



# The Hourglass

CCXIV Northborough Historical Society October 2012

[www.Northboroughhistsoc.org](http://www.Northboroughhistsoc.org)

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**Meeting October 26, 2012 -7:30 PM Northborough Historical Society**

**Program: Yours for Humanity - Abby.** Lynne McKenney Lydick will portray the life of Abby Kelley Foster, the 19th century Worcester abolitionist and women's rights activist.

## Down By the River

Water meant power, so for many decades Northborough's entrepreneurs located their factories near the Assabet River or smaller streams. Here is a selection of Northborough businesses and industries that clustered around the Assabet for more than a century.

In the late 1700s Abraham Wood served as the fuller of the village. A fuller scoured, dyed, and treated loose webs of woolen fabric to produce woolen cloth. The Assabet River at a point a little north of Main Street would have driven the hammers of his fulling mill. As makers usually did in those days, he sold the finished cloth himself. Probably none of this work survives today, but Wood also just happened to be a composer, and this work, which of course didn't require the Assabet, is still available.

I have just been listening to one of his compositions, "A Hymn of Peace," on a New World Records CD called Music of the American Revolution. On the record jacket Richard Crawford writes: "The Boston Independent Chronicle, May 6, 1784 advertised it as 'just published' and to be sold by Wood in Northboro and by William Billings, near Liberty Pole, Boston, thereby providing the only known link between America's leading

**Membership**  
Northborough Historical  
Society

**Time to renew  
membership**

**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

**Going, going, gone!**

**Pizza Party & Auction**

**The Museum Trustees**  
are asking members and  
friends to search their attics  
and basements for any  
treasures they could donate  
to the fund-raising auction

psalmodist-composers of the Revolution."

In the same territory in the 1840s a young gunsmith named Edwin Wesson operated a gunshop. Assisting him was his younger brother Dan, who in the course of this apprenticeship fell in love with a young woman who lived up the hill eastward. But although the Wessons were recognized by their neighbors as "quiet, sober, and industrious," Mr. and Mrs. Hawes would not sanction a marriage with their daughter Cynthia. So Dan and Cynthia eloped, and allied with Horace Smith in Springfield, he began to prove himself a pretty good breadwinner. We have no early Wesson guns in our collection, but the town has the little summer home they built thirty-five years later on property where the Hawes family had once lived. It is known as the White Cliffs.

A couple of decades after the Wessons left town Milo Hildreth operated a comb factor on

the site of the present motorcycle shop. He was one of several men whose firms manufactured millions of combs in Northborough from 1839 until the early

planned for Saturday evening, October 20th. We welcome most any clean items except large furniture and appliances, electronics and clothing. Of course, your old mink coat would be OK. Also welcome are gift certificates, baskets, hand-crafted items, etc. Use your imagination.

The evening will begin at 5:30 PM with a Pizza Party. Pizza, salad, homemade root beer, ice cream cups, cookies and squares are on the menu. Also offered will be no-cheese pizza for the lactose-intolerant. A donation of \$7 is suggested.

At 7:00 PM the auction will be held with guest auctioneer, our own Jim Halpin. Marge Hastings, a licensed auctioneer, will be on hand to offer assistance.

### **Curator's Report**

Our Society hosted a booth at the High School this year at Applefest with Cindy Atwood, Kathy Pierce and Jenifer Bakkala dressed in period costume. They distributed pamphlets, sold booklets and offered a "Then and Now" quiz for visitors. Sixteen winners received a year's free membership. Elbert Bloom provided the photographs and Bob Ellis, the historical

twentieth century. His combs were displayed at the 1876 World's Fair in Philadelphia. If you have one of his tortoise-shell combs, you own something valuable.

In the 1890s Thomas H. Blair was in business by the waterside. In addition to the Hildreth building and another on a lot across the street (now a parking lot), he also had a building on Winn Street, also near the river. He made cameras and film, and three of his cameras, highly valued by camera historians, are in the Historical Society collection. George Eastman, who invented the Kodak, regarded Blair as a major competitor, bought his business, and for a time continued to use the Blair name on a line of his own cameras.

It is probable that Blair also used Assabet River power, but he had much to do with the end of the river as a power source. In 1898 light poles, strung with wires, amazed viewers on Main Street; they had sprung up to power the trolley cars which began to run between Worcester and Marlborough. Five years later the American Incandescent Light Company of Philadelphia proposed to light the streets of Northborough. To quote my booklet Not Quite a Genius, "Although most of the other listed directors of this company were Philadelphians (with two more from Detroit), the firm's president was none other than Thomas H. Blair." The town retired Henry W. Paul, who had lighted gas lamps on the streets, and agreed to use forty of Blair's lamps (which he was now making instead of cameras). Until 1907 the Blair Light Company, as it was then called, illuminated Main and some other streets of Northborough.

From this point on nobody was down by the river-except to fish.

Bob Ellis, Historian

clues. At the building, children's toys and farming equipment were displayed by JoAnn Sullivan, Sandra Chaurette, Forest Lyford, Paul Derosier, and Judy and Alan Gustafson. The Ice Cream Social was served by Carolyn Squillante, Jane Fletcher and Diane Lyford. Bluegrass music was provided by the Stony Hollow String Dusters. Our thanks to all who helped out, hosted the museum and came to our events.

I have been scanning photos from Helen Corey's photo albums covering the years 1900 to 1930. These contain many photos of local homes and townspeople.

And lastly, my thanks to Forest Lyford for building new shelves in the storage room, just in time for storing the auction items, and also for repairing an upholstered chair (one of a set, c.1880s) donated by the Unitarian Church several years ago.

Ellen Racine, Curator

**Director's Meeting  
Historical Society Building  
7:30 PM October 9, 2012**

**Our mailing address has changed**

**Northborough Historical Society  
300 Ball St.  
Northborough, MA 01532**