

# The Hourglass

CXLII

Northborough Historical Society

September 2015

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

Text only - recovered from MailChimp email, February 2022

**“Tour of the Historical Museum”** by The Museum Trustees, will be the topic of our first program of the season: 7:30 p.m. September 25, 2015. The meeting will begin with a pot luck supper at 6:30 p.m. Take a guided tour of the Northborough Historical Society Museum and enjoy a scavenger hunt and a quiz at the end of the meeting.

**Applefest, Northborough’s annual town-wide celebration**, is scheduled for Saturday and Sunday, September 19 and 20. On Saturday, a luncheon will be held at the Northborough Historical Society following the Applefest parade. An information booth will be on the front lawn as well as an activities table for children, a Cookie Walk, and homemade root beer for sale. The museum will be open both Saturday and Sunday, and there will be an ice cream social on Sunday.

**Dues are Due!** September is the time to renew your membership with the Historical Society. Individual yearly memberships are \$20, with a discount for students and senior citizens. The first 100 people who join or renew will receive a Society car sticker. Mail your dues to: Membership Secretary, P.O. Box 661, Northborough, Mass. 01532 or drop by the Welcome Table at the next meeting.

## History Corner by Bob Ellis

### Why Do Historical Properties Persist?

Those of us who read publications like this one realize (though many people do not) that Northborough today is what it is partly because of what it was. Would we feel at home in a place where everything is new, where there are no points of reference to verify the town’s legacy, its tradition, its sense of having been received from predecessors who valued it?

Those of us with long memories say, “Remember that old house that used to be here? Now it’s a doughnut shop.” Or it’s a franchise that looks like a thousand other franchises all over the map, or it’s a parking lot. But someone will quickly point out that we need parking lots. Franchises are job opportunities, and we certainly need jobs. Perhaps we even need doughnuts. Many of these new things have to go where the old things that we seem not to need anymore were.

Some of the old things must stay, however, even if they are no longer useful - or useful in the old way. We form historical societies and historical commissions to decide which of the old things should remain,

#### Membership

##### Annual Dues:

Single \$20

Student/Senior \$15

Family \$45

Lifetime \$250

##### Send dues to:

Northborough Historical Soc.

Membership Secretary

P.O. Box 661

Northborough, MA 01532

Please make checks payable to  
Northborough Historical Society

even in the face of those who want space for something new. These seekers of something new in many cases own the old thing. They may argue that the old thing, once an asset, is now a heavily taxable inessential. Any drive along a commercial road will reveal many instances of old residential property transformed into commercial ones. Often it must be modified for its new use, covering features that once made it pleasing or destroying them entirely.

In some cases, even an owner with great respect for the admirable features of the property will find a suitable renovation simply too expensive. Members of our Historical Society and/or Historical Commission can give many examples. I remember talking with a man who would have liked to restore a very interesting property that had belonged to a relative. The house did not just have an outdoor spring, but one inside the house. One could open a panel in the floor, look down, and there it was. The house was full of memories for the man, and he would have liked to live in it himself but was informed that making it livable might cost him a million dollars. Furthermore developers considered the land on which the house stood very valuable. The house of course vanished. Several new houses on the property probably please the owners, but my guess is that those of us who visited it probably doubt that the new buildings will ever be as interesting as the displaced one.

Deterioration is the enemy. Once enough of it has taken place, an old building is doomed. Unless a community is willing and able to assist owners in maintaining their properties, the preservation of historical places must depend on the good will of owners who often must deal with considerable deterioration.

Here, briefly, are two examples of historically prominent eighteenth-century buildings that had become tenements. One, at the corner of Blake and Pierce Streets, was at least part of an eighteenth-century tavern in which soldiers of the American Revolution stayed. Deterioration and the absence of an adequate historical record doomed this building a few years ago. The building that replaced it is far more attractive, but it will have to work overtime to become as historical.

Another is the Captain Samuel Wood house on Main Street. The efforts of the present and at least two former owners have preserved it. The first was manufacturer-inventor Thomas Blair more than a century ago. His motive, however, was probably more entrepreneurial than historical. Fondness for local history was developing in his time, but it would take another decade for the Northborough Historical Society to be formed. Blair was visionary but also practical. Across both River Street and Main Street stood commercially suitable buildings, and like all businessmen of his day, he wanted to live close to his business. Therefore the deteriorating house was worth preserving. Fortunately, later owners agreed.

Today such a motive does not exist. Today preservers seem to be motivated primarily by respect for the heritage that their homes represent. How many such people can we expect today, either on Main Street, where not only business people but many others no longer choose to live, or on a large lot elsewhere which is very desirable to commercial developers?

## **Curator's News by Ellen Racine**

The fall activities are approaching quickly.

On Sunday, September 13, at 2:00 p.m. there will be an organ concert in the museum. Peter Brockmann, Director of Music Ministry at St. Rose of Lima Parish, with soprano Frankie Mueller will delight us with "Songs of Praise and Thanksgiving." Join us for this uplifting concert and again hear our 1874 George Stevens organ playing music for which it was designed. There will be a reception after the concert. We would appreciate members baking some refreshments. This is a free-will offering.

And, join us in our Applefest activities. We will have children's activities, cookie walk, luncheon, museum opening and on Sunday, our ice cream social with musical entertainment. Call Forest Lyford or Ellen at 508-393-2343 if you can volunteer a few hours and please bake batches of cookies!

