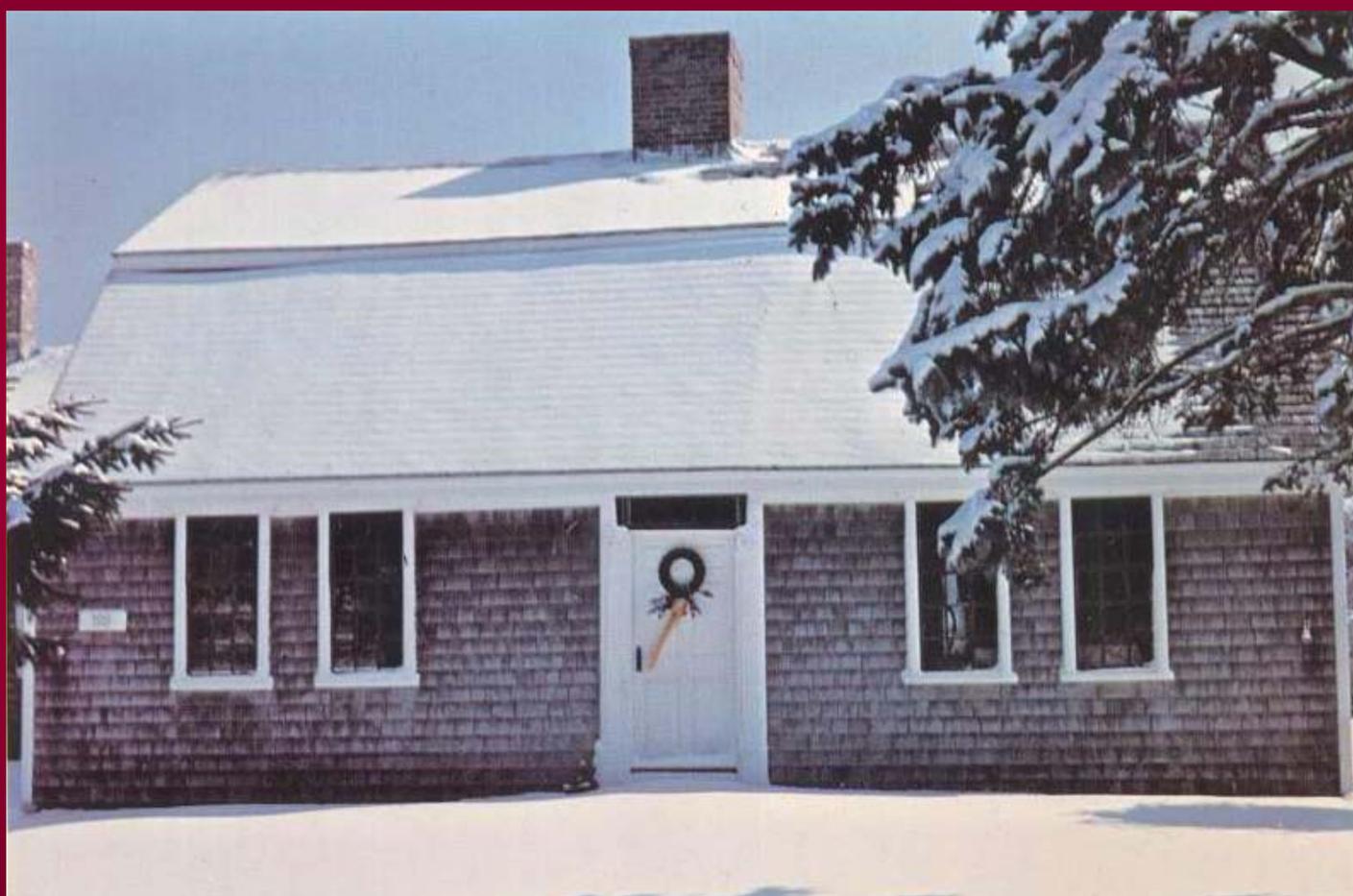


WINTER 2008

The Atwood Log

The Quarterly Newsletter of The Chatham Historical Society



The Atwood House Museum in Winter



From the President

The holiday season, just behind us at this writing, featured a number of new trial events on the museum calendar. The museum opened on December Saturdays and New Year's Eve afternoon. A winter exhibit and the Chatham Public School student's art projects shared the space in the main gallery into early January. Adding to those events the annual Festival of Trees cosponsored with the Chatham Garden Club and the traditional open house Hearth Warming with fires in the three Old House fireplaces (very carefully monitored!), new yearly records were established for attendance (3700) and for museum shop sales.

