



Dennis Historical Society Newsletter July 2024

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The next Board Meeting will be held on Tuesday, July 9th, 2:00 pm at the Dennis Memorial Library

1020 Old Bass River Road, Dennis Village

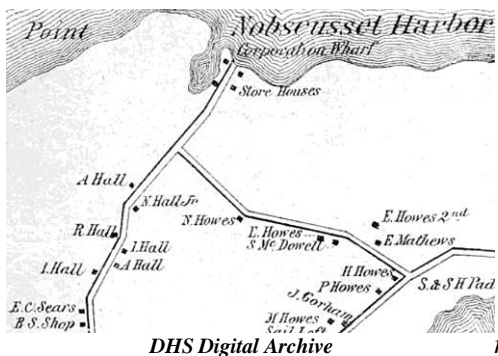
Members Welcome

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

The Stores and Storekeepers of Corporation Wharf

I am again wandering by Corporation Harbor, wearing my look-back spectacles while going in, out, and around the fish and ice houses, ship chandleries, salt vats and fish flaking yards. In the background there are ships of varying sizes and uses.

We are grateful to Howard Bonington for his drawing of Corporation Harbor as part of his ongoing series, *Imagining the Past*, done for the Dennis Historical Society. And again, special thanks to Nancy Thatcher Reid for *Dennis, Cape Cod*, Simeon Deyo for *History of Barnstable County* and Patricia Walker for her *Nobscusset Harbor at Corporation Beach* – so wrote Ann Croston as her introduction to her history of *The Stores and Storekeeper of Corporation Wharf*. It is again with pleasure that I present the second in the series of incredibly researched articles by Ann about a fascinating part of Dennis history.



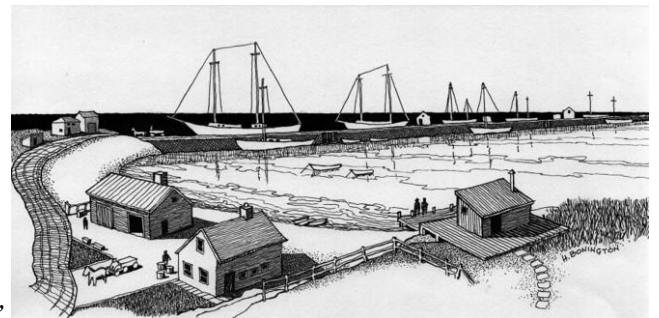
Judging from the 1856 map, there were at least 4 buildings located at the harbor. What were the buildings and who were the men who owned and worked them?

Early Cape Cod settlers found farming challenging due to sandy soil. Turning to the sea for a better livelihood, they faced obstacles like treacherous shoals, prompting a need for improved harbors and docking.

By 1814, Dennis was already active in maritime pursuits. Seeking a solution, citizens petitioned to build a pier into the Bay, emphasizing the absence of a convenient harbor. This move reflected the region's increasing reliance on maritime activities.

Nobscusset Point Pier Company

On February 21, 1814, the Nobscusset Point Pier Company was established by Daniel Howes, Henry Hall, Zenas Howes, John Howes Jr., and Oren Howes. The corporation, later known as Corporation Wharf, gained legal status to own real estate and construct a pier on the easterly side of Nobscusset Point. “That the whole real estate which the company may at any one-time hold, or possess, in their corporate capacity, shall not exceed \$20,000 in value. That the said Pier shall be erected upon the easterly side of Nobscusset Point, to be built of stone and timber, and to commence at a sufficient distance from high water mark, at said point, and to run easterly 600 feet, more or less.” [The bill passed the Debate the following day]. The pier became known as Corporation Wharf. Corporation Road was also known as “Wharf Road”. The purpose of the wharf was to land fishing and packet boats.



Corporation Harbor, pen & ink rendering by Howard Bonington

In 1834, the Corporation purchased land from Aaron Crowell for \$112.50. Shareholders, initially accepted until 1836, paid \$12.50 per share. The land purchase and successful share sales allowed them to cease further share offerings in 1836.

An 1835 entry from a combined journal-ledger of the early Nobscusset Pier Corporation documents the activities of the pier and reads, "Voted to accept the building of the harbor as far as they have and obtain funds for the same. Voted

for the committee to complete the breakwater and to raise money for the same on the shares if necessary." Another set of minutes adds that permission was granted to "build 30 feet on the west end of the shed for the convenience of packing."

