



Dennis Historical Society

Newsletter

March 2024

Volume 47, No.03

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

Thank you again, Nancy Thatcher Reid!

Over the years, many of the email inquires which have come into our society have resulted in an article for the newsletter. Usually, when a query about Dennis history arrives, the first thing I do is reach for my copy of *Dennis, Cape Cod* which sits by my computer. Such was the case when the one below came in on January 10th.

Good afternoon,

As a member of the Truro Historical Society, I am researching the history of Truro during the early to mid 19th century. The storm of 1841 was probably the single most important event of that period. 57 Truro men and boys died in that storm and so did 28 fishermen from Dennis. I am writing to see whether the Dennis Historical Society might know of any records about the schooners and men from your town who were lost in the storm.

In a memoir, Matthias Rich Jr. (at just 19 years old, the only Truro skipper to bring his vessel safely home that day) describes sailing during the storm near two other schooners. One of those schooners was the Pomona of Truro. Rich thought the other was probably the "Bride" of Dennis. Rich speculated that the Bride broke up in a squall some dozen miles off Nauset Harbor at around 1 pm on October 3. The Truro archives and published materials, as far as I can tell, do not contain any further information about what happened to the Bride. Would you by any chance have any information or leads on this piece of history?

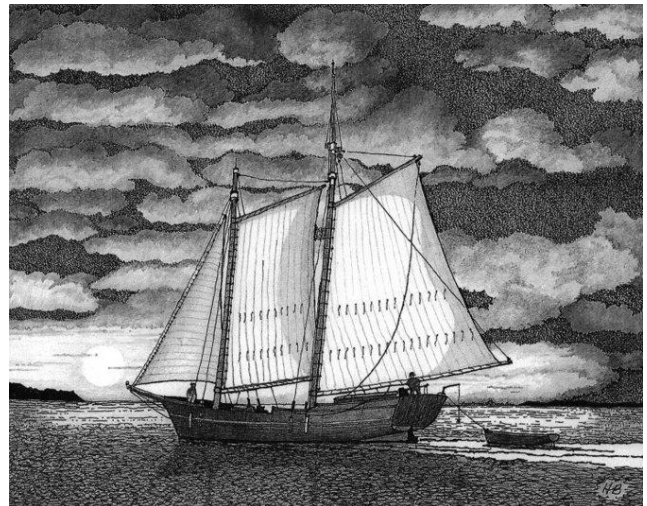
Thanks to Nancy Thatcher Reid, not only was I able to answer the sender's request, I reacquainted myself with a piece of Dennis history which is well researched, beautifully written and very poignant. I am pleased to share it.

The Great Gale

The story began on a bright October day. At the shore, the job of outfitting the fishing vessels for their last trip of the season was completed. Most of the young men of the village had left for Georges Bank in the fleet made up of thirteen of the schooners which called Nobscusset Point their home.

Only the women folk and the older men remained at home to complete the tasks necessary to prepare for the winter, while the children made ready to return to their studies at the district schools.

In the old Prince Howes house in the New Boston section of the village of Dennis, Desire (Howes) Hall (1808-1889) had once again said farewell to her beloved husband and had settled down to the solitary routine to which she had become accustomed. Lonely evenings were not unusual for Desire. Since her marriage to Freeman Hall (1808-1841) she had often been left alone for weeks at a time. This was not something she was unprepared to face, for as the daughter of a mariner, she knew when she married a mariner what her life would be like. Now alone once more, she carried out her customary duties of caring for her four young children: Cynthia, aged eleven, Freeman Gibbs, aged seven, Barnabas C., aged five and baby Sarah Freeman, who had just turned two on September 29th.



Calm before the Storm by Howard Bonington

When the children were safely in bed, Desire also retired to the lonely bed she longed to share with Freeman. Four young ones and a farm to look after in her husband's absence meant an early rising. Perhaps she dreamed of the new home Freeman was planning for them. This fishing voyage should pay for its construction. The lumber was already ordered and the lot on the corner of New Boston Road was ready. As soon as Freeman returned, the work on the house would begin.

