

# MHC Reconnaissance Survey Town Report

## DENNIS

Report Date: 1984

Associated Regional Report: Cape Cod and the Islands

**Reconnaissance Survey Town Reports**, produced for MHC's Statewide Reconnaissance Survey between 1979 and 1987, introduce the historical development of each of the Commonwealth's municipalities. Each report begins with an historic overview, a description of topography, and political boundaries. For the purposes of the survey, the historic period has been subdivided into seven periods: Contact (1500–1620), Plantation (1620–1675), Colonial (1675–1775), Federal (1775–1830), Early Industrial (1830–1870), Late Industrial (1870–1915), and Early Modern (1915–1940/55). Each report concludes with survey observations that evaluate the town's existing historic properties inventory and highlight significant historic buildings, settlement patterns, and present threats to these resources. A bibliography lists key secondary resources.

Town reports are designed for use together with a series of town maps that demarcate settlement patterns, transportation corridors and industrial sites for each historic period. These maps are in the form of color-coded, polyester overlays to the USGS topographic base map for each town on file and available for consultation at MHC. For further information on the organization and preparation of town reports, readers should contact MHC.

Users should keep in mind that these reports are now two decades or more old. The information they contain, including assessments of existing knowledge, planning recommendations, understanding of local development, and bibliographic references all date to the time they were written. In some cases, information on certain topics was not completed. No attempt has been made to update this information.

Electronic text was not available for digital capture, and as a result most of the reports have been scanned as PDF files. While all have been processed with optical character recognition, there will inevitably be some character recognition errors.

The activity that is the subject of the MHC Reconnaissance Survey Town Report has been financed in part with Federal funds from the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. However, the contents and opinions do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the Department of the Interior. This program receives Federal financial assistance for identification and protection of historic properties. Under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and the Age Discrimination Act of 1975, as amended, the U.S. Department of the Interior prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, disability or age in its federally assisted programs. If you believe you have been discriminated against in any program, activity or facility as described above, or if you desire further information please write to: Office of Equal Opportunity, National Park Service, 1849 C Street, N.W., Washington, D.C., 20240.



MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION

William Francis Galvin, Secretary of the Commonwealth

Chair, Massachusetts Historical Commission

220 Morrissey Blvd.

Boston, MA 02125

[www.sec.state.ma.us/mhc](http://www.sec.state.ma.us/mhc)

[mhc@sec.state.ma.us](mailto:mhc@sec.state.ma.us) / 617-727-8470

## MHC RECONNAISSANCE SURVEY REPORT

DATE: 1984

COMMUNITY: Dennis

---

### I. TOPOGRAPHY

The town of Dennis is located in the Mid-Cape area of Cape Cod. It lies in latitude 41° 45' north and longitude 70° 8' west. The town is approximately 78 miles from Boston by land and 60 miles by water. Dennis is bounded by Cape Cod Bay to the north, the Nantucket Sound to the south, Yarmouth to the west, and Brewster and Harwich to the east.

Geologically, Dennis is divided into three general areas which form two natural divisions of the town, the northern and southern part. Approximately one mile south of the Cape Cod Bay shoreline a range of hills exists representing an extension of the Sandwich Moraine. The hills extend from east to west across the town and the entire southern portion of the Cape from Sandwich and Bourne to Orleans. North of the moraine land surfaces are uneven and slope downward to the Bay. Geological deposits in this area include lake and lake bottom deposits, swamp and marsh deposits, beach deposits, and some undifferentiated dune deposits. South of the moraine area are Harwich Outwash Plain deposits sloping southerly to the Nantucket Sound. Beach and dune, as well as swamp and marsh, deposits are found along the southern shoreline as well. General elevations in the northern portion of town average 100 feet or less, although higher elevations are present (e.g., Scargo Hill at 160 feet). South of the moraine area elevations average 50 feet or less.

Soils within the town are generally light sandy deposits characteristic of the surficial deposits noted above. Soils in moraine deposits are mostly medium to very coarse sand and pebble to cobble gravel. Large boulders are common. In outwash plain deposits soils are composed mostly of medium to very coarse sand and pebble to cobble gravel in the northern part and medium to fine sand containing scattered pebbles and cobbles in the southern part (Oldale 1969). Till and boulders are common in the northern part. The Quivett and Sesuit Necks are the most fertile areas in the town, as are low-lying areas in valleys and around ponds. Woodlands in the Dennis area, like other Cape areas, were clear cut early in the town's settlement. Oak and pine now characterize existing wooded areas.

Both surface and subsurface drainage patterns exist in the Dennis area. In the northern portion of town surface drainage exists through several lakes, ponds, creeks, and brooks. These areas include Scargo Pond, Chase Garden Creek, White's Brook, Sesuit Creek, and Quivett Creek, all draining in a northerly direction toward the Bay. South of the Follins Pond, Setucket Road area, drainage is southerly. Surface drainage in the area is through Mill Pond, Follins Pond, Swan Pond, Bass River, Swan Pond River, and other wetlands. Subsurface drainage is also present in outwash plain deposits.

Dennis also contains several coastal inlets which offer harbor locations for vessels of most classes as well as extensive salt marshes. Salt marshes are present along tidal creeks and rivers on both northern and southern shorelines. Along the northern shoreline, potential harbors for smaller class vessels are present in the Bass Hole/Chase Garden Creek area, the Sesuit Creek area, and the Quivett Creek area. Along the Nantucket Sound shoreline, harbor areas are present in the Bass River and Swan Pond River areas. Anchorage areas in the vicinity of Bass River can accommodate larger class vessels than northern shore areas.

## II. POLITICAL BOUNDARIES

Nobscusset territory was included in the bounds of the town of Yarmouth, established in 1641. The original eastern boundary ran from Quivett Creek to the south shore east of Herring River (in present Harwich), but in 1681 this line was shifted to run west of Herring River, and this persists as the present Dennis-Harwich line. Lands east of Chase Garden River and Bass River were set off as East Parish Yarmouth in 1721, and with the incorporation of East Parish as the town of Dennis in 1793, these watercourses became the town's western boundary.