The monthly lecture of November given by Daniel Adams, director of the film "Cap'n Eri", based on the book of the same name by Joseph Lincoln, attracted probably the largest crowd ever to attend one of these programs. Many people had to be turned away with regrets, giving rise to consideration of how the museum can accommodate larger audiences. Mr. Adams was gracious with his time and behind the scenes stories and gave his listeners a most enjoyable talk. Recently he donated some costumes worn by actor David Carradine to the museum. Rumor has it that Mr. Adams is working on another Lincoln film.

As planned for many months, renovation of the Storage Room located on the lower floor under the Mural Barn is underway. The removal of artifacts and old wood shelving, the cleaning, the painting of walls and floor, and the updating of lighting went like clockwork. By early February, the new metal rolling stacks (for paintings) and other shelving should be installed, providing the museum with more efficient, stable, acid-free, and spacious storage conditions. Meanwhile, all the removed items are stored in the Mural Barn.

In a partnership with the Chatham High School, senior Nick Lapham video-taped four long time Chatham residents talking about their memories of many of the people depicted in the murals painted by Alice Stallknecht. Jane Powers, Florence Reynolds, Reggie Nickerson, and Bob Hardy participated in this project to record for future generations some of the old stories about former Chatham residents. When completed, Nick will edit the film in the high school photographic studio, and will produce a DVD for the museum archives.

The local Cultural Council awarded a grant to the Society to restore a figurehead given to the museum last year. Some boards need to be reattached, the whole cleaned, and a base constructed to support the figurehead while on display.

Another recent acquisition is a collection of botanical paintings by Marcia Norman, former resident on Stage Harbor Road in Chatham. These sixty-four lovely watercolors are of plants and mushrooms found on Cape Cod. Mrs. Norman was active in Chatham on conservation groups in the mid 1900s. She was the wife of Edward C. "Ted" Norman, also an artist, and benefactor of the Society.

The museum will open this year June 3rd and close October 31st. It is possible, however, to use the museum archives or visit for other purposes, by special arrangement through the office, staffed Monday-Friday, 9:00 to 1:00.

- Cynthia B. McCue

Mission Statement

The mission of the Chatham Historical Society is to collect, preserve, exhibit and interpret art, decorative arts, artifacts, archives, and places of historical interest relating to the history of Chatham and vicinity; and in so doing provide a record of the cultures and the people of our past and thereby inform and



Executive Board

Chairman
Spencer Y. Grey
Vice Chairman
David R. Oakley
Secretary

Treasurer
Linda Cebula
President
Cynthia B. McCue
Trustees
Walter J. Butler
Stephen S. Daniel
Deborah S. Ecker
John "Jack" Farrell
Phyllis Freeman
John J. King II
Joshua A. Nickerson, Jr.
Norman Pacun
Alan T. Sachtleben
E. B. Wilson
Nancy B. Yeaw
Andrew Young

Operating Board

President
Cynthia McCue
Administration & Operations
Wayne Jostrand
Archives
Mary Ann Gray
Costumes & Textiles
Janet Marjollet, Donna Jordan
Education
Richard Curcio
Galleries & Displays
Mary Ann Fritsch
Hospitality
Claire Kirby
Marketing & Public Relations
Nancy B. Yeaw
Membership
Sue Halligan
Museum Shop
Barbara Newberry
Programs

Publications & Library
Dwight Myer
Special Exhibits
Mary Ann Fritsch, Joyce Lashway, Cynthia McCue
Volunteers
Betsy Stevens

Administrator
Margaret L. Martin

Museum Consultant
Laurie Noble

Student Challenge and Contest

This past October, Chatham students at several grade levels took field trips to the Atwood House Museum for tours of the special exhibit room. Students and teachers viewed displays and heard presentations by museum docents on the Town of Chatham during the First World War, with special attention paid to the Nickerson's Neck Naval Air Station. Before the students arrived, their teachers were given copies of the essay and project "Student Challenge and Contest for 2007".

