



**THE ANNISQUAM
HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

34 Leonard Street
Annisquam MA 01930

Visit the Museum

The museum will close
October 15 and reopen on
May 1, 2018. To visit this
winter contact:

avhistorical@gmail.com

Admission

**Admission is free but
donations are gratefully
accepted.**



Annisquam's United States Senator

By David McAweeney

A few months ago the Smith family gave the history museum a large sheaf of newspaper clippings describing Annisquam resident Benjamin Atwood Smith II and his time in the United States Senate.

To follow up I met with Russell Smith who is the Senator's oldest son. Much of this story is from what he told me.

The Smith family's history goes far back in Gloucester. They were among the founders of Gortons and had a long history in the fisheries and banks before that.

Senator Smith was born in Gloucester, attended the Blynman School and graduated from Gloucester High School as captain of the football team under another Annisquam resident, Coach Nate Ross. After a post-graduate year at Governor Dummer (now The Governor's Academy) he attended Harvard University graduating in 1939.



Senator Benjamin Atwood Smith II

While a member of the Harvard varsity football team, he and teammate Joe Kennedy, Jack's older brother, became friends. Together they traveled to Hyannis where he became friends with the Kennedys especially Jack. In his senior year he, Jack, and Torbert McDonald were roommates. Not only did Smith visit Hyannis, Jack Kennedy visited Smith's home in Annisquam.

Russ Smith recalled one story that family lore says took place in Annisquam. Both Senator Smith and his father sailed Triangles at the Annisquam Yacht Club. Ben's father had a slightly bigger sail than most people. The father was afraid his son might steal it so he kept it under his bed for safety.

On Labor Day weekend before classes started at Harvard he and Jack attended a dance in Annisquam and probably had a little too much fun. About two in the morning Ben boosted Jack through Ben's father's bedroom window and they pulled out the sail. They put the sail on Ben's boat and sailed out in the bay to await the start of the great Labor Day race.

Rounding the last mark off Plum Cove Ben accidentally managed to drive the boat up on a ledge. With an outgoing tide they were stranded. They soon spotted the father's car at Plum Cove Beach. Father was watching them and puffing on a big cigar. He left them there all night.

Things became more serious in 1941. All three roommates joined the Navy and served in the South Pacific.

Russ found a journal his father kept during his time in the Navy. Most pages were blank but he found one entry, "world lost a great man today." That was when he heard the news of Kennedy's PT-109 boat.

Later when he heard that Jack had been found he wrote "JACK'S ALIVE." Later he was able to visit Jack at the Chelsea Naval Hospital while he was recuperating from his ordeal in the Pacific. He wrote "saw Jack and settled the affairs of the world."

After the war Smith came back to Gloucester where he managed his family box company, was elected to the school committee and then to the city council. He was selected by the council to be mayor. John Kennedy was an usher at his wedding and he was an usher at John and Jackie's wedding. He had two sons and three daughters.

He worked in Jack Kennedy's congressional campaign in 1946 and every campaign after. At one time, taking a break from campaigning, Ben hosted Bobby and Teddy Kennedy for a football game in the front yard of 54 Leonard St.

The Smith Family



Front "Sis" Smith, Ben, Cathleen
Back: Susan, Ben, Barbara and Russ



54 Leonard Street. Bobby
and Teddy played football
here on the lawn.

During Jack's presidential campaign Ben worked much of the time in West Virginia, one of the most crucial states.

When Kennedy was elected and his Senate seat became vacant, there was much speculation about who would fill his seat for the next two years. Many Massachusetts politicians were mentioned but Smith was not one of them.

When Russ first heard about it, he was home from Boston College working a Christmas-time mail delivery route to the Rockport line. Riding back to Riverdale on the bus the driver told him the news.

When they passed by Memorial Woods in the bus he could see his house at 54 Leonard through the trees. His front lawn looked like a parking lot. Cars were everywhere.