## III. HISTORIC OVERVIEW

Dennis is a coastal resort and residential community located on the central Cape Cod peninsula, east of Chase Garden Creek and Bass River, with both Cape Cod Bay and Nantucket Sound shores. Native settlement probably focused along the north shore at Nobscusset, Sesuit, and Quivett necks, and in the southwest along Bass River, with secondary occupation at other local pond, estuary, and shore sites. First colonial settlement took place ca. 1639 at or near Nobscusset native planting fields in the northwest. Local 17th- and 18th-century dispersed agricultural settlement concentrated on fertile bayside lands north of the central east-west overland corridor above the Bass River barrier, with primary branches northeast to Eastham and southeast to Chatham. East Parish Yarmouth meetinghouse site was established at Nobscusset in 1721.

Northside development continued through the mid 19th century, with institutional growth at Nobscusset (Dennis) Village and regionally significant salt production and shipbuilding at East Dennis. By 1800, however, significant maritime-oriented growth shifted southwest to the Bass River focus, and by mid 19th century coastal settlement spread along the southern Main Street corridor from West Dennis to Dennisport. South Dennis grew as a central civic focus, and after 1865 as local railroad depot. Population decline came with the collapse of the local fishing and maritime economy in the late 19th century, and settlement expansion ended, although institutional additions continued at East Dennis and Dennisport. Twentieth-century, resort-oriented growth came with the rise of automobile tourism, with a theatre complex established at Dennis Village in the 1920s and summer cottage development along the bay shore and in the south at Dennisport.

Intensive post-1940 residential development has followed the eastward expansion of the Barnstable-Yarmouth regional core. New development has been widespread, although most concentrated south of the Route 28 corridor toward Nantucket Sound, northwest of Dennis Village toward the bay shore, and in the central part of town northwest of the Route 6 interchange with new commercial development south of the interchange along Route 134. Surviving 19th-century village streetscapes at West Dennis and Dennisport along Route 28 in the south and at Dennis Village along Route 6A in the north continue to see intensive development pressures. Notable 19th-century village landscapes survive, however, particularly on Old Main Street in West Dennis, at South Dennis, and at East Dennis.

#### IV. CONTACT PERIOD (1500-1620)

##### A. Transportation Routes

Exact locations of Contact period Native American trails are unknown for Dennis during this period. However, several trails are indicated on the basis of earlier period site locations, the distribution of environmental resources, and the expected locations of known native populations. At least one major trail was probably present through the northern portion of town running east/west along the southern periphery of coastal estuaries bordering Cape Cod Bay. One trail probably followed the general course of Route 6A with another possible trail in the Satucket Road area. The trails probably connected native trails in the Mattacheese, Hockanom, Nobscusset, and Satucket areas. The Bass River area from Follins Pond to the southern coast also probably acted as a transportation route with a possible land trail along the shore. Secondary trails also probably existed leading to coastal locations, ponds, and other areas.

##### B. Population

Little direct evidence exists from which accurate Contact period population estimates can be made for the Dennis area. Actually, Native populations were probably shared with Brewster and Yarmouth as Native settlements were apparently centered along creeks and rivers shared between the towns. The northern portion of Dennis was known as Nobscusset and probably contained a Native village by that name. The Pawkunnawkuts occupied the southern portion of Dennis on both sides of the Bass River. It is unlikely the total Native population in Dennis exceeded 200 to 300 individuals, particularly after late Contact period plagues.

##### C. Settlement Pattern

European settlements did not exist in the Dennis area during this period. However, some contact between Natives and Europeans in the Dennis area undoubtedly took place, as European explorers and fishermen frequented the area long before settlement. For example, Gosnold may have visited the south shore area as early as 1602, or Champlain may have later, in 1605. Later, in 1620, explorers from the Mayflower may also have explored the bay area.

Other Mayflower explorers of the area may have included Governor Bradford and a party aboard the Swan in 1622 and Captain Standish in 1623.

Natives had settled the Dennis area for some time prior to European contact. Known Late Woodland period sites are present in the town, particularly in the Bass River area. Late Woodland period artifact listings with general town provenience also indicate the extent to which this area was settled during that period. All known sites and artifact listings generally exhibit site locational preferences for coastal estuarine areas.

While Contact period sites are currently unknown in the Dennis area, their presence is expected. The location of Native settlements in the Yarmouth, Dennis, and Brewster area has been documented for the preceding Late Woodland period. In addition, late Contact period Native populations were documented in the Mattacheese area of eastern Yarmouth/West Dennis. Later, in the Plantation period, known Native populations were present along the Bass River and expected in the Hockanom and Nobscusset areas as well as Quivett and Sesuit Neck areas. Thus while Contact period sites are not currently known in Dennis, sites of the preceding and later periods are present. In addition, Contact period sites are reported in neighboring Yarmouth.

Native place names also provide indications of the extent to which Natives either inhabited and/or used the Dennis area. In the northern portion of Dennis, several areas still retain their Algonkian roots. These areas include Sesuit and Quivett Necks, Sesuit and Quivett Creeks, Nobscusset Point, Nabskusset Harbor, and Hokum Rock. Most Native place names in the Dennis area survive in the northern portion of town.

Thus, considerable evidence indicates that Contact period sites should exist in the Dennis area. Ethnohistorical accounts have documented Native settlements in the Mattacheese area of East Yarmouth. Native place names are also present throughout much of the town. Accordingly, not only are Contact period sites expected to be present but also they should follow regional and Cape settlement preferences for coastal areas such as estuaries, tidal rivers, and ponds.

#### D. Subsistence Pattern

Since European settlements were not present in the Dennis area during this period, European subsistence probably followed that of the Native inhabitants in the area. While some food was undoubtedly carried with early explorers, traders, and fishermen, the bulk of their subsistence was probably secured through hunting, fishing, the gathering of wild plants and shellfish, and the trade, stealing, or purchase of agricultural products (e.g., corn or turkey wheat) from the local Natives.

Native subsistence during the Contact period in the Dennis area was probably similar to that practiced in other Cape areas. The combined use of wild and domesticated food resources formed the

basis of the subsistence system. It is unknown at present exactly when agriculture or, more specifically, horticulture, was introduced to the Natives in the Cape Cod area. However, by the Contact period, sufficient quantities of corn, beans, and squash were being produced for storage and at times for sale or trade to English settlers. Shellfishing, fishing, and hunting were also important subsistence pursuits. Numerous tidal areas contain mixed beds of virtually every type of shellfish available in the Cape area. In particular, soft-shell clams have been historically important in the area. Both fresh and saltwater species of fish are also available in the Dennis area. The town's several freshwater ponds contain numerous species of fish for consumption. In particular, alewives are present and may have had a wider distribution in the past.