Each museum docent presentation was filled with information helping to insure students successful participation in the challenge and contest. Activities were grade appropriate, with motivating activities reaching different ability and age levels. In all, there were twelve different options or activities for student project development. Atwood House Museum presentations were given to the Elementary School as follows:

- Second Grade: "July 4, 1920 Time Magazine Challenge," designing a cover story on Chatham as an All-American Town
- Third Grade: propaganda posters on issues impacting Chatham during World War I
- Fourth Grade: homing pigeons' role and bird's eye view during the existence of the Chatham Naval Air Station.

Middle School students in grades five and seven created a post card design and message communicating Chatham World War I events to a friend in New Mexico.

High School students produced entries on three different projects:

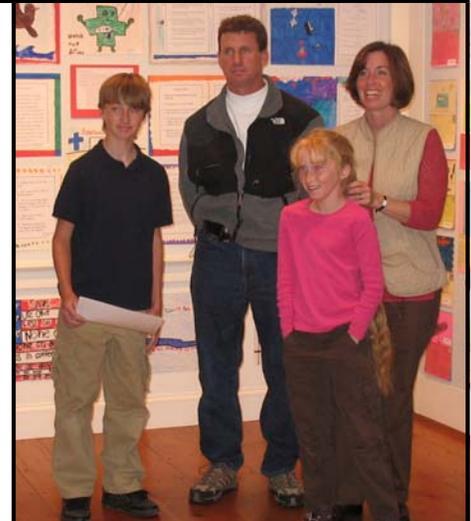
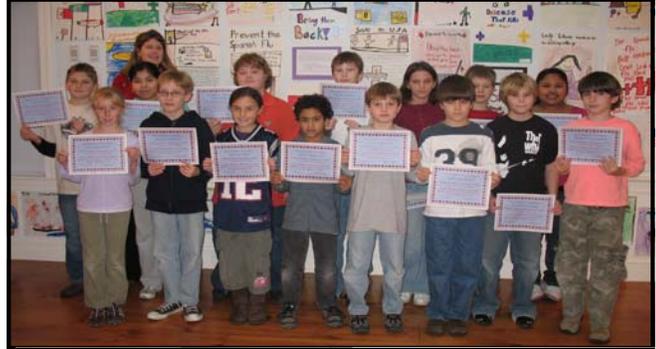
- A 1918 brochure for a "Horse and Buggy Tour of Chatham"
- A power point presentation on the Chatham Naval Air Station
- A lesson plan for teaching 4th grade students about the impact of World War I on Chatham.

To help the students prepare for the contest and challenge Richard Curcio, Chatham Historical Society Chairman of Educational Programs, visited the Elementary and Middle Schools to make lively and supportive informational presentations through activities such as the song *Over There*, reading a fictional help wanted ad for a student to take care of Homing Pigeons, "hands on" sugar rationing by using a slotted victory spoon and role playing the causes of World War I. Even Society President Cynthia McCue got into the act by showing her acting acumen while participating in a skit on teaching students observation skill development.

The Society was "tickled pink" to receive more than two hundred entries to the Challenge and Contest. All of the magnificent student work was displayed in the special exhibit gallery from December 8, 2007 through January 13, 2008. To wrap up activities, the Historical Society hosted a series of receptions for the students, teachers, and parents in January. All participating students received a Certificate of Participation. Plaques and gift certificates to local book stores were awarded to prize winners in grades five, seven, and eleven.

The success of the 2007 event was due to the hard work of docents Richard Curcio,

Jim McSweeney, Carol Kolb, President Cynthia McCue and past President Janet Daly . A special kudo goes to Ms. Cherian Armstrong, Chatham Elementary School Librarian, whose impressive commitment to establishing a successful educational link with the Atwood House Museum is extraordinary in explaining and preserving local history for the younger generation. Last but not least, Chatham Historical Society Administrator Margaret Martin played a pivotal role in designing and editing the challenge and contest and making the logistic arrangements, insuring the success of all associated activities. - **Richard Curcio** Education Chairman



Photos show award recipients and their families as well as visiting student groups

From the Archives

An article titled “The White Stallion of Monomoy” was written by Edward Rowe Snow and published in the Boston Herald Traveler in 1970. It is one of the many newspaper clippings found in the Historical Society’s archival collection being cataloged by volunteers each week. Each article is read quickly to determine how it should be cataloged and filed so that it may be used for future reference. Occasionally one of these articles catches the cataloger’s attention and spurs further research on the topic. This is what happened with the article written by Snow.

