



The Hourglass

CCXXIX NORTHBOROUGH HISTORICAL SOCIETY March 2014

www.Northboroughhistsoc.org

NHS1906@verizon.net

March 28, 2014 – History of Civil War Songs – Luan Crosby presents a discussion of the role music played during the Civil War. She talks about specific songs, who wrote them and why, and gives some background and context in terms of what was going on in society at the time. She then sings, accompanied by guitar, the songs she speaks about.

Hosted by Marie Nieber and Barbara O'Mara

A Courtship, 1839-1840
Joshua Jewett Johnson was a twenty-nine-year-old physician when he met his future wife, the eldest of Rev. Joseph Allen's six children, Mary, one decade younger. He was originally from New Hampshire. How they met I have not discovered. About eighty letters passed between them, fifteen before their marriage. Only one of the early letters is Mary's, although it is obvious that she wrote, probably as often as he did. The first letter, undated, was quickly written but formal in style. In a letter addressed to "Miss M. W. Allen," J. J. Johnson seeks an "interview" with her, for she had previously sent him a note. It is not possible to determine the reason for their meeting.

. A second undated letter (there were probably others in between), shows considerable social progress.

Mary,

I cannot let you go away without a few words too, which in your presence I cannot find a tongue to utter.

Mary, it is necessary for my own peace that I say something, and I know not why nor why that should not be everything. I don't like restraint. I want to be free, and I feel that I cannot be so until I speak out and tell you all. And the all that I find myself wandering so far to tell you, is simply that I love you, and my heart, my hand, all that I am and all that I hope to be in this [life?] I freely offer you. Can I do more?

(There is not much more to the letter. I will quote two passages.)

I don't do this lightly. I feel perfect confidence in you and I believe that you are exactly calculated to make me better and happier. . . . Many things are pressing for utterance but I Have said enough, perhaps too much already.

I am sincerely

Yours

J. J. Johnson

On October 31, 1939: "O! Mary I am so happy! I have just been talking with your father about you and he spoke to me so kindly and of you so proudly & yet so tenderly that had it been your mother instead, I certainly should have kissed her in the fullness of my heart. He confided in me oh so much!"

On November 6: "It does involve great responsibilities but, Mary, we will help each other. Sure I am your influence on me can only be for good. I feel certain you will make me wiser, better, happier for long after." Now he signs his name "J. J. J.," his favorite signature. She has been in Providence with relatives during some of these early letters. She had spent the 1838-39 year at the Green Street School in Providence, where her teacher was a young woman who became famous as a writer, Margaret Fuller. In several books about her, Mary Allen is mentioned as her most outstanding student. For the next few letters she is in Cambridge where her grandparents live.

The rest of the world comes into Joshua's later letters, although he can occasionally say things such as, on November 19, "I felt while gazing [sic] in your eyes that I was looking in your inmost soul." His letters now come frequently. In the letters that follow Mary is usually in Cambridge, where her grandparents lived, her father being a Professor of Divinity at Harvard.

From Mary we have a letter written on July 15, a month and a half before the marriage. "You, being uninitiated into the mysteries of female employment, can have no idea of the numberless stitches that must necessarily be set by a young lady who is beginning the world." She judges that he will consider her preparations "all

fudge” but that “it is for you that I am working.”

Unfortunately we have no letters describing the ceremony on September 1, 1840. The couple eventually settled in the house at the corner of South and Gale Streets. Their daughter Harriet, born in 1842, lived until 1929. Her five younger siblings all died between the ages of two and five. Both Joshua and Mary opposed slavery fiercely, helped arrange abolitionists’ visits to Northborough in the 1840s, and hosted many of them, including former slaves, in their house. Joshua died in 1884, Mary in 1897. Harriet’s descendants lived in the Church Street parsonage for several generations.

Bob Ellis, Historian

Curator’s News

February’s meeting featuring Patricia Perry was well attended and there were many new faces in the audience. The Board of Directors need to be complimented for initiating a “Meet and Greet” table to welcome the new visitors and members, hosted by Jenifer Bakkala and Hilary Wilson.

We have had two groups of scouts visiting our frosty museum in February. A small group of three Tiger Cubs and a large group of nine Cub Scouts visited and learned something of Northborough’s history. My thanks to JoAnn Sullivan for using her excellent tour guide skills on the curious young men.

Ellen Racine, Curator

Director’s Meeting
March 11, 2014
7:00 PM
Northborough Historical Society
Building

Kent’s Current Events

March 27, 1918. The Allen Parsonage. An event of Considerable interest took place at the Allen Parsonage this evening. A reception was held there in recognition of its first occupancy by Dr. Joseph Allen and his new bride. Dr. Allen was ordained in the church on Oct. 30, 1816. A minister in those days was supposed to own his own house. He immediately set himself the task of building a house. In this task he was assisted by the men of the parish. Mr. Allen was married to Lucy Clark Ware, daughter of Prof. Henry Ware of Cambridge on Feb. 3. The next day he brought his bride to Northborough, and to the new parsonage, where they lived until their deaths --Mrs. Allen in 1866 and Mr. Allen in 1873. Soon after they settled in their new house they gave a series of receptions to the parish -- one for the old people, one for the younger people and one for the children. That was one hundred years ago. The reception this evening was in recognition of that event. Mrs. Harriet H. Johnson, who lives in the house now is a grand daughter of Dr. and Mrs. Allen, and is herself seventy-five years old. Rev. Mr. Kent gave a talk, giving a history of the house and calling attention to some of the many well known people who had been entertained in the house. He also read a letter from Rev. Benj. H. Bailey, regretting his inability to be present, and then introduce Rev. Frederick H. Hosmer of California. Mr. Hosmer was a minister of the Unitarian Church, as colleague with Dr. Allen 1869-72. He gave a few reminiscences of Dr. Allen and then read his own poem "The Village Meeting House". A goodly number were present.

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