Sometime in the night, did Desire notice the change in wind sounds? Probably she did. Probably the families of other men in the fishing fleet which had departed that day for Georges Banks also took note of this change. Families of mariners at sea were very observant of weather conditions, often reassuring themselves that, to their loved ones far out in the ocean, these changes meant little. By now the fleet which had left from Nobscusset Point was well away from Cape Cod. A little wind here in Dennis probably meant nothing to them away out there.

Desire Hall awoke at first light from a restless sleep. The wind was becoming brisk as she and her children went about their usual business. The baby was fed and bathed, the older children went about their duties—feeding the hens, milking the cow and putting her out to pasture—and then they must be sent off to school. Desire had a busy round of responsibilities to fulfill, for Dennis families were still mostly self-sufficient. Spinning, weaving, soap making, drying and preserving food were still a routine part of every homemaker's day. Perhaps she would have time to walk across the field with baby Sarah to visit with her mother, or down the road from New Boston to chat with one of her sisters, Juliana, who had married James Howes, or Sarah, who had married Barnabas Crowell. Both of them would also be alone with their children, for the sisters had all married mariners.

By noontime of October 2nd, those ashore were beginning to feel the effects of a strong northeast wind. Still, God willing, the fleet on Georges Bank would be out of harm's way. The nagging fears must be kept in check, for life must go on as it always did.

By the morning of October 3rd, the wind had increased to a strong gale. Surely the ministers could not complain of a "thin" congregation on this anxious Sunday morning as those at home became increasingly concerned. As the winds blew and the tides reached record proportions, who could blame the brave mother or wife who began to worry about their loved ones so far away from home?

As dawn broke on Monday, October 4, 1841 in the villages of the town of Dennis the people were already up and about, assessing the havoc wrecked by the storm. Trees had been uprooted, outbuildings collapsed. The high tides had done considerable damage to the saltworks along the beaches and to the wharf. Nothing had been heard as yet from those far away seeking fish but hope remained high that no news could be considered good news.

The first dreadful confirmation of the worst of the homefolk's fears came on Tuesday, October 5th when the Dennis schooner Village, Captain Eben Howes, was sighted approaching the Point with her flag at half mast. She made port at 5 pm. with most of the villagers waiting in the semidarkness to hear her news. Private anxiety was replaced by public fear.

All that the schooner's captain, Eben Howes, could report was this. He and his crew were caught in the gale, but had been able to turn back and make port safely at Provincetown because they had been late in leaving Nobscusset. Other vessels had not been so fortunate. Eben Howes had the unhappy task of informing the people of his native town of the loss of the nine man crew of the schooner Bride all drowned when that handsome vessel was demasted and overturned by the gale. Eight bodies were found inside the schooner's cabin when she drifted into Provincetown Harbor, and they were returned to their home aboard his vessel on this sad evening.

In addition to the loss of the Bride, Captain Eben was able to report that Captain William Crowell and his crew of the Vestal—were safe, having also come ashore at Provincetown. William was the brother of Captain Noah of the Bride. Both vessels had been built at Asa Shiverick's yard in East Dennis. Ironically, the Bride lost all of her crew, but the hull was salvageable, while the Vestal's crew were saved, but the vessel was a total loss. The Zambucca, Captain Abijah Howes, Jr., and the Red Wing, Captain ____ had also come ashore at the tip of the Cape with crew all safe. Eben had no news about the other eight schooners in the fleet that had left on October first. They were: the Theater, Isabella, Prussia, Sarah Ripley, Paragon, Peruvian, Patty and Betsy and the Greek, of which Desire's husband, Freeman Hall, was master.

Of the nine crew members of the Bride, all of the bodies were recovered except that of Kimball Howes. Sadly, the survivors went about the task of preparing to bury their dead. On Thursday, October 7th, a service was conducted at the Congregational Church in the village of Dennis. The Reverend Mr. Wallcut of the Unitarian Church and Mr. Handy Harris of the Methodist Church conducted the ceremony jointly. There was no joyful sound raised from the churches of

Dennis on this day—only the low sigh of heartbreak from the families of the deceased and the prayerful plea of those whose loved ones had sailed aboard the eight vessels which had not been heard from as yet.

We learn the news about the rest of the fleet as Captain Eben Howes recorded it in his log. The anguish and, in some cases, joy of the families of each of the crew members can only be recreated in our hearts.