Ben and Barbara (Sis) Smith had been Christmas shopping in Boston when they heard the story on the car radio. He had heard nothing official. He had Barbara drop him off at the Box Company, and she went home to face the crowd. The phone was ringing constantly.

After a time Ben came home but stayed secluded. Russ was answering the calls. One caller asked to speak to Mr. Smith. Russ politely told him that Mr. Smith was not taking calls just then. The person asked whether he would speak to Jack Kennedy. Russ replied "I bet he will."

Then Ben could speak to the enthusiastic crowd. It was official.

Senator Smith served the two years. By then Teddy Kennedy had turned thirty and was eligible for election to the senate.



Here is Senator Smith in the plaid shorts with JFK at the wheel. Senator Ed Muskie is leaning on the chair. Behind Muskie is Senator George Smathers. Paul "Red" Fay, Secretary of the Navy, is at the mast. The boat was from the US Naval Academy. They are on vacation in Penobscot Bay.

Senator Smith was active in the Senate. One of his projects was the creation of the Cape Cod National Seashore; a project dear to President Kennedy. In 1962 as a member of a Senate Fact Finding Mission he travelled extensively in Southeast Asia, notably South Vietnam. Had the US followed the recommendations of this Mission, the war might have followed a different course.

The Don Usher Family



Photo by Rita Teele

From left to right:

Katelyn Lange, Lyndsey Lange, Jake Bennett, Steven Lange, Kevin Bennett, Andrew Bennett, Jennifer Bennett, Brett Lange, Susan Lange, John Bennett, Gerald Lange.

These are three generations of Don Usher's family, that starts with daughter, Susan. They all visited the Firehouse on August 7, 2017. They came to see Don's legacy. They traveled from the Rochester, N.Y area and Virginia.

Who was Donald Usher? By David McAweeney

With the visit of eleven members of the Donald Usher family last July we decided to find out more about him.

The person in Annisquam who knows the most about Don is Tom O'Keefe. Now Tom is living at Den Mar nursing home in Rockport, but is feeling much better and hopes to get back to his home soon. Sarah Hackett and I went to visit him on August 28, 2017.

According to Tom, Don Usher retired to Annisquam in 1968. He was a top executive at Pan American Airlines and had lived in Scarsdale, N.Y. He was a graduate of Yale University and was a naval lieutenant in WWII.

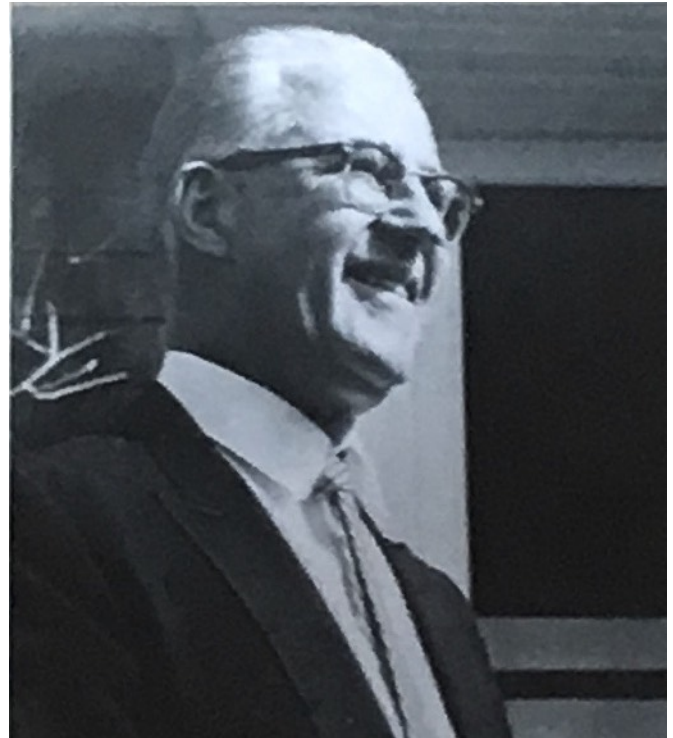


Photo Courtesy of The Annisquam Yacht Club

He summered in Annisquam from childhood. His grandparents owned a house in Norwood Heights that he inherited. Some years before he retired he purchased the large stable, the first house on the right of Norwood Heights Road. He spent many summers converting it to a residence that became his home in 1968.