Cape Cod Bay and the Atlantic Ocean also provided a wide variety of fish for utilization. Sea mammals, such as whales and seals, were also available.

The wetlands and forested areas of Dennis provided numerous species of mammals for hunting. Wolves were present as were deer and various fur-bearers. Various species of ducks were also present in freshwater wetlands and coastal estuarine areas.

#### V. PLANTATION PERIOD (1620-1675)

##### A. Transportation Routes

Native trails were probably still in use throughout this period. Colonial roads were slow to develop. The County Road was laid out roughly in the area of Route 6A, possibly in the area of an earlier Native trail. This road connected Barnstable and Sandwich settlements with those in Satucket (Brewster) and Nauset, or Eastham. Other roadways may also have been laid out during this period in the vicinity of Dennis Village.

##### B. Population

Native populations in the Dennis and entire Cape Cod area were in constant decline during this period. Natives were still settled along the Bass River area. A settlement or reservation was also present at Nobsquassit in the northern area of town. In 1674 Richard Bourne reported 121 Praying Indians at Sawtucket and Nobsqusset, which includes both the Dennis and Brewster areas. This figure likely underestimates the total Native population of the towns. However, it is unlikely that more than 150 to 200 Native individuals still lived in the Dennis area.

European population estimates for the Dennis area during the Plantation period are difficult to determine since the town records of Yarmouth (which then included Dennis) burned in 1674 (Deyo 1890: 462). However, settlement was slow following initial efforts in 1639. By 1675 it is unlikely more than 200 individuals resided within the town.

### C. Settlement Pattern

Dennis as it exists today was settled as part of Mattacheese, or Yarmouth. Most of the Dennis area as we know it today was then known as Nobscusset, the Native name for that area. The first white settlement of Nobscusset, or Dennis, occurred in 1639 with the settlement of three or four families in the North Dennis area. Within a few years, settlement had spread to most areas of the present town. However, the area was sparsely settled. Some settlement had occurred in the southern portion of town, but most settlements were in the area north of Follins Pond and in the general area of Route 6A in the Dennis Village, East Dennis, Scargo Lake, and Quivett Neck areas. A fort may also have been built on Scargo Hill during this period.

That Native Americans were still settled in the Dennis area at the time of settlement is attested to by a number of factors. White settlement was facilitated through the purchase of Native lands from at least two sachems. Masshantampane was sagamore of the Nobscussetts and was apparently the sachem for the entire northern half of the town. Janno, a successor of Jyannough, held authority over the western portion of Yarmouth to Masshantampane's lands on the east, and from there southeasterly to Bass River. All land claims in these areas were settled by 1658. Christian missionary activities with the Natives were begun in Dennis/Yarmouth by John Elliot in 1647-48. A Native congregation was present at Nobsquassit during this period as Bourne reported 121 Praying Indians there and on Sawtucket in 1674. Other Native settlements also probably existed in the southern portion of town along Bass River.

### D. Economic Base

Dennis was inhabited by both Europeans and Natives during this period. Wampanoag Natives, known locally as Mattacheese, Hakanom, Nobscusset, and Pawkunnawkuts, continued to combine wild and domesticate food resources as their subsistence base. Corn agriculture was important and may have been concentrated along the coastal necks in the northern portion of town and later along the Bass River. Hunting and fishing were still important. Drift whales and shellfish were also likely exploited in coastal areas.

Following the initial settlement of Nobscusset (Dennis) in 1639, agricultural pursuits were the primary emphasis of the settlers. Corn, rye, wheat, and in some areas English hay, were probably grown as were some fruits. Salt hay was also harvested from the extensive marsh areas along both northern and southern coastlines. Salt hay provided grazing material for animals which were also present: cattle, sheep, pigs, horses, and oxen. Domesticate fowl such as chickens, ducks, and geese may also have been present.

In addition to agriculture and husbandry, European settlers also likely hunted, fished, and gathered wild plants and shellfish to supplement their subsistence base. Limited attempts at commercial fishing may also have begun at this time. Bass River, the largest

river on the Cape, in the southern portion of town, provided a harbor and shelter for vessels of most classes. In the northern portion of town, the Chase Garden Creek, Sesuit Creek, and Quivett Creek areas also provided harbors for vessels. The herring, cod, and whale fisheries were probably the earliest fisheries originated. Early fisheries at first probably supplemented agricultural pursuits on a seasonal basis. Shipbuilding may also have begun during this period, with small vessels being built along the northern shore. No record of mill activity currently exists for this period.

## VI. COLONIAL PERIOD (1675-1775)

### A. Transportation Routes

New roadways laid out during this period included the Setucket Road in 1686, which ran through Dennis south of a range of hills between the Route 6A Setucket Road area. This road connected with the county road, thus avoiding the existing coastal route. The Old Chatham Road was also laid out during this period connecting Dennis with Harwich and Chatham. Bass River probably continued to serve as a north/south travel route through the town and prohibited east/west travel as well. Native trails may have continued in use in the southern portion of town where major roadways did not exist and some Native settlements were still present.

### B. Population

The Native population of Dennis disintegrated during this period to the point of near extinction by 1775. Following disease in 1763 and natural decline, it is unlikely that more than 25-50 Native individuals resided in the town by the end of the period.

European settlement and town growth was rapid throughout the Colonial period. As the Yarmouth town records were burned in 1677, population estimates for Dennis at the start of the period are difficult to determine. Furthermore, since official censuses were not taken until 1765 and Dennis was not incorporated apart from Yarmouth until 1793, population estimates at the end of the Colonial period are also difficult. Assuming that the population of Dennis may have approached one-half that of Yarmouth, its population may have been as high as 600 to 800 individuals in 1765 and around 1,000 individuals in 1776.

### C. Settlement Pattern

While much of the area in the present town of Dennis was settled during the Plantation period, it was not until the Colonial period that settlement density significantly increased. As settlement increased, five general divisions of the township were created. Dennis proper or North Dennis was a locus of early white settlement and was reported to be the original chief seat of the Nobschussett Natives. An old fort is reported on Scargo Hill in



this area. The East Precinct meetinghouse is also located in this division, probably built shortly after the organization of the East parish of Yarmouth (Dennis) in 1721.

