



# The Hourglass

CCXV Northborough Historical Society December 2012

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

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**Meeting December 7, 2012, 7:30 PM Northborough Historical Society**

**Program: Puritans, Praying Indians, and King Philip's War-In 1675-76**, the Main Street in Northborough was the main road to war! Paul Brodeur tells the story of how the Puritans, Praying Indians and Nipmucs engaged in King Philip's War.

## A Northborough Pamphleteer

The August 1887 issue of the Engineering Journal carried the following item: "Mechanical Defects of Our Railroads: By Charles W. Felt. Northboro, Mass. Mr. Felt proposes a very startling change in our railroad system, and engineers will read his pamphlet with curiosity, if not with approval." This pamphlet is one of several by Felt, who lived in Northborough from the mid-1870s until his death in 1907.

Born in Salem, Massachusetts in 1834, Felt developed two abiding interests: one in printing and writing, the other in railroads. As early as 1852 he was working on a machine designed, in his words, "to distribute, set, and justify the type, and also to lead the matter and make a register of the same by which distribution and resetting of the same could be performed by the machine automatically." A 1916 book on typography comments as follows:

"Two very interesting patents, machines constructed under which were [theoretically] capable of performing the entire cycle of operations of composing, line-justifying, and distributing, were taken out by C. W. Felt in

## 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

## Curator's Report

The Auction and Pizza Party made for an enjoyable evening - and although we had hoped for a larger crowd, we were still able to earn over \$1,000 for our efforts. Our thanks to all the members who donated their "treasures" and to all those who worked on this

America in 1860 (and in England in 1861), and that of J. W. Paige taken out in America in 1895. In many respects the earlier patent is the more remarkable for its curious anticipation of much that has followed."

Felt's own machine, however, like Paige's later one, was a failure. Felt's English attempt led to the publication in Liverpool of two pamphlets on railroads titled *The Eastern Railroad of Massachusetts: Its Blunders, Mismanagement, and Corruption*. Among a series of accidents on this railroad in that period was one in Revere, Massachusetts in 1871 that took thirty lives. The book was printed in Liverpool by "Miss J. Green" with a date of 1873. Felt married an Englishwoman named Jemima Green; it seems likely, doesn't it, that Jemima was the printer? When Green returned from England he and Jemima had with them their son George, born in Liverpool. George became the proprietor of a lumber company. (Many of you will remember a later stage of this business, Northboro Lumber-whose sales building is now "Doggy Den" and whose lumberyard now makes plastic cards. Wouldn't George Felt be surprised to find that lumber in Northborough has turned into dogs and plastic?)

Before arriving in Northborough, Charles Felt apparently settled in Ayer. There he published a group of pamphlets called *Deadhead*. A deadhead was a person who rode the rails without buying a ticket. Pointing out that the apparently huge number of deadheads in the 1870s was costing the general public money, Felt wrote a scathing revelation of the practice of deadheading, issued in Ayer over several successive weeks. It appears likely that Felt's animus toward Eastern was at least in part personally motivated. In a later pamphlet he writes that he was "for several years connected with the passenger department of one of the chief New England lines, which has

event. Marg Hastings, an auctioneer and realtor from Boylston, and our own Paul Derosier kept the items moving and with their humor and knowledge, made the evening entertaining. Thanks to Cindy and Dick Atwood, Carol and Buz Bostock, Helen Calverley, JoAnn Sullivan, Jean Langley, Jane Fletcher, Frank Bissett, Kathy Pierce and Carolyn Squillante. Could there be an Auction 2?

And again my thanks to Forest Lyford for building a second rack of shelves in the storage room. Items are now off the floor and nicely stored.

**Ellen Racine, Curator**

### **Kent's Current Events Town Meeting**

Nov. 15, 1911. A special town meeting was held this evening "to see if the town will establish an agricultural department in the High School, and appropriate money for the same." It was voted unanimously to do so and \$1800. were appropriated for the purpose. There was not one word of opposition. All credit is due to Mr. Van Ornum, our School Superintendent -he has

been absorbed in the Boston and Maine system." Eastern is known to have been involved in the Maine Railroad's business.

In 1887 Felt published in Northborough *Mechanical Defects of Our Railroads*, as noted above. In his introduction he writes that "we have in Northborough an excellent public library, which is steadily growing, and one of the trustees has assiduously devoted herself to the task of preparing a card catalogue." He pointed out, however, that his research had also taken him to the Boston Public, Harvard, and state libraries, and the Athenaeum. In this book safety is not a major issue. He insisted that the railroad system was not large enough to move American freight, especially that coming from ocean liners. He judged that locomotives, then capable of only about 80 miles per hour, ought to be able to do 200. (We still seem to be working on that one!) One of his suggestions—that in cities trains might well be elevated 80 to 100 feet over the streets, is somewhat bizarre.

Although Felt was identified in one source as a state Grange official, I have found no indication of an association with the Northborough Grange, which originated in 1885. Records indicate that he and Jemima lived on Bartlett Street. They had four more children, all born in Northborough. Their son William married Elizabeth, a daughter of Reverend and Mrs. Charles Pease; some of their descendants, still interested in Northborough, visited our organization recently.

Bob Ellis, historian

worked untiringly to bring this about.

Nov. 14,  
1913. Agricultural  
School

The agricultural department of the High School suspended operations today. It had only three or four pupils. There did not seem to be interest enough in the neighborhood for such a school. John H. Fay, the teacher, has secured a position at the new Agricultural School which Essex County has just recently established at Danvers, Mass

**Director's Meeting  
Historical Society Building**

**7:30 PM November 13, 2012**

**Our mailing address has changed**

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