, divided between the Dennis Historical Society and the Dennis Memorial Library.

An Art Deco Masterpiece

My interest in art deco dates back to the 1950s, although I didn't realize it at the time. Devouring everything I could find about the Space Age, even before the launching of Sputnik 1 in 1957, I was fascinated by a series of articles in *Collier's Magazine* which detailed Wehner von Braun's plans for human spaceflight. The articles were accompanied by amazing illustrations by architect and artist Chesley Bonestell. I later learned Bonestell was famous for the art deco façade on the Chrysler Building in New York. This became my connection with art deco. Closer to home, today I read that, although far from art deco in style, he designed the Plymouth Rock Memorial.

Two events magically came together to precipitate this article. First, a box of books about Cape Cod which had been stored in our basement was opened and yielded a copy of *A Pilgrim Returns to Cape Cod* by Edward Rowe Snow, published in 1946. Second, I was gifted a book entitled *Ahoy Cape Cod!* by Arthur Wilson Tarbell, published in 1932. Curious about what the books might have to say about Dennis, I read the chapter in each. Most of the writing was about people, places, history and folklore with which I was very familiar, such as the story of Scargo Lake as told in the poem about Princess Scargo. Other information had been included in past DHS Newsletter issues or in the Society's monthly Digital Digest. Both contained a very unique bit of Dennis history and included what follows.



Image courtesy of atlasobscura.com

From Tarbell, we read - *An honor that had been held by Venice for 350 years came recently to Dennis. In 1588 the great artist, Tintoretto, executed his masterpiece "Paradise" at the Ducal Palace in the City of the Sea, a colossal canvas of 2220 square feet, the largest of all pictures ever painted. It was not until 1930 that it was superseded in size by a mural decoration of 6400 square feet, designed by Rockwell Kent, the distinguished American artist. In that year, at Dennis, was erected an interesting structure. Vaulting its ceiling and decorating its walls upward from the wainscoting is this enormous mural of Kent's, a modernistic conception of the heavens. In gorgeous colorings, mostly deep blues and rich yellows, prancing wild horses, lovers in pairs, and figures of flying men, float through stellar space. The sun and the moon are at either end of the auditorium.*

And from Snow we learn - *It is said that Venice held for many years the honor of having the world's largest mural, designed and painted by the great Tintoretto in the late sixteenth century. In 1930, however, Venice lost that honor when Rockwell Kent and Joe Mielzener painted the mural in the Cape Cinema at Dennis. There in the painting is the bull jumping over the moon, Lovers Lane in the Milky Way, horses in the sea, a brilliant comet, and many other colorful flying figures.*