An 1838 excerpt still has the corporation adding to the wharf, "Voted the trustees continue the building of the new wharf as far as they may think expedient, "leading to the acquisition of 12,000 feet of timber.

The subsequent year 1839 saw a decision to lay stones for pier construction and terminate fifty-four feet from the old pier for the Northwest corner, and to have the Northeast corner of the pier seventy-two feet from the breakwater and about abreast of the breakwater to the Eastward. It would extend dockage facilities and fish packing sheds.

The meeting of January 28, 1841 shows a vote to petition the Honorable Seth Crowell for advice respecting the legality of digging into John Hall's Pond (the small pond west of the Peat Hole behind the lower parking lot).

At the May meeting members voted that those profits be used for improving the harbor that same year. It was also voted that any additional expense would be liquidated with 1842 profits.

The harbor, with its pier, fish packing, ice sheds, store and fleet was altogether excellent. The Dennis mackerel fleet was the Cape leader for landed mackerel that year.

Ed. note - at this point in her extensive research, Ann lists the *Business Operations and Financials (1841)* which I have omitted. If anyone would like to read Ann's research in its entirety, email me at info@dennishistoricalsociety.org and I will send you the pdf.

James Howes and the Fish-Packing Business (1837-1856)

In 1837, James Howes initiated the first fish-packing business at Corporation Wharf, a venture that thrived until 1856. James Howes and Howes Chapman kept a store at Corporation Wharf, then one of the liveliest places on the Cape. James Howes maintained the business, sometimes in partnership with Howes Chapman (1812-1897) until succeeded by Joshua C Howes (1816-1902) in 1856. Deyo pg 525, Reid pg 301. Keeping the fish edible was a huge challenge. The ice came from Scargo Lake.

"Along the street were buildings for icing and packing fish for sale in Boston and New York. An ice house stood on the site where the home of John M. Stone now is (Corporation Rd 217 – House built 1907). Anson Howes remembers that when he was a boy, his father would cart ice from "the pond", as Scargo Lake was called, to fill that icehouse." May 14, 1981: The Register, Page: S4 - Nobscusset journal by Paula Bacon.

After the fishing businesses declined, the buildings were sold or torn down. One of the buildings was removed to the property of Alvin Greenleaf (father of Mae Greenleaf Freeman) and used as a barn. It may still be seen on Mrs. Freeman's property on New Boston Road.

Ed. note – at this point, Ann lists much valuable information about James Howes, his family and business activities, including *James Howes, the Farmer & Storekeeper*, up to 1857. Again, this information is in the pdf which I will be pleased to send. For this brilliantly researched look into our past - **Thank you Ann!**

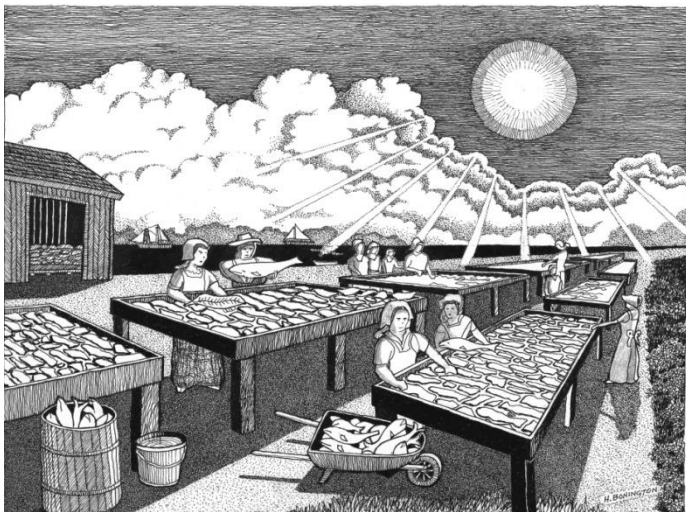
Fish Flakes

In addition to using ice for refrigeration, there was another intriguing method of preserving fish mentioned in Ann's opening paragraph, "fish flaking yards". Wanting to know more, this is what I found. Quoting from *Memories of the Past* from the memoirs of Joshua Eldridge Crowell –