Snow mentions his first encounter with Henry Beston, the author of the book *The Outermost House*. Snow was impressed with the Beston’s research and his study of the beach at Monomoy. Beston told of the legend of the white stallion or stone horse that was said to have walked along the great sandy beach with two lights swinging from his body, placed there by his master to lure vessels onto the shore. Beston said the master’s name was Spider and he had carried on his nefarious activities for 10 years. One night a full moon broke through the clouds, spooking the stallion who galloped into the sea with Spider on his back. The horse dislodged Spider who drowned and whose body washed up several days later at Stage Harbor. Legend had it that the white stallion continues to swim on and out beyond the dangerous tidal rip where he may be seen from the shore.

Curiosity led the archivist to do a little more research to find out about this legend before tucking the article into its folder. When did this legend first surface? Was White Horse shoal named after the legend? Was this the origin of the name of the lightship “Stone Horse?”

A survey of the holdings of the archives yielded very little information on the lightship; however, an Internet search did offer some information. The ship was built in 1891 in South Boston with illumination apparatus of two lanterns and 8 oil lamps each with a reflector. It had a fog signal that consisted of a 12-inch steam bell whistle and a hand operated 1000-pound bell. In 1910, a submarine bell signal was added followed by the conversion in 1912 of the fog signal to a 12-inch chime whistle. By 1919, it was equipped with a radio and in 1924 the illumination was changed from oil to acetylene. The ship’s first station in 1891 was at the Great Round Shoal, and then it was moved to Pollock Rip in 1892 remaining there until 1923. It finally was placed at Stone Horse Shoal in 1924 where it served until 1934. After that the ship served briefly as an experimental whaling ship and later as a coastal freighter until it was finally abandoned at New York in 1954. This information however did not answer the question as to what the ship was originally named or when it was named the Stone Horse Lightship. One could surmise that the name was given to a ship when it began its duty at White Horse Shoal.

The next step was to try to determine the origin of the legend. Often tales like this have their beginnings in true stories. Another book in our collection is *The Narrow Land* by Elizabeth Reynard. Her book has a section entitled, “Pirates, Mooncursing, and Yarns of the Sea”, with a few pages devoted to “The White Stallion.” Her account is much more poetic than Snow’s rendering of Beston’s story. She describes the “slender sandspit of Monomy ... some seven miles out to sea; as eerie, isolated,

gleaming a bar as ever shone back at the moon.” She tells of a white horse that “sank to its fetlocks plowing through drifts of ‘singing sand.’ A light like a star gleamed in his mane, another swung at the saddle.... Many vessels followed him, ‘the false mirage of Monomoy’; many hulks lie buried in that sand that were once led like winged chariots at the heel of the moon-cursurer’s stallion.”

Reynard also describes the weather on the night that the stallion’s unknown master was drowned as one where a full gale, with no rain, ripped the roof off of the church and placed it down on the Widow Atwood’s house where the roof had needed repair. In addition, the arms of the windmill owned by the Atkins brothers were ripped off. In fact, she says that the tide “knifed its way through the spit; then roared down Stage Harbor Channel like a gang of yelling whalemens broken loose with ‘three-winter money’ making for Mother Thornton’s tavern down New Bedford way.” She writes that three men witnessed the master and his horse left on a dwindling island between the two channels. Then the horse spooked by the moon “breasted the tide, swimming in the center of the moonfall.” The rider was dislodged but “the white stallion swam on -- on into the mountains of the ocean. He still swims beyond the Rip, and when the moon comes out may be seen close to the pointed prows of ships, his white mane gleaming as he guides them over the bars.”

So the questions remain. How old is the legend? When Reynard wrote about it in her book in 1934, it had been 10 years since the light ship was placed at the shoal. She offers no source for the legend. Snow’s article states he met Beston more than one third of a century before the date of the clipping from the Boston paper. This would make Beston’s telling of the legend sometime in the mid 1930’s just around the time Reynard’s book was published. Was the ship renamed for its location? The record gives no name for the ship at the time it was built. When was the shoal given its name?

We would love to hear from anyone with more information.
- Mary Ann Gray, Archivist



Sketch map of pirate and mooncursers from *The Narrow Land*. Notice “The White Stallion” to the lower right off the coast of Monomoy Island.