The East Dennis area was also settled early and contained a group of continuous settlements from Sesuit to Quivett Necks. Some settlement was also present along the Main Lower Road to Setucket in Brewster. Most settlement was agricultural in nature. However, settlement emphasizing fishing and other maritime-related industries (e.g., shipbuilding, salt production) was also present in Sesuit and Quivett Creek areas. Sparsely settled interior areas were also settled in the general area.

Settlement was also increasing along the Bass River. One locus included the South Dennis division in the area of East/West Dennis Road and Great Western Road. This area originally included the entire southern portion of the township. However, settlement in this area still lagged behind the northern portion of town, which was still the focus of development. The West Dennis and Dennis Port areas saw development after the Revolutionary War period and development of coasting and fishing in those areas.

Natives were also settled in Dennis during this period. However, their settlements were decreasing. Conkey, Boissevain, and Goddard report a Native congregation referred to as Nobsquassit in the northern portion of town. However, little else is known regarding this settlement or reservation. Other Native settlements may also have been present along the Bass River and at its mouth. However, a disease in 1763 wiped out numerous Natives in the Yarmouth/Dennis area. Natives were virtually extinct in the Dennis area by the end of the Revolution.

#### D. Economic Base

As the population of Dennis grew during the Colonial period, its economic base also expanded and diversified. Agriculture and husbandry continued to grow, particularly along the town's fertile necks in the north. However, it was industrial growth, primarily in the maritime area, that was the major emphasis during this period. Shipbuilding developed at an early date, particularly in the Sesuit and Bass River areas. Lumber was purchased from Maine and the south, possibly providing a stimulus for coasting at an early date. After the Revolutionary period, and into the 19th century, the West Dennis and Dennis Port areas were important in the coasting trade. Fishing was also developing as an important industry such that by 1795 it was the leading industry in the town. Cod and mackerel fisheries were important. Wharves were probably present before the Revolution. However, it was not until after the Revolutionary period that extensive wharf development occurred, particularly in the Bass River area.

Salt manufacture also developed in Dennis during the Colonial period. In fact, Dennis was the first area in this country to manufacture salt by solar evaporation in 1776, when John Sears and others developed the industry. Most salt manufacture was located in the northern portion of the town. At least two windpowered

mills were also present in the village of Dennis or North Dennis during the period. At least one mill was built (the northern mill) by 1754. In 1759, William Howes was appointed proper miller for the grist mill in the East Parish.

Native subsistence during the Colonial period was likely characterized by hunting and fishing with some limited agriculture. As cod fishing also developed some Natives may have served as crew on fishing vessels.

#### E. Architecture:

Residential: Surviving period examples are interior chimney in form, dating from the 2nd quarter of the 18th century. Most conform to the regional model of 1 and 1/2 stories, five-bay, center entry and chimney. Three primary rooms in a double pile orientation; a small number of three-bay and four-bay examples are also known, (T.C.10). Larger 2 and 1/2 story examples are also known, including early 5-bay, saltbox forms like the Josiah Dennis and Hope houses, as well as symmetrical side elevation forms in 5-bay and at least one 3 bay house.

Institutional: No information is available on the East Parish meetinghouse except that it was enlarged in 1761.

The West Schoolhouse of 1770-75 is a small, 1 and 1/2 gable roofed structure, on the National Register.

### VII. FEDERAL PERIOD (1775-1830)

#### A. Transportation Routes

The 18th-century highways continued in use. By ca. 1800, three well travelled, east/west routes crossed the northern half of town. The direct County Road between Yarmouth and North Parish Harwich (Brewster) on Follins Pond Road-Setucket Road bypassed Dennis Village, avoiding the hard travelling through the deep, sandy soil to the north. Where this road entered town in the west, north of Follins Pond, a southeast branch (Old Chatham Road) led to Harwich and Chatham. A third, sandy route passed northeast from Yarmouth through Dennis Village, then south of Scargo Lake to Brewster (Route 6A-Scargo Hill Road-Route 6A). In the late 18th century, Bass River continued to be a barrier to east-west overland traffic across the southern part of town. By 1795, ferry service was initiated at South Dennis, and in 1814 a toll bridge was opened here. By period's end ferry service on Bass River had been established further south, between Yarmouth and West Dennis. The primary local connector between north and south shore communities followed Old Bass River Road-Main Street through South Dennis. Maritime traffic increased: by the early 19th century, three wharves were located on the Bass River in West Dennis, and in 1814 the Nobscusset Pier Company was incorporated to build a wharf north of Dennis Village. In 1825, a committee was formed to investigate the possibility of opening a canal from Flax Pond north to Cape Cod Bay, but nothing came of the project.

## B. Population

Population shifts to the South Sea area leading to the construction of a second meetinghouse there in 1795, forming a separate parish in 1815. Methodists found followers in the town who worshipped perhaps in Dennis Village, and with neighbors in Brewster as a Reformed or anti-Episcopal group. By 1828 the First Parish suffered a division as many church members withdrew to form the Trinitarian North Church and the remaining parish society became explicitly Unitarian. Masons formed a Lodge by 1802, and temperance found followers by 1818.

The division of the old town of Yarmouth gave Dennis approximately 45% of the population (based on 1800 counts) and 46% of the land area. Thus, Dennis had a population density seven years after incorporation of 68 persons per square mile -- fifth highest among the 13 other towns in Barnstable County. Dennis, like the other Cape towns between Yarmouth and Chatham, grew rapidly in the Federal period. Allowing for an estimated 1790 population of 1,205 persons (45% of the Old Yarmouth count that year), Dennis experienced a population rise of 92% -- third highest in the study unit after Provincetown and Chatham. Unusual for any of the Cape towns was that this growth never averaged less than 20 persons per year (measured by decennial census years) and even during the Embargo period was over 33 persons.