October 7th The Schooner Sarah Ripley arrived at Hyannis. There still being seven not heard from.

October 8th Heard from the Schooner Peruvian. She arrived at Hyannis.

October 9th Heard from the Schooner Prussia of Dennis, she arrived at Hyannis, there still being five not heard from.

October 11th Heard from the Schooner Paragon, Zenas Howes, master. She arrived at Newport, Rhode Island.

October 12th Heard from Schooner Patty and Betsy arrived at Dennis. There still being three not heard from, consisting of the Schooners Greek, Isabella, and Theater and their friends are much concerned about them.

October 13th no news from the missing vessels.

October 15th no news from the missing vessels.

October 16th This day my journal ends for the present year.¹

*The fate of the three missing schooners has never been learned. It must be assumed that they were overcome by the tremendous wind and waves of what today would be termed a tropical hurricane. Including the crew of the *Bride*, at least twenty men from the town of Dennis died in this one devastating storm. In addition to *Desire's* husband Freeman Hall, two of her brothers, Jotham Howes and Uriah Howes, Jr., were lost. Two other victims were her first cousins, Luther Howes, the son of her father's brother Abijah, and Albert Howes, the son of her father's brother Jeremiah. Albert was just one day short of becoming sixteen years of age. Three sons of Shear Jashub and Ruth (Vincent) Howes went down—Philip, Martin and Captain John of the *Isabella*. Other members of the Howes family who never returned were Elisha and Frederick, sons of Ira and Charlotte Howes and Kimball, Daniel and Samuel Howes, all distant cousins. Urbana and Captain Noah H. Crowell, sons of Aaron Crowell (1783—1871) and his wife Polly (Howes), were both lost in the *Bride*. The other victims were Gustavius Hedge, Stephen and Larned Sears, Marshall Kelley and Peter Crowell. Although most of the men were but boys, still nine widows and sixteen fatherless children were left when the toll was final.*

*The south side had not escaped losses even though their fleet was not as far from home. The schooner *Government*, Captain Ryder, was driven from its anchorage, loaded with fish, but with the crew all safe ashore. Schooner *Victory* with one man aboard was also driven off and scuttled on Cape Poge, Martha's Vineyard, badly damaged. The fishing schooner *Union* was missing. Nathan Fisk's schooner *Tremont* broke its cables and ended up on Muskeget Island west of Nantucket, with surprisingly little damage. And the schooner *Eliza and Mary*, Captain Kelley, making a voyage from Bath, Maine to Providence was lucky enough to work her way into Plymouth, having lost her jib and five thousand feet of lumber and shingles which was a deck load. The *Yarmouth Register* reported that, of twenty-seven vessels moored or at anchor at Bass River, only six were able to ride out the storm safely.*

Many of the lost and damaged schooners were insured by the Cape Cod Commercial Insurance Company of Dennis, Nehemiah Baker, President. Stunned by the huge claims, the company nevertheless pressed on, but eventually failed in 1847.

1. A copy of Captain Eben Howes' log may be seen in the collection of the Pauline Wixon Derick Library (open most Tuesdays from 10:30 am to 2 pm) on the top floor of the West Dennis Free Public Library, 260 Main Street (Rt. 28).

Unknown House

We haven't done one of these in a while, and this time there is a reward! The first member who identifies whose house is pictured will receive a gift copy of the *Gazetteer of Dennis*, featured in last month's newsletter. Here are some clues. The house was built in Brewster and moved to East Dennis in August 1886. The shed was/is purportedly built of boards from the saltworks. Most importantly, does it still exist? If yes, where is it? All answers are needed to win! Please email your answers to me at info@dennishistoricalsociety.org.

Good hunting!



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**Join local storyteller Janine Orr
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18th century native daughter**

**Saturday, March 30, 2pm at Dennis Memorial Library
1020 Old Bass River Road, Dennis Village**

**This lecture series is sponsored by the Dennis Historical Society
and Dennis Memorial Library. A \$5 donation is recommended.**

It's Membership Renewal Time! ***March is the Month!***

When your letter arrives, don't just renew your membership, consider giving a gift membership to a family member, or a friend. What a great present! 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 also do so online using **PayPal** at
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Thank you!