



The Hourglass

CCVIII Northborough Historical Society February 2012

Meeting February 24, 2012, 7:30 PM

Northborough Historical Society

Program: Northborough Evening News at the Turn of the Century. Hear the latest news from Northborough with newscasters Forest Lyford, Jane Fletcher, and Jin Halpin.

Hosted by Llanda Richardson and Carolyn Squillante

Peter Whitney's History of Northborough

We have histories of Northborough by several clergymen (Joseph Allen, his son Joseph H. Allen, and Josiah Kent), but the first is by the town's second minister, Rev. Peter Whitney. Published in 1793, it is part of the author's History of the County of Worcester, is nine pages long, and is supplemented by his history of Westborough, of which Northborough was part from 1717 to 1744. Worcester's eminent Isaiah Thomas printed the book.

Whitney's history is, so far as I know, the first history anyone made of the town, then an independent community for only twenty-eight years. He dedicated his book to Vice President John Adams. Incidentally, there are other connections between the Whitney and Adams families. Two of Whitney's daughters would marry Adams men from Quincy early in the next century, and his son Peter would become minister of the church in Quincy.

Membership

Northborough Historical Society

Membership Dues:

Regular \$15.00; Student and Seniors (65 and over) \$10.00; Family \$35.00; and Life \$250.00.

Dues should be sent to
Judy Bissett
300 Ball St.

Northborough, MA 01532

Checks should be made out to the
Northborough Historical Society

Director's Meeting
Historical Society Building
Feb. 14, 2012
7:30PM

Curator's News

Just a few notes of interest: Our wall-size 1855 map of Northborough is at the Green Dragon bindery in Shrewsbury for restoration. The old varnish will be removed and it will be backed with new linen. Missing areas will be filled and hand painted and a binding will secure the map's edges. It is truly a map worth

John C. Crane wrote about Whitney's history for the 1891 edition of the Proceedings of the Worcester Society of Antiquity. Much of what he says is repeated in Kent's Northborough History but not everything. Kent, for instance, does not repeat this account of Whitney's father, Rev. Aaron Whitney:

Against Rev. Mr. Whitney, who had continued, both in his preaching and his praying, to inculcate submission to the sovereign, the tide of popular indignation rose at length to a high pitch. The church was rent by dissensions, and public worship was neglected, till at length, about the close of 1774, the town voted that 'they will not bargain with, hire nor employ the Rev. Mr. Whitney to preach for them any longer.'

When Aaron Whitney attempted reconciliation, he was rebuffed, and thereafter he ministered at home to those who remained loyal to him.

As we know, Peter Whitney expressed firm support of the American Revolution and according to Crane "passed his long ministry in perfect peace and harmony both with the Church and Society." Like his predecessor, John Martyn, and his successor, Joseph Allen, Whitney spent his entire clerical career in Northborough. All three served until their deaths, which in Whitney's case came forty-eight years after his 1767 ordination, by which time he had outlived nearly everyone who had witnessed it. Crane claimed that Whitney "was a man of method, although a little eccentric in some ways." He illustrated his point by noting the minister's habit of marching his eleven children in chronological order from parsonage to church on Sunday mornings.

Crane actually says little about Whitney's historical venture beyond the fact that it was a good one. One feature of Whitney's account of Northborough that struck me is that, unlike

restoring as it bridges the gap between the 1830 and 1870 maps. Not only does it mark house locations and owner names but has several illustrations of Northborough buildings. When completed, we hope to have copies available for sale.

A delightful Brownie troop of thirteen girls toured the museum in January and learned some of the town's history. They then had their meeting and enjoyed snacks in the downstairs hall.

More good news: The Community Preservation Committee has granted \$7,200 to the Historical Society for our organ restoration project. With approval at Town Meeting, work can begin. The 1874 George Stevens pipe organ is original to the building (the former Baptist Church) and the air reservoir and some of the lead wind pipes need serious restoration. We look forward to having this wonderful instrument brought back to playable condition and hosting many concerts in the future.

New Accessions:

Booklet of "Northborough Trails Committee, 2001 to 2011" by George Curtis and donated by Forest Lyford.

Ellen Racine, Curator

many minister-historians, he spends few paragraphs on religious history. In his more balanced account he relates the tale of Mary Goodenow, which he probably could not have heard from anyone alive at that time (1707), but no doubt consulted Timothy Fay, who would have heard it from his mother, for Mary Fay was with the victim when the Indians attacked them. Timothy lived until 1802.

Whitney devotes much of the essay to the physical aspects of the town. He was impressed by Liquor Hill, "seen from all the neighboring towns; but is not inaccessible even to teams." Shuddering at the intoxicating name, the Allens renamed it Mount Assabet. Townspeople then obtained their drinking water from Rocky Pond in Boylston. It is Whitney who tells us that Solomon Pond was named for "an Indian of that name . . . drowned therein, by falling through a raft on which he was fishing." Although there was no Bartlett's Pond, the stream known as Stirrup Brook provided "a corn and a saw mill together; and although it be small, yet by clearing it of obstructions, and a little digging in a few places" water, whose original sources were Great and Little Chauncy Ponds, could be put to use.

He tells of Northborough's industries. Abraham Wood (whose musical talent he does not mention) dressed seven thousand yards of cloth annually. This would amount to twenty yards per day six days a week. He claims that a "great resort of people from all the neighboring towns" came to Northborough's corn, saw, and fulling mills and "to the shops and stores."

In telling Northborough's history today, we are moving in the train of which Rev. Whitney was the first engineer.

Bob Ellis, Historian

