



Dennis Historical Society

Newsletter

May 2024

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**The next Board Meeting will be held on Tuesday, May 21st, 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

A brisk walk on Corporation Road, and I am imagining the activity on the shore before it became Corporation Beach. We are indebted to Patricia Walker for her 2005 book, *Nobscusset Harbor at Corporation Beach*, to Nancy Thatcher Reid for her book, *Dennis, Cape Cod*, Simeon Deyo for *History of Barnstable County* and other researchers along the way. There is much more to tell, but here is a snapshot of the history. Aaron Crowell was an early property owner, although he and his family lived at 885 Main Street (Rt. 6A) – so wrote Dennis Historical Society Board Member, accomplished local historian and founder and sustainer of *Dennis Village Walking Tour* Ann Croston as her introduction to her history of *The Wharf of the Nobscusset Point Pier Corporation*. It is with pleasure that I present the first in a series of incredibly researched articles by Ann about a fascinating part of Dennis history. Part 2 will consist of a 4 part series entitled – *Nobscusset Stores*.

The Wharf of the Nobscusset Point Pier Corporation

The wharf of the Nobscusset Point Pier Corporation was the center of business in Dennis village, being home to a fishing fleet, which by 1829 was comprised of seventeen schooners and seven sloops. What came before the Nobscusset Point Pier Corporation wharf?



James Freeman, portrait
by Gilbert Stuart - from Wikipedia

*In an 1802 description by Rev James Freeman (1759-1835) in the **Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society, Volume VIII** - A mile north-east of the old meeting house, a bend in the shore forms a cove, which is denominated the Bite. On the west of it runs a point of rocks, which is dry at low water, but the greatest part of which is covered at high water. This point extends a quarter of a mile into the bay, north; and affords shelter against north-west winds. A pier carried out to the east of the Bite would form a convenient harbor. As however the banks are continually wearing away, they ought to be secured by a seawall.*

*The Bight – a protected area for fishing vessels in the Bass Hole at the mouth of Chase Garden Creek which separates Yarmouth from Dennis. At one time this was an active harbor but has silted in and is no longer a good anchorage. **Gazetteer of Dennis** – **Burt Derick.***

In 1814, a group of businessmen embarked upon a venture establishing a harbor at Nobscusset. The Nobscusset Point Pier Company was officially commissioned through the Massachusetts legislature. Captains included Daniel Howes (1767-1866), Zena Howes (1780-1864), Henry Hall (1761-1850), John Howes Jr. (1795-1864), and Oren Howes 1776-1834). Most of these men were either neighbors, friends, or relatives of each other. In most cases, families would see their children intermarry as well.

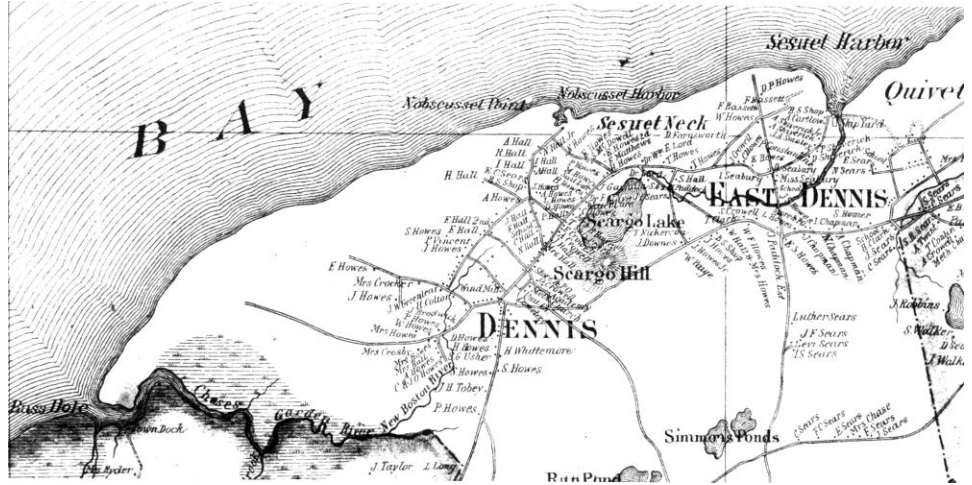
In March, it was "thought proper" by the original five subscribers to divide the company into thirty shares. New members bought in at thirteen dollars per share. The Nobscusset Pint Pear Company [sic] held its first legal corporate meeting on June 1, 1814. By November fees were in place for landing and shipping cargo and for anchorage, one cent on a barrel of salt or grain or other articles, such as shingles, so landed. Ships were charged one shilling per day "even if she only stay one tide". (P. Walker)

Thirty shares were sold to a total of fourteen stockholders, mostly in the Halls and Howes family. A wharf of stone and wood was first created at the easterly side of Nobscusset Point running for six hundred feet. When completed the local citizenry referred to it as Corporation Road and the area is still called Corporation beach today.