SHOP NEWS

In recent months since the publication of Rob Carlisle's book, *Beyond the Bar: The Perilous Journey: Three Centuries of Fishing in Chatham, Massachusetts*, a very large number of Chatham residents and many others have purchased copies. Historical Society members were given a chance by mail to buy copies in time for Christmas. A local book signing party was very successful. More than 1000 copies overall have been sold. The Museum Shop continues to offer the book for sale in hardcover and paperback.

This gem of a book appropriately bears a beautiful blue cover depicting Chatham's signature scene, where sky meets sparkling water, water meets sand, and scurrying seagulls survey an outbound fishing boat.

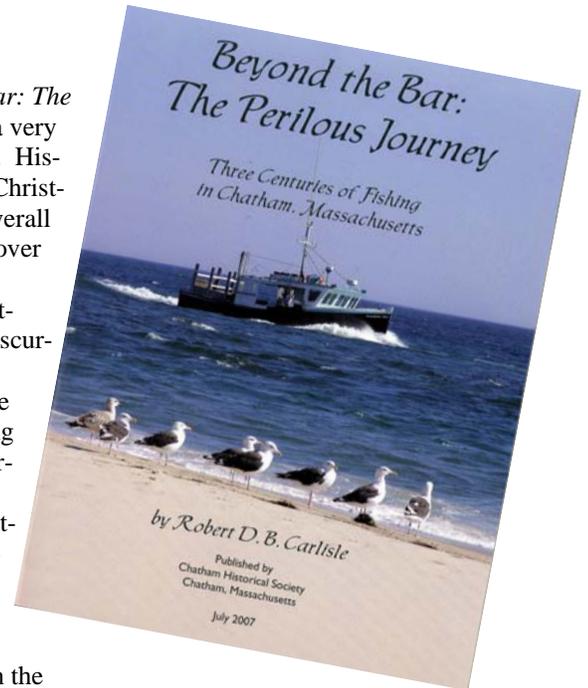
For three centuries, fishing has been a fruitful industry for Chatham. Carlisle reviews the early days when natives offered life-saving information about fishing to settlers. He tracks the fishing industry though more than three centuries, interweaving stories of early settlers whose descendants still are active in Chatham today, various wars, and priceless maps of old Chatham. Carlisle describes Chatham's 1800's shores busy with windmill powered salt mills, flake yards for drying fish, docks and boat builders, interspersing poems old and new, and photographs from a rich archival resource located here at the Chatham Historical Society.

An alarming depletion of fish stocks is documented, along with its effects on the lives of those connected to the fishing industry. Carlisle gives voice to many individual men and women whose lives are closely impacted by the stock depletion. He reviews government interventions, and looks at solutions, those tried and new ones proposed.

Beyond the Bar is a case study of contemporary urgency and relevance to fishing communities all along the New England shoreline. We expect the book to be purchased and read widely. We extend congratulations to Rob Carlisle and those associated with the publication and sale of this wonderful new title.

If you have not had a chance to read *Beyond the Bar*, you may order copies by mail, by phoning the Chatham Historical Society (508)945-2493, by connecting to our website www.chathamhistoricalsociety.org (click on museum store), or visit the Atwood House Museum Shop in person. If you live out of town, you can help the CHS by asking your local book store to carry the title, and give them our contact information. We'll be glad to discuss arrangements with them.

- Dot Gross, Shop Books



Volunteers working on archival materials

VOLUNTEERING AT YOUR MUSEUM

In the midst of winter, to think of the Atwood House Museum buzzing with activity may be a stretch, but June will be here sooner than we realize.

Volunteers, whether on the "front line" as docents, or behind the scenes working in the archives, or on other committees are the skeleton of this museum we so love. Some of us are lucky enough to spend our entire year here on the Cape; others spend only the summer months here. Regardless of the category into which you fall, there is a place at the museum where you can share your interest and enthusiasm with others.

Toward the end of March you will be receiving a mailing containing volunteer application forms. Many opportunities are listed from which you may choose, so start thinking how you would best like to enrich your relationship with your museum. If you have questions or concerns, please give me a call at my home (508)945-2858 so we can discuss your particular needs. Remember, docent training will be offered in May and June for new volunteers, and update sessions for those who are returning.

