



The Hourglass

CCXXXII NORTHBOROUGH HISTORICAL SOCIETY June 2014

www.Northboroughhistoricalsociety.org

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An Unhappy Abolitionist in Northborough

Usually my essays about Northborough are positive, because there are many positive things to report. In 1852, however, a letter sent by an abolitionist who visited the town seems to suggest that the spirit against slavery, very powerful throughout the 1830s and '40s, resulting in many anti-slavery speakers in the town's lyceum, had declined.

The writer was Daniel Foster, described in one web site as a "forgotten abolitionist." The letter, written to a friend, William Henry Garrison published in his *Liberator*, then into its 23rd year, on December 17, 1852.

I went to Northboro on Friday, December 3rd and lectured there that morning. The Town Hall was about half full. No one offered me a home, and so, at the close of the service, I made my way to the tavern, where I found shelter for the night. But there is always a vast distance between hospitality freely and in love bestowed upon the laborer who is worthy of such hire" and the fare one gets for money at the public house. In the tavern there was one of the old-fashioned bar-rooms, with the counter fitted for the glasses and toddy sticks with which I suppose it was once well loaded.

As I sat in meditation that evening, I seemed to see the party of olden days standing around the bar, and paying out 4 fools' pence according to the custom of those days. Since the passing of the Maine Law, and through the concentration of travel on routes where the iron horse keeps on his tireless way, the country tavern has become as dull as a deserted crow's nest. Go into a room by yourself and you can have the best company, to wit, your own thoughts, but in the bar-room, where idlers kill time, you realize what it is to feel lonesome and homesick. So I found in this old bar-room, where I sat for an hour after the lecture.

The next day was a dark and stormy one. I called on the Unitarian clergyman, who has been settled in Northboro the larger half of his life. What an impression a thorough reformer would make upon public sentiment in the pinch, by forty years' earnest effort to apply God's truth to life's relations. In Northboro there are no copies of the *Liberator* taken, but very many of the *Era*. For some cause a strange prejudice against Mr. Garrison prevails in Northboro, founded, as [are] most such cases which I have examined, on a misapprehension of his books. . . . One man, who

quite severely condemned the editor of the *Liberator*, was candid enough to admit that he might be mistaken, and so he bought one of Mr. Garrison's books to examine for himself.

I met one very earnest abolitionist, who lives in the woods, and reads the *Liberator* with an interest that never flags. So, at least, he said. I was greatly interested in him. If he had been a resident of the center of the town, I should have found a reformer's home.

[He then mentions a few more towns, some of which he found more satisfactory.]

Yours fraternally,

Daniel Foster, Cambridge

A little less than four years earlier, townspeople had welcomed William and Ellen Crafts warmly. What had happened? Two years earlier Congress enacted the Fugitive Slave Act, which required northerners to return escaped slaves. It was this law that drove the Crafts to England. Although some Bostonians reacted strongly against this law, perhaps many people in the area had decided to give up the long struggle against slavery. Also that year the Kansas-Nebraska Act permitted the citizens of the territories to decide whether or not they wanted slavery. Both the Whigs and the Democrats in the recent presidential election having supported the act, the anti-slavery Republican party would be formed in 1854.

The Maine Law required temperance, the banning of liquor, and it had been imitated in other states. The "*Era*" was an anti-slavery paper published in Washington. Foster may have been making a point against Dr. Allen, who as a member of the Peace Society was irritated by the militancy of some of the reformers. It is too bad he didn't identify that woodsman. I wonder who he was.

Bob Ellis, Historian

Curator's News

Our congratulations to Rick and Marie Nieber for their hard work in getting approval from the voters of Northborough establishing the Peter Whitney parsonage as a Historic District. This will ensure that the outside of this historic house will be preserved.

Helen Calverley, Carolyn Squillante and Janice Ferenchick of the Garden Club have been caring for our gardens and have added several planters at our doorways. Forest has kept the grass trimmed and the landscape has never looked better. Our thanks to all.

Electrician Dave Pasco has repaired the suspicious wiring inside the pipe organ. He has also moved the water heater plug up and

out of reach and installed a motion detector light in the back of the archive building. My thanks to the Property Committee for seeing this through.

Dan Fishbein, Eagle Scout Candidate, has completed his map project on our new website. He is currently working on the final phase of publicizing its usefulness and presenting his work to groups such as the Senior Center. Check it out at <http://northboroughhistoricalsociety.org>.

The Town’s 250 anniversary is coming up in 2016. We will be starting a sewing group at the Historical Society in the fall to work on our period costumes. It’s time to start planning your costume for the many events that will be sponsored: – a Parade, Ball, fashion show?

Accessions:
Display of Proctor buttons from Carol Bostock
A Shirley Temple 3-piece breakfast set from Bob Trimble
Large lot of newspaper clippings, 1880s receipts, copies of research papers from Bucky Rogers
Kent’s History, photos, fan, corset, WWII ration books from Jane Fletcher.

2014 Annual Meeting

The Annual Meeting of the Northborough Historical Society was held on May 16th. The reports of the various committees were accepted as noted in the Annual Report. It was voted and approved to raise the membership dues of the Society. Regular membership \$20; Student and Senior (65 and over) \$15; Family \$45; Life membership \$250.

The following slate of officers were elected for 2014-15:

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| President | Paul Derosier |
| Vice-President | Mark Bashour |
| Directors | Henry Squillante |
| | Normand Corbin |
| | Melessa LeSage |
| | Carol Bostock |
| | Robert Marchetta |
| Treasurer | Frank Bissett |

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|-------------------|----------------------|
| Recording Sec. | Hilary Wilson |
| Membership Sec. | Jenifer Kahn Bakkala |
| Newsletter Editor | Jenifer Kahn Bakkala |
| Museum Trustees | Jo-ann Sullivan |
| | Kathy Pierce |
| | Llanda Richardson |
| | Beryl Krouse |
| | Cynthia Atwood |
| | Richard Atwood |
| Hospitality | Diane Guldner |
| | Jane Fletcher |
| | Linda Corbin |
| Program | Janice Ferenchick |
| | Arlene Marshall |
| | Richard Ferenchick |
| Property | Chuck Krouse |
| | Jim Halpin |
| Publicity | Cathy Cairns |
| | Carolyn Squillante |
| Legislative | Forest Lyford |
| | Melanie Magee |
| | Hilary Wilson |
| Nominating | Kevin Carroll |
| | Hilary Wilson |

Organizational Meeting

The Organizational; meeting for newly elected committee members will take place on June 24, 2014 at 7:30 PM at the Northborough Historical Society building.

Membership

Northborough Historical Society

Membership Dues:

Regular \$20.00; Student and Seniors (65 and over) \$15.00; Family \$45.00; and Life \$250.00.

Dues should be sent to

Northborough Historical Society

Membership Secretary

PO Box 661

Northborough, MA 01532

Checks should be made out to the

Northborough Historical Society

Red square on your label indicates that it is time to renew your membership.