When the stable was first built horses were not allowed overnight in Norwood Heights. They and their handlers or drivers stayed in this building at the entrance.

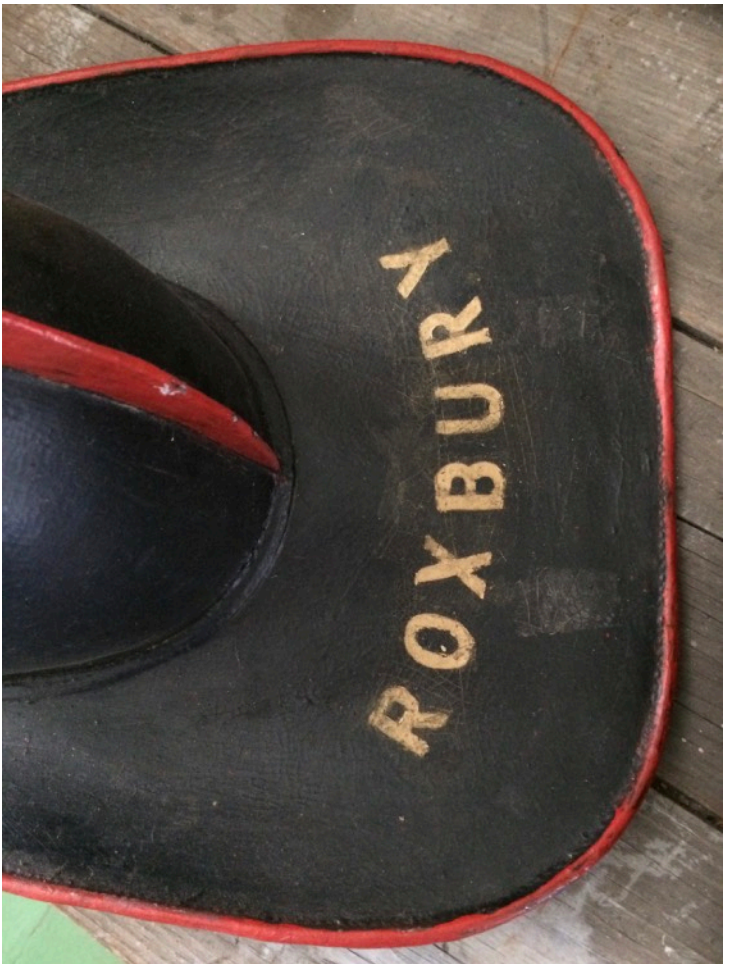
He was a member of the Yacht Club and was commodore in 1963-1964. When he retired in 1968 Donald was legally blind.

The Annisquam Historical Society was losing momentum in 1968 and Bunny Andrew who had led it for many years wanted to retire. Some of the Village leadership urged that the collection be liquidated and transferred to the Cape Ann Museum. Donald Usher took over and added to the collection. He obtained the Martha Harvey glass plates.

Blindness did not stop him. He had an active household. He had a secretary, a cook, a house cleaner, a chauffeur and gardener. His car was a big Cadillac. He enjoyed large dinner parties with ten or more people. He worked along with Susan Jones to run the Society. When his wife, Peggy, passed away in 1982, he invited Tom O'Keefe to live in his house. He needed someone to be at his house at night and Tom needed a place to live. It all worked out and they became good friends. Tom became involved with the museum and took charge later.

Mr. Usher was at one time president of the Leonard Club and according to Tom started the tradition of lowering the flag in front of the Village Hall and placing a card on the flagpole when an Annisquam person passed away. He was also a trustee of the Squam Rock Land Trust.