## C. Settlement Pattern

Late 18th-century development at East Parish Yarmouth continued both on the northern bay side and at Bass River in the southwest. The precinct was incorporated as the town of Dennis in 1793. At the beginning of the 19th century, the old East Parish meetinghouse center at Nobscusset (Dennis Village) in the northwest remained the primary local center, with more than 50 dwellings clustered along the lower road from Yarmouth to Harwich (Route 6A) and to the north, where saltworks extended along the shore. In 1801, Sumner's Masonic Lodge was formed here, and a hall built. A second local center developed in the northeast at Sesuit (East Dennis), where three dozen dwellings clustered at Quivett Neck, where extensive salt works were operated. A third center was located near Bass River in the southwest. Here, at South Dennis, linear development extended along Old Main Street and East-West Dennis Road, and a second Congregational church was built here in 1795. At about the same time, a small Quaker meetinghouse was erected on Mayfair Road on the east side of Follins Pond. Southwest of South Dennis, settlement was dispersed along the Bass River shore. Subsequent local settlement expansion through the early 19th century was increasingly focused on the south side, and by 1815 the southern population was large enough to form a Second Parish. Dennis Village, however, remained the civic focus, and a Methodist church was located here in 1820. A split in the Congregational Church led to the erection of a Trinitarian church adjacent to the earlier structure in 1829.

#### D. Economic Base

Capt. John Sears (1744-1817) of East Dennis is universally credited, 1776, with the introduction of solar evaporation to an already active salt manufacturing industry, stimulated by the cutting off of foreign salt by trade restrictions and war. Sears had been a fisherman before the war, and to secure financial support, he engaged as partners his cousin Edward Sears, and Christopher and William Crowell. William Crowell had seen the works on the Isle of Shoals. The works were to be located on Sesuit Neck in East Dennis. Amos Otis described the original works:

[The works] was one hundred feet long, and ten feet wide, and all on the same level. The flooring was of white pine plank, laid on oak sleepers, the latter running crosswise. The gunnels were of plank, eight inches deep, and secured by upright pieces, mortised into the ends of the sleepers, and by knees passing under the flooring and on the outsides of the gunnels. The corners of the vat were also secured by knees; the roof was curiously fashioned; rafters, grooved on either side, were permanently fixed to the gunnels, at the distance of five or six feet from each other; the doors were made of a corresponding width, and consisted of several boards of the same length, with the rafters clamped together. These slid obliquely upwards and downwards in the grooves of the rafters, and were prevented from swagging in the center by board rafters placed between the principal ones. It was soon found necessary to have a separate vat to chrystalize the salt, and a partition was placed across, and the brine boiled over. ... A little before the close of the war [1780], Mr. Sears procured one of the pumps of the British ship-of-war Somerset, wrecked on the coast of Cape Cod, and erected it for the supply of his manufactory, and to avoid the labor of bailing water. [Otis: 90]

Sears first attempt in 1776 produced only eight bushels of salt, and the works were promptly labeled "Sears Folly." The second year Sears caulked the seams and obtained 30 bushels. In 1785, at the suggestion of Major Nathaniel Freeman of Harwich, who had seen a similar pump, Sears attached a small windmill with canvass sails to his pump. These small windmills became the most distinctive feature of the Cape Cod saltworks. Thatcher wrote that for every 2,000 feet of works, a mill and pump were required (Thatcher: 114-115).

By 1802, north shore of Dennis alone had 47 such works, about equally distributed between Suet (East Dennis) where Sears had his works, and Nobscusset. Nearest rival was Harwich (what is now Brewster) with 21 works. The Embargo was probably the chief cause of a dramatic rise in the number and capacity of salt works. Between 1802 and 1809, county capacity rose by over 150%, though this figure does not appear to have been sustained, if accurate. By 1832 the town still led the rest of the county, and state, with

a production of 56,548 bushels, although her share of the county total fell from 21% to 15% due to the extensive development of the works elsewhere.

Salt was essential for the fishing industry, the trade which occupied most Dennis males between the ages of 15 and 45. The pre-Revolutionary success of the cod and mackerel industry in Old Yarmouth remained significant on the south shore where important harbors were established both at Bass River and at Dennis Port. (Based on a comparison of 1830s reports for Dennis and Yarmouth, pre-Revolutionary Dennis may even have exceeded Yarmouth in fish catches.) Deyo reported that Dennis Port had been "an active fishing station" since the 18th century, closely related to activity in West Harwich.

Bass Hole, the mouth of the Chase Garden River, afforded a small harbor for fishing vessels to be laid up. Along this river boundary with Yarmouth were the town's largest salt marshes.

As early as 1802, Nobscusset Point, called "the Bite," was eyed as a location for a pier which could afford shelter against the northwest winds and a convenient harbor. The first successful wharf company to be incorporated in the study unit was the Nobscusset Point Pier Company, chartered in 1814, though the 600-foot stone and timber structure was probably constructed somewhat earlier.

Five or six windmills were also in use in Dennis for most of the period.

#### E. Architecture:

Residential: The 1 and 1/2 story, double pile, interior chimney house type remained the most common throughout this period. The largest proportion of these remained the five-bay, center entry and chimney type (c. 20), and only a handful of four-bay houses. Ornament on these remained scarce, restricted to entablature door treatments. A new appearance was given to the form, however, with the adoption of extended studd height adding headroom to the upper story, space between window heads and cornice often filled by wide cornice boards later in the period as Greek revival elements became popular. A small number of 2 and 1/2 continued to be built in the gable roof form but many of these larger homes were constructed with fashionable low hip roofs; similarly fashionable homes used double interior chimneys of the Georgian pear for the first time, and in small numbers.

Institutional: The First Parish Church was repaired in 1804 but no information is available. A second south meetinghouse was constructed early in the period, date unknown. A small Friends Meetinghouse existed ca. 1795 but no information is available on this short-lived structure. The Masonic Lodge of 1802 has been changed but resembles period residential architecture in its 2 and 1/2 story hip bloc, 40 feet by 20 feet. Dennis Village Methodists constructed a meetinghouse ca. 1820 (?), four-bay gable roof structure altered later as a meeting hall known as Carlton.

### III. EARLY INDUSTRIAL PERIOD (1830-1870)

#### A. Transportation Routes

The early 19th-century highways remained in use. A new upper Bass River toll bridge was built in 1833. By 1858 a lower toll bridge had been opened between South Harwich and West Dennis, and new highways emanated from the two river crossings, including the Upper County Road from South Dennis southeast to Dennis Port, the Lower County Road along the south shore from West Dennis to Dennisport, and the projected Great Western Road from South Dennis to Harwich Center. With the opening of the lower bridge, traffic increased along the primary south shore corridor on Main Street, and along the northeast Old Main Street-Central Street branch to Harwich Center. In 1869 the two toll bridges over Bass River were made free. West Dennis continued to grow in importance as a Bass River shipping center at the head of navigation for coasting vessels, and by the 1860s regular packet runs to New York had been established. In 1865, service opened on the Cape Cod Central Railroad from Yarmouth Port to Orleans, and the line had a South Dennis station on its route through the south-central part of town.