This curing fish for the market is no boy's play for it deserves great care that the curing may be done right. Perhaps it may be of interest to some to know how the flakes are made that are used for drying out the fish, and in showing how salt cod are cured for the market. I will only mention the way in which they are handled in my own home town on the Cape. The fish must be dried out no matter in what town or place they are made. There may be some difference in the construction of the flakes on which the fish are made but nevertheless they must be dried out, and the same care must be taken to produce the required results. It requires first of all that the land on which the tables or flakes are built should be level and free from briars and ivy as possible, as one is poisonous and the other nearly as bad. The earth in that vicinity being free from rocks or stones makes the digging for the post holes an easy job. These drying tables as I may call them are arranged in sections in a straight line one with another and extend to any length needed, each section being we will say thirty feet or more in length, divided by a space sufficient for a team to pass through, and it makes this fish yard appear like the streets of a city that are laid out at right angles. The foundation of the flakes consists of posts about the size of those needed for fencing set in the ground six or eight feet apart on which rests the top frame of two by three spruce, each section being about six feet

wide and four high with thirty or more less feet in length, and when all framed up are then ready for the finishing act, as once the frame is made it then only remains to be covered, after which they are ready for the business or use intended.

From the *Gazetteer of Dennis*, edited by Burt Derick, we learn that - *Flakes* were structures made of wood on which split and salted codfish (primarily, but also other species such as haddock and halibut) were air-dried for preservation.



Pen & Ink Rendering by Howard Bonington

Cod fish were cleaned at sea, having their entrails only removed, and were then salted. This preserved them long enough to get them ashore, but they still contained a large moisture content. They would then be laid out on the fish flakes by local women and girls, to dry in the sun and reduce the moisture content. When the rains came, the fish had to be scooped up in wheelbarrows and removed to barns which were nearby until the bad weather passed. **No photos remain of the various fish flakes in Dennis.**

Once again, thanks to the artistic talent and imagination of Howard Bonington, we are able to time travel back and view a scene in Dennis' history of which no images exist. Working from the information supplied by both *Memories of the Past* and the *Gazetteer of Dennis*, Howard created this amazing depiction!

Thank you Howard!

Pop Quiz

Last month I received an email from Board member Maureen Sullivan. Maureen is also the Assistant Librarian at the Pauline Wixon Derick Library. She and Librarian Ruth Derick have been sorting, clipping and saving bits and pieces related to Dennis history from various publications which were just taking up too much space in the library. When an editor is asked a question along the lines of – *do you think readers would be interested in occasional Trivia quizzes in the newsletter?* – it doesn't take much mulling over to respond with an enthusiastic **YES!** So here is pop quiz number one. All of the questions this month relate to Scargo Tower.



HSOY Facebook via Kevin Keegan

1. How many towers have been built on Scargo Hill?
2. When was the first tower built?
3. How were the first towers destroyed?
4. How tall is the current structure?
5. Name the mason who built the final tower?

Ed. note – many months ago, this unique photo of Scargo Tower was found online and emailed to me by Kevin Keegan. He found it on HSOY's Facebook Pages.

After a lot of time and patience working with a photo program, I was able to restore and enhance it to its present appearance. It may be the only photo of the construction in existence, and it is with gratitude that I make it available to our readers. **Thank you HSOY and Kevin!**

The first two readers to email the correct answers to me at info@dennishistoricalsociety.org will be recognized as winners in a future newsletter. Having two winners, one on and one off Cape, allows an extra day for mail delivery and levels the playing field.



Wishing Everyone a Safe & Happy Independence Day!

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US POSTAGE PAID
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South Yarmouth, MA
02664

Don't Miss These Wonderful July Events!

DENNIS MARITIME MUSEUM

Second floor of the West Dennis Graded Schoolhouse

Open Wednesdays 1-4 pm from July 10 to August 28



"CELEBRATING NEW ACQUISITIONS"

67 School Street, West Dennis/wheelchair accessible

HISTORY COMES ALIVE
FRIDAY, JULY 12, AT 10AM



DENNIS VILLAGE
CEMETERY WALK

FREE TOUR WILL HIGHLIGHT
EARLY DENNIS HISTORY

Meet guide Terri Fox at the Receiving Tomb
RAIN DATE: Sunday, July 14, at 2pm

GRAND REOPENING

1801 CAPTAIN THEOPHILUS BAKER HOUSE
& BARN AT JERICHO HISTORICAL CENTER



SATURDAY, JULY 13, 10 AM - 3 PM
90 OLD MAIN STREET, WEST DENNIS
FREE ADMISSION (Donations gladly accepted)