- Betsey Stevens, Volunteer Coordinator



Volunteers working in Costumes and Textiles

Course Offered at the Society in March

Organizing and Preserving your Family's Historical Papers

The same course of one session will be offered at two different times. Sign up for the date that fits your schedule.

Dates: March 12, 2008 from 7:00 to 8:30 PM
March 26, 2008 from 7:00 to 8:30 PM

Cost: \$40.00 per person (non members)
\$35.00 per person (members)

Course Description

This class is designed as an introduction to the steps required in developing a family history. The main portion of time will involve methods of sorting, arranging, and preservation of the paper/manuscript portion of the items collected to develop a family history. Participants will be given a kit containing basic preservation material to be used in starting this process. It is suggested that each person bring to class some of the family papers that he/she has collected in order to begin arrangement and documentation of those papers.

Class sizes are limited to twelve participants.

Objectives

At the conclusion of either program the participant will be able to:

- List the basic steps for creating a family history.
- Describe the methods of sorting and arranging documents etc. for creating a family history.
- Describe the methods for storing and preserving paper documents/manuscripts used in creating a family history.

Instructor: Mary Ann Gray MLS, Certificate in Museum Studies;
Volunteer Archivist, Chatham Historical Society

To register for either session please call the museum at 508 945-2493 between 9:00 am and 1:00 pm Monday through Friday.



A sampling of archival materials to collect and preserve along with acid-free folders, box and glove for special handling of fragile items.

Chatham Preservation Awards Program Is Five

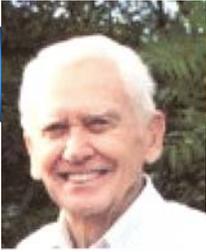
Plans are underway for the fifth year of the Chatham Preservation Awards program sponsored jointly by the Town of Chatham Historical Commission, the Historic Business District Commission, the Chatham Garden Club, and the Chatham Historical Society. This annual event seeks to honor noteworthy efforts by local property owners, builders, architects, and designers to preserve and maintain historic residences and other important historic resources. A broad range of preservation activities may be considered for awards, including stabilization, rehabilitation, restoration and adaptive reuse of historic structures; sensitive additions and modernization; preservation of historic streetscapes; landscape preservation; and archaeology. An award ceremony will be held in early May, the month traditionally designated by the National Trust as National Preservation Month.

Other programs focusing on preservation issues will take place in May. The schedule may include panel discussions, lectures, an archives tour and an opening of a sea chart and maps gallery at the Atwood House Museum, and a House Tour. Watch the newspapers for further information, visit the web site at www.chathamhistoricalsociety.org and plan now to take some



*The Atwood School/Doc Keene Scout Hall
on Stage Harbor Road,
a 2007 Preservation Award Winner*

time to appreciate the work of many whose efforts strive to preserve the architectural history and charm of Chatham.



From the Chairman

JOSEPH ATKINS NICKERSON, JR.

On November 23, 2007, The Chatham Historical Society and the town of Chatham lost one of the best known, most admired, and most beloved members of the community—Joseph Atkins Nickerson, Jr. Although he was involved in many activities and organizations in town, Joe Nick, as his friends often called him, was most widely known for his vast knowledge of the history of Chatham and its people, and it was this that made him the keystone of the Historical Society for nearly fifty years.

Born in Chatham in 1918, Joe attended local schools and graduated from the Chatham School (now the Chatham Community Center) in 1936. An avid baseball player, he pitched for the Chatham team in the Cape Cod Baseball League during the 30's. He was especially proud of the game in which he pitched a record no runs, no hits, no walks, and 19 strikeouts. In characteristic modesty when he related this achievement, he often added that "the day before I went in as a relief pitcher and threw 11 straight balls and got yanked out quick!"

As an accomplished clarinetist he became a member of the Chatham Band about 1935 and continued playing with that group for well over fifty years. Not satisfied with the band as an outlet for his musical talents, he joined Norman Jones and Willard Nickerson to form a dance band in 1938, appropriately named "The Nik-Nax," which ultimately had nine members and later developed into today's band called "The Dreamers".