#### B. Population

Dennis in the Early Industrial period grew by 41% -- more than any other study-unit community except Provincetown. Although its greatest growth period was in the 1830s when it grew by an average of 62.5 persons per year, it was not until the Civil War years that Dennis's boom came to an end, entering a decline that did not cease until the 1920s. In its peak year, 1860, with 3,662 persons, Dennis was the third largest town in the county, after Barnstable and Sandwich/Bourne.

In 1855, foreign-born residents amounted to 2.8% of the population, about half the county average; and consisted primarily of Irish (48) and English (26).

Methodists, particularly those of the reformed and Wesleyan schisms, continued to find followers. Although information is sketchy, groups were added at West Dennis in 1836, Dennisport ca. 1842, and a newly independent society in East Dennis in 1847. Mormon missionaries found converts in 1840; these reorganized in 1868 within the sector formed by the descendants of founder Joseph Smith when, after his death, Brigham Young took control of what would become the Utah-based Church. Universalists met briefly in South Dennis ca. 1850. In 1866 the three societies in Dennis Village formed the Union church. The Masons reorganized in 1854. In 1858 the town reorganized the school system with a primary and grammar school in each village; in 1866 the district system was adopted.

#### C. Settlement Pattern

During the period, local settlement was increasingly oriented toward coasting and fishing activities along Bass River and the south shore, and development extended along the southern Main Street corridor from West Dennis to Dennisport. The north shore

centers retained their institutional functions. The Methodists joined with the Trinitarians in building a Union Church at Dennis Village in 1847, and the old Methodist edifice was used as an academy from 1847 to 1867. The 18th-century Congregational church was replaced in 1838. Residential additions were made along the 6A corridor, and on Corporation Road northeast toward the wharf. In 1847 a Methodist church was built on Center Street in East Dennis, where shipbuilding on Sesuit Neck and saltmaking on Quivett Neck continued, and new dwellings were built along Sesuit Neck Road and in the Center Street area. In 1866, Worden Hall was built to the southwest on the 6A corridor, and by period's end a library association was located in the building.

Growth continued at South Dennis, where a new Congregational church was built in 1835, and a Universalist church was located to the south ca. 1850. New dwellings were located along High Bark Road leading to the Bass River Bridge, and along East-West Dennis Road-Old Main Street to the south. In 1865, the local railroad depot was located at the northern end of the village. A central town house was built north of South Dennis, on Old Bass River road, in 1837, possibly replacing an earlier structure on the same site. The town farm was located nearby at the same time.

In the southwest, a village developed at West Dennis, and a Methodist church was located here in 1835. Residential development extended along Main Street east from Bass River, to the north along Church Road, and to the south along Fisk Street and School Street toward the south shore wharf. More scattered residential additions continued east along Main Street toward Dennis Port in the southeast. Here, development intensified where Main Street approached West Harwich. Dwellings were built to the south along Sea Street and Depot Street. A Methodist church was built in 1842, but remained in use for only a short period.

#### D. Economic Base

Unlike most of the towns of the outer Cape, Dennis's harbors, especially at Bass River and Dennis Port, remained serviceable into the last quarter of the century, and the cod and mackerel fishery statistics continued to rise until after 1865. (But for P'town, the only towns to advance after 1855 were Chatham, Dennis, and Harwich.) At the peak of the business, in 1865, Dennis sent 722 men in 48 vessels to sea -- third highest in the county.

In the alewife fishery, Yarmouth and Dennis together were the leading towns on the Cape in 1855. In 1855, Dennis men reported 2,125 barrels of alewives, highest in the county.

Dennis, like her neighbors Yarmouth and Barnstable, also maintained a prosperous merchant fleet long after other towns' had declined. In 1865, 85 coastal vessels sailed from Dennis with a total tonnage of 10,208 (highest in the county), employing 445 men.

Dennis was also the only town in the study unit to engage in shipbuilding on a large scale. As in other towns, small yards for schooners, sloops and other vessels were located on both north and

south coasts, but about 1820 Asa Shiverick built his residence on Sesuit Neck commencing there a boat yard turning out a succession of packet and fishing vessels. Between 1850 and 1863, under his son Asa (1816-1894) the yard built eight clipper ships, including the famed Belle of the West and the Wild Hunter.

Another factor accounting for the town's continuing prosperity was the cranberry industry, which like the salt industry was first introduced on Dennis's north shore -- and like it also, placed Dennis continually at the top of the list in the value of its annual product in successive census years.

One industry which does not appear to have made it into the secondary sources and yet appears unique to the mid-Cape towns is the production of lampblack. State census reports between 1837 and 1865 report varying number of lampblack establishments, invariably operated by a single person. The largest number was reported in Dennis in 1845 when thirteen such works produced 30,000 lbs. worth \$2,600. The number had declined to four by 1865.

#### E. Architecture

Residential: Early in the period the popular 1 and 1/2 story, double pile, interior chimney house type were constructed, primarily in the extended stud height modes. The new and rapidly popular form of this period, however, was the gable front group. Like most towns the three-bay examples are most common in 1 and 1/2 story (c 10), and 2 and 1/2 story (c 5) versions. A small number of four-bay examples are known including a small number of 2 story houses with very low gable roofs, and a 1 and 1/2 story example with full pediment form porch with square columns and another with four Doric columns.. Two exceptional gable front houses survive; 2 and 1/2 stories form one with a full two-storied porch with square columns and large lateral ell. Most of these examples are treated with simple door surrounds and wide cornice boards of Greek Revival proportions. Occasionally facade gables and barge boards recall Gothic designs, and gable front houses were often treated with bracketed cornices, round headed windows, and porches in Italianate motifs. The Captain Obed house of 1862 in an elaborate Italianate example, 2 and 1/2 stories in height with gable roof, center entry treated with a full height, half round portico of Ionic columns, bracketed cornice and round headed windows.