In his will Mr. Usher left \$10,000 to be used by the Historical Society for the museum.



Rita Teele took these photos and passed them along as a sample of one of Don Usher's interests.

The helmets are on display in the Firehouse.

ROXBURY FIRE HELMET OF THE 1860'S

WHAT IS IT DOING IN THE ANNISQUAM HISTORICAL?

IN 1975, DONALD USHER AND DEREK BOWSER FOUND A NUMBER OF OLD FIRE HELMETS HIDDEN UNDER THE EAVES OF THIS BUILDING. IN ENDEAVORING TO RESTORE THESE OLD AND NEGLECTED HELMETS, ALL PAINTED BLACK, MR. USHER NOTICED FLECKS OF RED COMING THROUGH THE CHIPPED AND FADED ENAMEL. CAREFUL CLEANING REVEALED THE RED TRIM, HERE RESTORED.

IN 1868, THE ROXBURY FIRE DEPARTMENT WAS ABSORBED BY THE BOSTON FIRE DEPARTMENT AND LOST ITS IDENTITY. APPARENTLY, THE GLOUCESTER FIRE DEPARTMENT PURCHASED A QUANTITY OF THE OLD ROXBURY HELMETS, ASSIGNED THEM TO ANNISQUAM, AND THEY WERE THEN REPAINTED AS GLOUCESTER HELMETS OF THAT TIME.

NOTES FROM THE AHS EXECUTIVE BOARD

We hope everyone responds to the **questionnaire** about AHS and the Firehouse that has been emailed to Annisquam residents. Initiated and distributed by Marilyn Short, the survey had input from Victoria and Bruce Godfrey who helped design it. The questionnaire asks for villagers' feedback about the Firehouse and AHS activities. AHS will use responses to fine tune our mission and better respond to the public. Those who did not receive the survey email can request one at:

annisquam@harbingerideas.com

The survey was disseminated via [surveymonkey.com](https://www.surveymonkey.com)

The upcoming Cape Ann History exhibition at CAM.

In the role of CAM guest curator, Molly O'Hagan Hardy, PhD, Director for Digital and Book History Initiatives at the American Antiquarian Society, has chosen five AHS items to include in the Spring 2018 show. Among these are authentic Maya votives, part of a collection which has been carefully displayed in a glass case in the Firehouse for many years. The Henry Clark Wright letter book, dating to his years doing reform and anti-slavery work in England, will also be on exhibit. The letter book, 1842-47, contains over one hundred letters the reformer abolitionist received from English, Irish and Scottish correspondents, many from noteworthy individuals.

The Annisquam Village Church will be the focus of our next exhibition. The WWI show will be "taken down" this month, making way for annual temporary exhibits of material in the extraordinary AHS collection.

The Massachusetts Historical Commission (MHC) has contracted with Historic Preservation Specialist Ann Forbes to research properties on the Washington Street side of Lobster Cove. These properties are under consideration for inclusion in the National Register nomination the MHC is spearheading. Adding these sites to the central area of Annisquam previously surveyed will enlarge the boundaries of an Annisquam National Register area, should residents agree to the nomination.

Accession Committee

The Annisquam Historical Society is forming an Accession Committee. Its charge will be to review potential additions (documents, artifacts, photographs, ephemera, etc.) to the Firehouse collections and determine their suitability in the context of the AHS mission. Please contact Betsey Horovitz, 978-879-4640 or by e-mail at betseybh@gmail.com.

Digital Commonwealth

Rita Teele reports that more of the Historical Collection is now available online at Digital Commonwealth: <https://www.digitalcommonwealth.org/collections/commonwealth:6h445k54w>

Click on it. Some interesting things pop up.

In the future volunteers at the museum will be scanning and digitizing more and more of the collection.

Monthly Meeting

The next Annisquam Historical Society meeting will be on Tuesday, October 24, 2017, at 7:30 PM in the Annisquam Village Library. Anyone interested in Annisquam History is invited to attend.