As the pier became more utilized, demand increased as packets boats to Boston were a boon to the local town's economy. With the increase of more ships in the region, the demand to add to a fleet also increased, thus creating the opportunity for the town's most famous commercial enterprise, the shipyard at Sesuit Harbor.

"The Bite" and "The Point" provided a natural but not fully protected anchorage for the several fishing boats owned in Nobsusset. The boats could find winter and storm shelter in a quay known as the Peat Hole just inland from the point of rocks, or in the Bass Hole at the mouth of the Chase Garden River at the border of Yarmouth. The big change on the north side was on the beaches, where new saltworks appeared as fast as they could be constructed.

Aaron Crowell (1783-1871), Jeremiah Crowell (1779-1823), and Elkanah Crowell (1789-), three of the sons of Aaron Crowell, Sr., (1743-1831) and his wife Rebecca Crowell (1748 - 1835), were workers in wood, being called at various times in their lives "carpenters" or "shipwrights." One of the vessels which they constructed was Judah Paddock's packet. Their shipbuilding probably took place at "The Point" where Aaron owned land.



DHS Digital Archive, from an 1858 Map of Dennis

The Corporation at "The Pint" - as it was called, in days of yore - was an artificial harbor where the wharves and piers were once the busy scene of commercial traffic. Hither the white winged vessels brought their finny argosies, for authorized inspection and merchantable preparation. Hither to their homes came the "toilers of the sea," to spend, after the fishing season was over, a jolly winter's leisure and what spare change they had earned through the summer. They no longer go down to the sea in ships, but entrap the fish in weirs, and the Corporation has gone the way of all corporeal things. Naught but the skeleton piles remain to enhance the desolation of the scene. **Yarmouth Register, Saturday, June 02, 1888; Page: 4 - After 50 Years Cape Cod revisited - E. M. Stearns.**

[Nobsusset Point – the point of land which projects slightly into Cape Cod Bay, just west of Corporation Road. Originally this was a prominent clay bluff which sat well above the water and was the lookout point in colonial times for the shore whaling industry. The point also offered some degree of protection from westerlies for vessels landing at Corporation wharf] **Reminiscences of Corporation Wharf – 1875.**



Low tide at Corporation Harbor, DHS Digital Archive

January 26, 1875; Barnstable Patriot Page: 2 - The Corporation Wharf at Dennis. Decay is consequent to creation. Still the sight is always more or less lamentable. Sixty or seventy years ago, e'er the iron horse had cast his firey eye along our sandy pathways, cheapening both travel and merchandize transportation, the enterprising citizens, Capt. Daniel Howes, Mr. Josiah Hall, and others, seized the water privilege and started two small packets, running to and from Boston, for general accommodation. Some protection being needed against the rough north winds, they constructed a wharf of stones and logs, two hundred feet in length. There the Five Sisters, commanded by Capt. Judah Paddock, and the Dove by Capt. Jesse Hall, lay lovingly at anchor.

About the year 1834 a new impetus was given to the movement. People talked over the facilities for a harbor to a fishing fleet, and a wharf for salting, packing and inspecting fish. An architect and builder appeared upon the scene, advising them to extend a breakwater as far back as Jack Josiah's Rock [aka Jack Sias' Rock or Jackass Rock], lying about two hundred and twenty-five feet to the north of the old harbor. Believing him to be a responsible individual, they contracted with him to do the work. A part of the price demanded, they paid in advance, and forthwith Mr. Damon left for parts unknown.

Mr. James Howes and others then undertook it themselves. They had not completed extending the old stone and log structure to the shore, before a storm, from the northeast, set the whole in motion, and finally sank it into the sand. Nothing daunted, they rebuilt upon this, as a basis, extending it to the shore, adding two hundred feet to the outer pier, and building wharves inside. Soon, like magic, twenty or thirty vessels hailed from Dennis, whose energetic crews, from bays and shoals, fished up the treasures of the deep. The wharf was speedily alive with its busy throng and old Ocean answered to the ring of hammers, the rattle of barrels and the carts laden with farm produce or water tanks for the vessels' supply, and the hum of voices. But the sweeping north winds made their awful curve within the harbor, rendering it unsafe for vessels to winter there. So, an inside quay was next built, from digging out a peat bog.