Institutional: Many of the town's religious societies built or rebuilt during this period. The South Parish Congregational built in 1835 a gable front church with tower topped by belfry and spire slightly projecting from the primary block for entry with lancet windows above and on the building side walls. That same year the West Dennis Community Church was constructed by the Reformed Methodists; it, too, is gable front but its square tower, belfry and spire sit on the roof, and its ornament comes from four facade pilasters while its center entry and all other openings are square headed. The North Parish Society constructed a new meetinghouse in 1830, prior to Union; like South it is ornamented by lancet windows, though its square tower sits on the gable, adds pinnacles, and its facade employs paired entries. The West Dennis Methodist Church, now 1st Wesleyan, is a 1956 of the structure



built in 1847; its gable front contains a recessed entry flanked by inantis Doric columns and side pillasters, its square tower is pierced by lancet openings but its windows are square headed. Other meetinghouses are unknown. Meeting halls remained popular and the surviving Liberty Hall (pre 1844) is a 2 and 1/2 story gable block with end entry into a full height porch which began as a shop, and later housed the meeting hall of the Good Templars; Warden Hall of 1866 is 1 and 1/2 stories, five-bay with center entry. A school of 1868 survives in West Dennis, 2 and 1/2 story gable front inform with paired entries, Greek Revival trim, now the Community Building. A town house existed in South Dennis but its appearance is unknown.

Industrial: A lighthouse related structure of 1855 survives as a 3 and 1/2 story cross gable structure with many later additions, probably related to its use as an Inn after 1914.

## IX. LATE INDUSTRIAL PERIOD (1870-1915)

### A. Transportation Routes

The 19th-century road and railroad system continued in use.

### B. Population

With the loss of the fishing industry, after 1865, a rapid population decline set in. Between 1870 and 1915, the town lost nearly half of her population, reaching in the latter year, 1,822 persons. After about 1880, the small number of foreign-born residents were primarily natives of Nova Scotia or Portugal.

Dennis lost 44% of its population during the period, a rate of decline among the highest in the study unit. In 1875, only 2% of the local population was foreign-born. With the general population decline, this proportion rose to 4% in 1905. Employment opportunities shrank during the period. In 1875, mariners (38%) and fishermen (30%) were the primary types of working men. By 1905, only 17% remained employed in transportation, and the proportion of fishermen had dropped to 8%. Meanwhile, the percentage of laborers rose from 4% to 16%, agriculturalists from 8% to 18%, and mechanics and manufacturers for 11% to 16%. In 1905, the town had the highest proportion of men engaged in trade (17%) in the study unit.

New religious societies were formed in Dennisport during the period. In 1877, the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints built an edifice. The Free and Independent Church of Holiness was organized here in 1885. Subsequently, local interest in the Holiness movement led to the organization in 1906 of the Church of the Nazarene. In East Dennis, a Young People's Society of Christian Endeavor was formed in 1888. Voluntary associations included temperance societies in South Dennis, West Dennis, and Dennisport, Good Fellows in West Dennis and Dennisport, and a mutual aid association in Dennisport.

### C. Settlement Pattern

With population decline, little new development took place. Dennis Village saw some resort growth, with the 1871 Cape Cod Bay Hotel, and the ca. 1890 Nobscusset Hotel and Cottages, both north of the village on the bay shore. Some late Victorian residences were built in the villages itself. At East Dennis, the Christian Endeavor Chapel (1893) and Jacob Sears Memorial Library (1895) were added near the Center Street church. At South Dennis, a jail was built at the cemetery near the railroad. A town house was located to the north of the village along Old Bass River Road near Mayfair Road. A few residential additions were made here and at West Dennis. At Dennisport, some infill took place along Main Street, Mill Street, and Center Street, and on Sea Street and Depot Street toward the shore. In 1877, the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints built an edifice south of Main on Sea Street. By 1884, the Free Independent Church of Holiness had a building nearby on Depot Street, and when that structure burned in 1885, it was replaced by an academy building from Harwich.

### D. Economic Base

After 1865, the cod and mackerel fishery dropped sharply. Five ships were reported chasing mackerel in 1875 (down from 48 a decade earlier).

In the 1880s, attempts to provide land-based employment in West Dennis took the form of a tack factory (1886-89) and a shoe factory (1886-1891), the Casey Brothers shoe factory in West Dennis, also begun in 1886. For its short life it was the largest shoe factory on the Cape and one of the half-dozen manufacturing industries employing over 100 hands in the manufacture of footwear for the western trade. A second shoe factory, the West Dennis Shoe Company, begun in January 1892 by a group of retired sea captains, was even more ambitious. Employing 200 hands, it lasted less than nine months.

The southern shore, with its still-active coastal trade to West Dennis and Dennis Port, retained a more active economic livelihood longer than the north shore, where the bulk of the town's cranberry bogs and agricultural land was located. In 1885, Dennis was the study unit's leading port town, as it had been in 1865. At that time, the state census had credited Dennis with 10,208 tons of coastal shipping -- 30% of the district total. The 1885 figure of 12,026 tons, though flawed as noted in the preceding paragraph, represents over 55% of all the exclusively coastal shipping in the district. Most of this was made up of 28 large coal schooners moving between Boston and New York or Philadelphia. Twenty-two of the coal schooners also picked up ice from Maine, Kennebec ports (then providing nearly a third of all Maine ice) being the most usual destination. The largest of the coal vessels was a 773-ton barkentine which carried a cargo of cotton from Pensicola and coal from Baltimore to Boston (and Dennis?). Although most of the vessels appear to have had separate owners, two firms had fleets of coal and ice schooners.

The largest in the study unit was a company with six schooners ranging in size between 654 and 150 tons. All sailed with ice from Maine ports to Baltimore and Philadelphia, returning with coal. The same firm also owned two ocean-going vessels, credited to Dennis. The larger, a 916-ton bark, carried a cargo of coal and oil to India returning with tea; a smaller 587-ton bark carried lumber to Buenos Ayres returning with hides and wool.