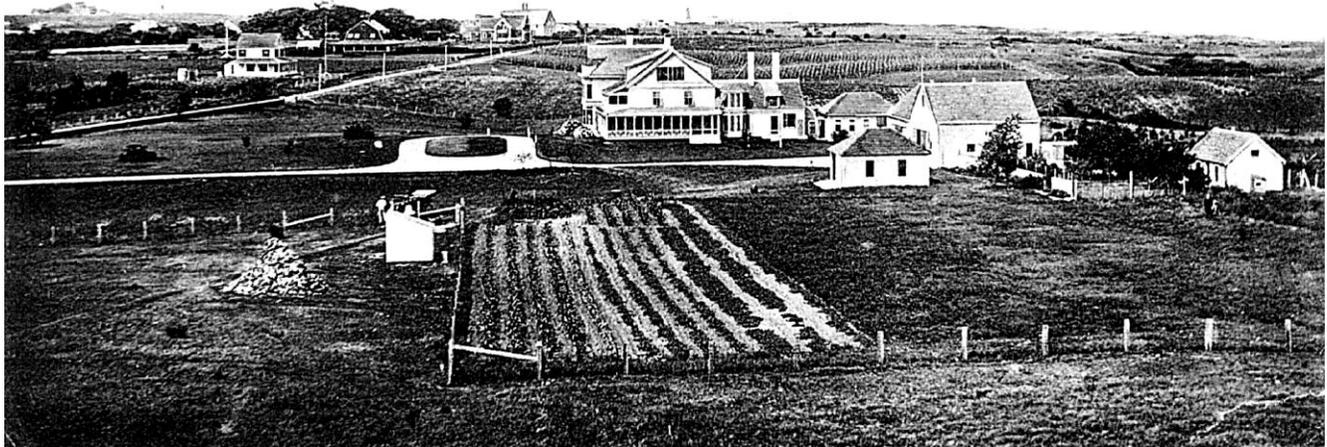


132 GARDENS AT THE CINEMA, CAPE COD, MASS. 66-10240
Cape Cinema in a postcard from the DHS Digital Archive

Ed note - Rockwell Kent's is no longer the world's largest mural. It lost the title to another Kent mural with the name *Power*, commissioned by General Electric for its pavilion at the 1939 New York World's Fair. Themed the *World of Tomorrow*, the fair closed in October 1940 because of World War II. The mural was lost in a warehouse fire late in 1940. Today, the title for the world's largest is held by the *Incheon Grain Silo Mural* (2018) in South Korea. However, the 6,400-square-foot art deco mural, depicting the heavens and covering the curved ceiling of the Cape Cinema remains a significant piece of American art. Never did I expect my childhood interest in the heavens, space travel and later art deco would come together in Dennis!

So, where was the photographer?

It wasn't long after the arrival of the May Newsletter that I received an email from a reader suggesting that this image of the Bleakhouse property on Seaview Avenue in Dennis might have been taken from the Bleakhouse Observatory.



The Bleak House property, looking west toward Corporation Road. Seaside Avenue runs diagonally up left to right – Dennis Postcard History Series

Intrigued by the suggestion, I consulted what had been written about the location and the map which was in the May issue and determined that the distance from Seaside Avenue and the angle which defined the location of the house on the Paddock Homestead made it impossible. So, from where was the picture taken? Before answering this question, it is necessary to revisit the article which was reprinted in the May Newsletter. Written by Phyllis Horton, it first appeared in the August 1996 DHS Newsletter. – *Zachariah Howes built his home in North Dennis in 1805 on a rise*

with Scargo Lake on the south and Cape Cod Bay on the north. One of his grandsons, Ezra T. Howes, went from Dennis to find fame and fortune. He was successful in the oil fields of Titusville, PA and returned to Dennis with his business associate Edward Cole, formerly of Orleans, to renovate the homestead into a summer residence in 1888. They changed the old family home into a very imposing residence and named it Bleak House because of its location overlooking the high moors between the house and the bay.

The partners arrived every year with their families and relaxed to enjoy the balmy breezes and beautiful sunsets over the bay. Unlike many other summer families, they hired their housekeeper, chauffeur and maids here and took them back to Brookline in the winter. In one of the later years, they moved to Tiverton, RI for tax purposes, but continued to spend the summers here. "Aunt Esther" was the last family member to come and she stayed at Little Bleak House. Originally built as an observatory on Newcomb's Hill near the corner of Rte. 6A and Seaside Avenue on Bleak House property it had been converted to a year-round house. At the onset of World War II Bleak House was leased to the U.S Coast Guard as a school for training guard dogs for patrol work. By the end of the war the family no longer was interested in retaining Bleak House and it was sold out of the family only to be subsequently purchased by Ted Howes, a nephew of the last Howes owner. He tore the house down and subdivided the property. This development is notable in that it was one of the first on Cape Cod with underground utilities, but out front along Seaside Avenue still stands the rock wall built by Mr. Joseph Murphy of Scargo Tower fame—for the majestic Bleak House.

I was sure that at some time, I had seen a 19th century map of that part of Dennis which showed the area north of the intersection of Seaside Avenue and Route 6A. A search of my newsletter files produced the one at the right. The photo angle from the windmill and the property designated Mrs. E. Howes matches perfectly. Ah, I thought, the photo was taken from the mill! But was it?