After this, they considered the harbor as complete as their means would allow. For a few succeeding years, business prospered from under the impetus there from, and the whole village looked up. No better man could have been found for the needs of the community than was Mr. James Howes of that period. Blessed with an indomitable energy and large hopefulness, he became the propelling principal need; and had not ill winds, beyond his possible control, unsettled the very foundations for him, he would have stood to the end, a pillar for the village prosperity.

That memorable gale of Oct. 3, 1841, spent its fury heavily upon the fishing fleet, which it overtook on George's Shoals, or vainly flying for the nearest ports. Ed. note – see the March 2024 Newsletter. Nineteen of its strong men from a small district were swept away. The Corporation Co., with crushed hopes, set themselves to repair and replace as best they might. But the death blow had been struck. Two more ship chandler stores were built, and a few vessels added to the remaining fleet. The crews were drummed up from the backwoods of Harwich and our own middle villages. Fish had become scarce, with market prices not correspondingly high. Yet it is hard deciding whether it was this, or too many of a trade, which proved the last straw that broke the camel's back.

During the month of April 1849, another north cast storm backed up the high, spring tide, until it swept over the breakwater carrying all before it. The packet North was lifted from her moorage and landed on the north pier. An eastern lumber schooner broke away, but was skillfully steered into the Peat Quay, where she safely anchored. The ship chandlery store of Messrs. Howes & Crowell was lifted from its foundation and stranded upon the sand with a rock projecting through the floor of one apartment. Barrel sheds were swept away, and the barrels and rubbish floated along the docks. The tax for repairs became oppressive; one firm and then another turned their attention in other directions until the old silence settled upon the spot, and the feeling of deadness paralyzed the village at large. Fifteen years ago, the Corporation Co. sold their shares to Elisha Crowell and John Gorham, Esq., of New York, at two dollars each. These gentlemen caused some alterations to be made inside the harbor for the accommodation of coal, lumber and grain vessels.

The quay where the fishing fleet wintered is today filled with tall, coarse hay. Where thousands of barrels were tiered, the rank beach grass grows to the knees, and where the fish cargoes were landed, three or four fishing boats and as many more dories now ride, whose aggregate size combined could not exceed fifteen tons.



Corporation Harbor Breakwater, DHS Digital Archive

This dwindling to nothingness, of what was once a resource for the general livelihood is sad to contemplate. Is there no James Howes, whose generous hopeful nature will again risk to build up the business there?—whose energy too, in petitioning, shall arouse the general government to extend its aid for the stone breakwater needed?

A few rods in length, cut through a piece of lowland, would open a passage into Scargo Lake where a fleet would lie as securely as at the famous Quays built by Napoleon at Anvers. Something must be done for the accommodation of vessels preparatory to seeing our village a second Newport in importance, as many dream, now that the eyes of land speculators are awakening to the rare facilities here, for a fashionable watering place.

Our fine extent of hard beach, our surf, devoid of undertow, our delightful climate, so clear of the fog that afflicts the south-side and the Vineyard, are points for success that should encourage us, individually, to do what we can for internal improvement. C.R.C. Ed. note – Either the source or the author of this segment with the abbreviation or initials (C.R.C.) got lost in a crack...no pun intended! Can a reader who recognizes what or who these letters stand for, please email me at info@dennishistoricalsociety.org?

The end of Part 1. Thank you Ann!

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02664

West Dennis Cemetery Walk

with local guide
Terri Fox of the
Dennis Historical
Society Board of
Directors

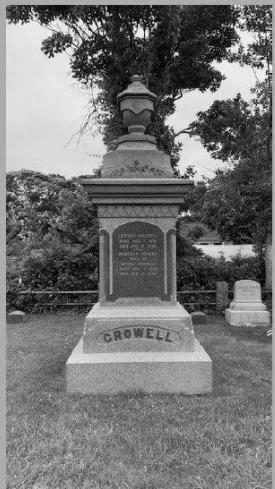
**Friday,
June 21st,
at 10am**

Rain date:
Sunday, June 23rd, at 2pm

FREE ADMISSION

WEST DENNIS CEMETERY
AT THE INTERSECTION OF POND AND FISK STREETS

(Note: No parking in the cemetery itself)



Membership

Come on members, you're doing
great, but we're not there yet!
If you haven't renewed for 2024-2025,
please do so today!

If you've lost the application we
mailed you, another is available on
the DHS Website -go to
<http://www.dennishistoricalsociety.org/>
and click on *Get Involved/Membership*

You can either download the
membership form, and mail it with a
check, or you can renew using
PayPal.

Thank you!