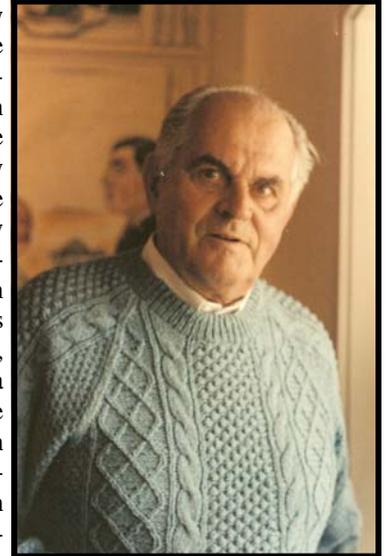
At about the same time that he joined the United States Navy in 1942, Joe married Louise Wentworth, who not surprisingly shared some of the same forebears in the Atkins and Nickerson families. After serving with the Navy throughout World War II, Joe returned to Chatham to resume his occupation as a builder and to continue his research into local history. Louise joined him in those efforts, and together they amassed an extensive collection of information about Chatham sea captains. Many years later, with the encouragement and assistance of Gerry, his wife for the past 24 years, he organized and refined that material to create a book, *Chatham Sea Captains in the Age of Sail*. Very shortly before he died Joe fortunately was able to see the proofs for his book, which will be published in the spring of 2008.

Throughout his life Joe Nickerson was active in many town organizations, such as the Band, the Conservation Foundation, and the Volunteer Firemen, but his lifelong deep interest in Chatham's history led him at the age of 40 to become one of the youngest members of The Chatham Historical Society Board of Trustees in 1959. Three years later he became president, an office he held until 1967; thereafter he held other positions, including vice-president, curator, and historian.

But no listing of the many positions he held with the Society can indicate the extent of his involvement with it and The Atwood House Museum for nearly sixty years. Over that period he was a prime mover in every aspect of its operation, including all of the museum additions and improvements between 1960 and 1999, where his experience as a builder helped to guide those constructions. Perhaps even more important, as the Society's first curator, he began the laborious task of organizing and cataloging the archives and artifacts in its collection. He also was responsible for securing many additions to the collections because of his close acquaintance with so many of the town's old families and his connections with local antique dealers and auctioneers. As Joe himself once said, "If there was anything interesting, there was a 95 percent chance we'd get it through an unidentified donor." On the occasion of his official retirement from the Society's Executive Board, the room in the museum containing portraits of many of Chatham's sea captains was named The Joseph Atkins Nickerson, Jr. Portrait Gallery.

When asked if he would continue to be involved with the Historical Society after his retirement, Joe said, "I can't stop coming here as long as I can move," and he was true to his word. As our official Historian, Joe continued to be an important source of information about events, people, and places in the annals of Chatham. His memory for these facts was nothing short of phenomenal, whether it was about someone who lived in Chatham 100 or more years ago, or about the history of a building, or about an event, which he usually was able to date with considerable precision.

Clearly The Chatham Historical Society and The Atwood House Museum will not be the same without Joe Nickerson. We will miss not only his vast knowledge but also his friendship, his warmth, and his delightful sense of humor. In fact, the entire town will not be the same without him, nor will there ever be any others like him—for he was truly unique and a legend in his own time.



*Joseph A. Nickerson, Jr.
Photo by Jean Jones*



L to R: Willard H. Nickerson, Jr., Joseph A. Nickerson, Jr., Benjamin K. Goodspeed, and Philip G. Nickerson during the town's 250th Anniversary celebration in 1962.

347 Stage Harbor Road
PO Box 381
Chatham, MA 02633

On the Web: www.chathamhistoricalsociety.org

Mark Your Calendars

Coming up at The Chatham Historical
Society & Atwood House Museum

Afternoons at the Atwood Lecture Series

All lectures take place at 2 pm at The Atwood House Museum, 347 Stage Harbor Road. Donations Appreciated.

Sunday February 10, 2008

Noel Beyle: *Cape Cod Humor - What Makes us Laugh*, a look at types of regional humor and the subjects treated.

Sunday March 9, 2008

Michael Tougias: *Fatal Forecast*; the chronicle of an incredible survival story involving two 50' boats hit by a 90' wave 200 miles out to sea.

Sunday April 13, 2008

Daniel Lombardo: *Cape Cod Windmills:
Yesterday and Today*

Single Session Preservation Class Offered

**Tuesday March 12, 2008 or Tuesday March 26, 2008,
7 to 8:30 pm**

Organizing and Preserving Your Family Papers

A fee will be charged and will include a kit of
beginning supplies. See article inside.

Coming in May: National Preservation Month

Special events scheduled.

