



# THE HOURGLASS

## NORTHBOROUGH HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

CCXXXV

Northborough Historical Society

December 2014

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

**The next meeting** of the Northborough Historical Society will take place at 7:30 p.m. Friday, January 23. Norm Corbin will present: "Wilder Bush: Combs and More." Wilder Bush is well-known as the first entrepreneur to bring comb manufacturing to Northborough. Did you know that he was also a key player in bringing the railroad and first bank to town as well?

**Dues are Due:** If you have not yet renewed your membership for the 2014-15 season, please stop by the welcome table at the next meeting, or mail a check to:  
*Membership Secretary, Northborough Historical Society, PO Box 661, Northborough, MA 01532.*

**The Board of Directors** will meet at 7:30 p.m. Tuesday, January 13.

### History Corner

by Bob Ellis, Historian

#### A Northborough Thoreauvian

A Sunday edition of the Worcester Telegram

### **Membership**

#### **Annual Dues:**

Single - \$20  
Student/Senior - \$15  
Family - \$45  
Lifetime - \$250

Send dues to:  
Northborough Historical  
Soc.  
Membership Secretary

in 1962 carried a story called “Meet Clarence Nelson, Leominster’s Modern-Day Thoreau.”

Having lived in Northborough for the first 25 years of his life, however, Nelson was certainly formed here. When he was born on February 24, 1895, the first of Charles and Marion Nelson’s seven boys and one girl, the family lived on Mill Street. An amateur photographer from the age of 13, he took an appealing picture of two neighborhood boys, obviously great friends: one, Tony Dobardo, most likely Italian, the other, Tommy Cobb, one of Northborough’s few blacks. (Tommy sister’s Irene can be seen on the cover of *Images of America: Northborough*). Later the Nelson family lived on River Street. He maintained his photograph album of Northborough people and sites for a dozen years.

In 1916, as a National Guardsman, he participated in the expedition against Pancho Villa, whose forces had attacked a New Mexico border town. The next year he was called to World War I. In his diary—part of our collection—he laments war but also celebrates birds in this passage from February 8, 1918:

“Wonderful weather. Song birds sing every morning. Mild and sunny. Speaking of birds, I found 17 more cuckoos last night. Everybody has them. They only bother you when you’re sweaty, except that they are kind of on your mind all the time. Tourists would pay thousands for the privilege of seeing what we’ve seen for the past few days. Hope I live so I can tell about it, but none of us have much hope. We are a sort of pioneer division and expect to be sacrificed. Not without a hell of a scrap, tho.”

Wounded in action, he received the Purple Heart (but not until 1932). On July 8, 1918 he wrote: “They plugged us all last night. Ripped our woods to pieces. Got 2 men from our post. I got belted by the same concussion and dazed for a while. Came to in time to administer first aid to the men,” for Nelson was sergeant of his unit and responsible for as many as sixty-eight men.

Here are his final moments in the war:

“Went over the top at about 10:30 to the accompaniment of considerable noise. Moved forward to battle line when guns suddenly stopped

P.O. Box 661  
Northborough, MA 01532

*Please make checks payable  
to Northborough Historical  
Society*

## Curator's News

by Ellen Racine, Curator

Bob Ellis and I have been busy working on a new photo book, *America Through Time*. We have pulled some 90 photographs of our town. While Bob has been writing captions, I have been about town taking equivalent current photos. We are very excited about the new project and it should be completed in time for our town’s 250th anniversary in 2016.

We have had several newspaper writers visit our archive for research, and two college students. One young man will be researching religion in Northborough while the other young man is compiling a history of the Police Department. They are both enjoying their projects and we will receive copies of their finished work.

Our period costume sewing group continues to meet on the

and only noise was enemy machine guns. Strange. 11<sup>th</sup> month, 11<sup>th</sup> day, 11<sup>th</sup> hour. Word came from rear to cease hostilities, war over. Couldn't believe it. Built huge bonfires and tried to dry our clothes and get the frost out of our bones. Slept where we were. Some fellows went over to the Bosche [German] lines and swapped souvenirs. That night shot up all the flares there were in the lines. Fellows too weary and exhausted to celebrate much."

In about 1920 he worked for an optical company in Worcester and by 1923, the year of his marriage, he became its president. He and Barbara had two children. Following her death in 1946, his life became more solitary. He ended his working career as a cook and baker at the Gardner State Hospital. "I liked my work at the hospital. The patients treated me as an equal," he said. He bought an old bathhouse on the shore of Lake Samoset and remodeled it as a cottage. The Telegram reporter began his 1962 article thus:

"Living a happy, close-to-nature existence on the shores of Lake Samoset in Leominster these days is a man who calls himself a hermit and a friend of almost all wild life. Birds and fishes eat out of his hands and a skunk and chipmunks are his daily visitors. . . . He likes to think of himself as a modern-day Thoreau living in a bird sanctuary."

On his wall hung a definition of success, which reads in part: "He has achieved success who has lived well, laughed often, and loved much; who has enjoyed the trust of pure women, the respect of intelligent men, and the love of little children; who has filled his niche and accomplished his task; who has never lacked appreciation of Earth's beauty or failed to express it; who has left the world better than he found it." He did not know who wrote it.

Often attributed to well-known writers, it was actually the work of an otherwise unknown woman, Bessie Anderson Stanley, in a contest run by Brown Book Magazine in 1904.

After nearly another decade of his later Thoreauvian life, when he lived alone but never lonely because "I have all these friends," Nelson died in 1971.

second Monday of each month. Please feel free to visit or join us. We are meeting Monday, December 10th at 1:00.

#### ***New Accessions:***

- Postcard photos of 1916 Town Anniversary, N. National Bank papers and record books of minutes from 1865 to 1933 from Wesley and Karen Ostiguy.
- Photos from the Hudson Street School, 150th anniversary and the Herbert Kimball farm from Marcia Kimball Parsneau.

#### **Our Newest Members:**

Amanda Millette  
Dawn Rand  
Rick & Arlene Stetson  
Rick & Gerri Cayer  
Pat Horgan  
Jamie Desautels  
Bill Pantazis  
Kimberly Reed  
Danielle Gregoire  
Jolene C. Downey  
Maureen Sargent  
Mike Long  
Mike Horgan  
Christina Kennedy  
Doug Brandt  
Dale Rains  
Peg Williamson