#### E. Architecture

Residential: With the town's drop in population, beginning in 1860, the need for new housing was reduced and existing housing stock remained adequate. In this context it is not surprising that houses from this period are rare. Small, two-story mansard houses were constructed in the five-bay center entry mode primarily, occasionally with roof towers, and in one instance with a large 2 and 1/2 bracketed facade ell. Occasional large homes were constructed in the Queen Ann style, including Elmwood Lodge, a 2 and 1/2 story hip block with facade gable, side projecting, pedimented block, hexagonal corner tower and porch. In at least one example fanciful period out-buildings were added to an earlier homestead.

Institutional: The Reorganized church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints built a simple meetinghouse in 1877, gable front, 1 and 1/2 stories in form with an enclosed entry porch. the Christian Endeavor Chapel was constructed in 1893, a hip block with a projecting side bay and small side entry porch, covered with ornamental shingles. The Jacob Sears Memorial Library was built in 1895, a high hip block with dormers, an octagonal and round tower on the ends, and a porch over the side entry.

#### X. EARLY MODERN PERIOD (1915-1940)

##### A. Transportation Routes

By the mid-1920s, east-west U. S. Route 6, an improved automobile highway corridor, was established in the north through Dennis and East Dennis. In the south, the east-west Route 28 route was paved and improved along Main Street. Route 134 from East Dennis to South Dennis and Route 28 (East-West Dennis Road) was also upgraded during the period. Other primary local routes by period's end also included the Old Bass River Road, Upper County Road, Lower County Road, and Great Western Road.

##### B. Population

Dennis's long period of decline ended in the 1920s when the automobile brought the town's relative isolation to a close and a sudden surge to the number of residents. Between 1920 and 1930, the town grew by nearly 20%, and by 1940 had a population of 2015.

Dennis had a moderate population growth of 11% during the period. In 1915 the foreign-born population remained low, at 5% of the total. In 1940, it stood at 6%. The employment structure changed somewhat by 1915, as the proportion of mechanics and manufacturers

rose to 34%. Agriculture and fishing employed 32%, and 15% of local working men were engaged in trade. A Pentacostal Church was organized at Dennisport in 1931. A new high school was built in 1931.

### C. Settlement Pattern

Development during the period was primarily institutional or summer resort oriented. In 1926, the Cape Playhouse opened at Dennis Village, offering summer theatre, and in 1930 the Cape Cinema was built at part of the entertainment complex. A stone observation tower was erected on Scargo Hill east of the village in 1929. Meanwhile, clusters of summer cottages were built along the bay shore to the northwest in the Beach Street/Taunton Avenue area, and along Lords Road north of Scargo Lake. Cottages were also built on Sesuit and Quivett Necks near Sesuit Harbor at East Dennis. In the south, resort development concentrated at Dennisport, the focus of period growth. Residential development extended along the Old Wharf Road. The Cape Cod Pentacostal Assembly built a church here on Mill Street in ca. 1931. Local libraries were built at West Dennis (1923) and South Dennis (1926) and a high school (1931) was built on Route 28 east of Trotting Park Road.

### D. Economic Base

Both farming and fishing remained important adjuncts to the tourist economy of summer visitors which dominated the place. The former included the still-important cranberry bogs, while truck farming, particularly in the northern sections, supplied produce for the summer visitors. A cold storage plant at East Dennis was built to freeze fish caught in weirs on both the north and south shores.

### E. Architecture

Residential: Little is inventoried for this period but additions to older homes, including a field stone arts and crafts porch, are noted. New Cape Cod cottages are also known.

Institutional: The Dennis Memorial Library of 1924 is a five-bay gable block with a three-bay recessed entry with support columns and lateral ells, and belfry. the brick Ezra H. Baker School of 1931 is a 2 and 1/2 story hip block with rear ell, ornamented by a central projecting pediment of 3 bays at the entry cupola, and quoins.

Theatres: The Cape Cod playhouse of 1926 is a gable block with square tower said to be a former meetinghouse with later additions. The Cape Cinema of 1930 uses historic motifs in its gable front form with entry porch and pilasters.

## XI. SURVEY OBSERVATIONS

Although completed 15 years ago this inventory represents one of the regions most reliable. the forms are completed fully, and accurately. The town's villages are uniformly covered, and most

of the period's well represented. In addition, a chart of building types and styles precedes the inventory providing a useful summary of the town, and representing a good first step toward analysis.

## XII. SOURCES

Conkey, Laura E., Ethel Boissevain, and J. Goddard, Indians of Southern New England and Long Island: Late Period. In Handbook of North American Indians. Vol. 15: Northeast, Bruce G. Trigger, ed. (Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 1978).

Crosby, Katherine, "When the Cape Built Clipper Ships," Cape Cod Magazine 8 (16 August 1926), pp. 5-6, 20, 25.

Deyo, Simeon L. (ed.), History of Barnstable County, Massachusetts, 1620-1890 (New York: H. W. Black, 1890).

Freeman, Frederick, The History of Cape Cod, Annals of the Thirteen Towns of Barnstable County. Vols. 1 and 2 (Boston: W. H. Piper & Co., 1869).

[Freeman, Rev. James,] "A Description of Dennis in the county of Barnstable, September, 1802," Mass. Historical Society Collections Ser. 1 vol. 8 (1802), pp. 129-140.

Mass. Dept. of Labor & Industries, Population and Resources of Cape Cod (Boston, 1922).

Mooney, James, The Aboriginal Population of America North of Mexico, Smithsonian Miscellaneous Collections 80(7), John R. Swanton, ed. (Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 1928).

Oldale, Robert N., Geologic Map of the Harwich Quadrangle, Barnstable County, Cape Cod, Massachusetts. U. S. Geological Survey Map 6Q-786 (Washington: U.S. Geological Survey, 1969).

Swift, Charles Francis, History of Old Yarmouth, Comprising the Present Towns of Yarmouth and Dennis, from the Settlement to the Division in 1794, with the History of Both Towns to 1876. (1877) Ed. by Charles A. Holbrook, Jr. (Yarmouth Port, 1975).

Walsh, Lavinia, "The Oldest Wind Mill--A Cape Cod Treasure," Cape Cod Magazine 10 (January 1928), pp. 3-4, 15-16 [Ferris Mill, moved to Henry Ford Museum 1930s].

[Wing, Daniel,] Some of the Older Landmarks in South Yarmouth, Mass. Yarmouth, Mass., 1901-02. Extracts from the Yarmouth Register 8/31/1901-1/4/1902. Bound collection in the Mass. State Library.