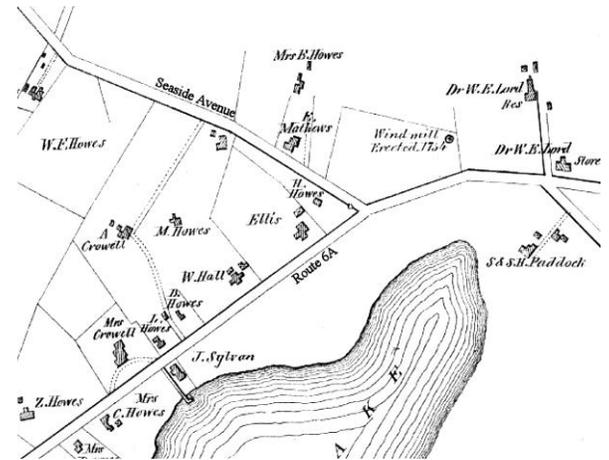
The Massachusetts Historical Commission on Bleak House contain extensive information about the property and its history. There is, however, nothing about the windmill which is designated *Wind mill Erected 1754* on the map.

Seeking more information, I consulted Diane Rochelle, our treasurer and chair of the Dennis Historical Commission. Accompanying the email she sent back was a picture of the North Mill plaque on a stone at the intersection of New Boston and Nobsussetts Roads and a document from which I learned - *grist mill in the East parish (S, Deyo p. 516)*. It was renamed North Mill when a second mill was erected across street west of the burying ground & meeting house, late 1700's (DCC, NTR p. 185). This mill was also owned by Abner and Oren Howes, who sold it in 1869 to Edmund Matthews. In 1870, Mr. Matthews moved the mill to the east end of Scargo Lake's shore and started grinding. Five years later, he took the mill down and used the stones as steps to his house beside his store and post office on Main Street. (S. Deyo p. 523).

So, it was the second mill which appears on the 1880 map, and it appears that the date 1754 is incorrect for the one which was moved. Diane is of the opinion that the date came from what was renamed the North Mill when the second mill was built in the late 1700s, 1795 according to the North Mill plaque. The mill was taken down in 1875. According to Phyllis Horton's article, the renovation of the Bleak House property into the summer estate which appears in the photo began in 1888. At that point, according to the information available, the mill had been gone for thirteen years. The photo could not have been taken from the mill, and as was shown earlier, not from the observatory either.

The following is speculation, but might explain the location of the photographer who took the remarkable picture on the previous page. Having checked a topographic map of Dennis and found the elevation of Newcomb Hill from which the photo was taken (not from ground level) and having checked all the *Digital Archive* photos for one that might show it (and found none), I believe that there was a water storage tank erected on the Bleak House property as part of the 1888 renovation.

With abundant fresh water available near the surface of the sole source aquifer, such storage tanks, usually with an accompanying windmill to pump the water, were very common on large estates on Cape Cod at the end of the 19th century. It was from such a water tower that I believe the photograph was taken. Anyone with a theory, please email me at info@dennishistoricalsociety.org. – thank you!



From Geo.H. Walker & Co.'s Atlas of Barnstable County, 1880



Image from the DHS Website – Historic Markers

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**ANNUAL
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BAKING
CONTEST**

Saturday, October 11, 1-4 pm
Captain Theophilus Baker House
at 90 Old Main Street in West Dennis

DEADLINE TO REGISTER: OCTOBER 7
Contact Dawn Dellner at 508.237.6954
or at dawn.dellner@gmail.com



**Women in the
American Revolution**

A Talk by Anne Speyer

for Dennis Historical Society Members and Their Guests
at the DHS Annual Meeting October 25

Dennis Memorial Library | 1020 Old Bass River Road

A \$5 Donation is Suggested
Proceeds to Dennis Memorial Library

DHS Annual Meeting at 2 pm: All Members/Guests Welcome
Anne's Talk to Begin by 2:30 pm

Don't miss these terrific October events!