## A Snapshot in Time

The Northborough Historical Society is sponsoring a photograph contest as part of the town's 250th anniversary celebration. The purpose of the contest is to document life in Northborough during 2015-2016 for future generations. Photographs submitted for the contest will be judged in early October 2016 and displayed at the Historical Society building. A prize will be offered for the best photograph for each of the following categories, and a people's choice also will be awarded based on popular votes. Categories are: **Buildings** (inside and out) ; **Sights and Scenes** (streets, landscapes, traffic, etc.); **Northborough at Play** (leisure-time activities, sports, recreation, parades, concerts, etc.); **Northborough at Work** (construction, farming, town government, DPW, fire, police, building maintenance, etc.); **Northborough People** (family gatherings, etc.). **Deadline is October 3, 2016.**

For more information and an entry form, visit [www.NorthboroughHistoricalSociety.org](http://www.NorthboroughHistoricalSociety.org).

## Program Schedule 2015-2016

Programs take place Fridays at 7:30 p.m. at the Historical Society 52 Main St., Northborough and are free and open to the public.

The September and May programs are preceded by a potluck supper at 6:30 p.m., which is open to all.

**September 25, 2015** "Tour of the Historical Museum" by The Museum Trustees. After a pot luck supper, take a guided tour of the Northborough Historical Society Museum. The evening will include a scavenger hunt and a quiz at the end of the meeting.

**October 23, 2015** "Mark Twain" portrayed by Richard Clark. This solo performance about the life and work of America's foremost humorist, Mark Twain, is full of wit and wisdom and the special brand of storytelling that made Mark Twain a legend in his time.

Hosts for meeting: Christina Kennedy and Mary Fortin

**December 4, 2015** "Pearl Harbor" by Gary Hylander. Seventy-four years ago, December 7, 1941, FDR declared the attack on Pearl Harbor as a 'A Date Which Will Live in Infamy'. In his dramatic presentation, Professor Gary Hylander recounts the facts of this historic event.

Hosts for meeting: Rick and Gerri Cayer

**January 22, 2016** "Algonquin Regional High School Presentation" by ARHS students. In this two-part program, students studying US history under Stephen Godbout will do a presentation on a research project with resources from the NHS museum. The evening will also include a performance by the ARHS Chorus under the direction of Katherine Waters.

Hosts for meeting: Janice Ferenchick and Suzanne Williams

**February 26, 2016** "Who is Buried In Northborough's Brigham Street Old Burial Ground?" by Beth Finch McCarthy. The colonial-era Old Burial Ground on Brigham Street in Northborough was established to accommodate the burials of the town's first families. Through genealogical research, Beth Finch McCarthy has identified many of the individuals buried there. Highlights of the program will look at early colonial life in Northborough to include some good gossip about the early families.

Hosts for meeting: Frank and Judy Bissett

**March 18, 2016** "History of Northborough Fire Department" by Paul Desautels. Joining the Northborough Fire Department in 1965, Paul will share his first-hand knowledge of the Department, including how it grew as Northborough grew, and major fires that happened in town over the years. Most recently, Paul has been instrumental in having an historic fire "engine" returned to town.

Host for meeting: Beth Finch-McCarthy

**April 22, 2016** "The Lost Art of Etiquette" by Megan MacNeil. With quotes from the Phillips Family (Phillips House is one of the Historic New England's properties) Megan MacNeil, Registrar of Historic New England Association, will use journals, diaries and letters to discuss dining room and parlor etiquette, letter writing, how to pay a visit, calling cards and other behavior expected of the different members of the family and household staff. This lecture covers the period of time from 1880s to 1940s. Hosts for meeting: TBA

**May 20, 2016** "Living in Northborough" as recorded in the Northborough Historical Society Archives and remembered by several members of the Northborough Historical Society Members. After a pot luck supper, listen to highlights of Northborough's past. Anyone with special memories of Northborough, come prepared to share a story or two.

**September 23, 2016** "John and Abigail Adams: An American Couple" by Gary Hylander. During their courtship and marriage, John Adams and Abigail Smith Adams exchanged more than 1,100 letters, many filled with intellectual discussions on government and politics considered an invaluable account of the Revolutionary War. Abigail, a fierce advocate of rights for women and African-Americans, was an important partner throughout John's political career. Gary Hylander presents an animated lecture that brings this historic couple to life.

**October 28, 2016** "History of Route 20" by Bryan Farr. Stretching from Kenmore Square in Boston to Newport, Oregon at 3,365.3 miles in length, Route 20 is the longest highway in the United States. Northborough's Main Street is a minuscule segment of this historic road. Bryan Farr, founder of The Historic Route 20 Association, will lecture on the historical and cultural significance of the highway and will highlight landmarks and less-remembered points of interest in Northborough and neighboring communities.

**December 2, 2016** "A Portrait of the Victorian Age: Letters of the Holbrook Family of Northborough" by Beth Finch McCarthy. Town figure, Levi Holbrook (m. Eliza Grout), was a very interesting character. Beth Finch McCarthy has obtained a small collection of family letters which colorfully illustrate the life and times of Victorian Northborough. Themes include rail travel in New England, private school culture, Victorian medicines, slavery, boarding in family homes, local commerce, infidelity, and the intricacies of being an independent-minded woman in a male-dominated society. This program promises to be a veritable soap opera.