

The Hourglass

CXLV

Northborough Historical Society

December 2015

www.NorthboroughHistoricalSociety.org

Text only - recovered from MailChimp email, February 2022

A Night of History, a Night of Song: Join us for a double feature, as Algonquin Regional High School students studying U.S. history will present a research project with resources from the Historical Society's museum. A performance by the ARHS chorus will follow. The meeting and program are scheduled for 7:30 p.m. Friday, January 22 at the Society building. The event is free and open to the public.

Mark Your Calendar for special Historical Society events in honor of the Town of Northborough's 250th Anniversary: On May 15, a Hunt for History and Ice Cream Social is planned; on September 24 a Cemetery Tour; and on October 22, a Harvest Supper. In addition, there will be a Fashion Show on May 22, and our Photo Contest, already under way, will run through October. Visit the Society web site for more details. The town is also planning a myriad of events, which can be viewed at www.town.northborough.ma.us.

Dues are Due! Now is the time to renew your membership with the Historical Society. Individual yearly memberships are \$20, with a discount for students and senior citizens. Mail your dues to: Membership Secretary, P.O. Box 661, Northborough, MA 01532 or drop by the Welcome Table at the next meeting.

History Corner by Bob Ellis

Miss Hilliard's Recollections of Christmas

This month, your historian calls upon Elizabeth Hilliard. Born in 1899, Miss Hilliard was a history teacher and later the director of the Northborough Library. Her following remarks are dated December 17, 1969 and may represent a talk given on that date.

In 1856 Christmas became a legal holiday. This was due, perhaps, to the influx of varied ethnic groups who brought with them a Catholic/Episcopalian heritage that favored the celebration of Christmas.

Although most rural New England towns clung to the tradition of no Christmas celebrations well into the 1800s, Northboro was more liberal in its attitudes. The third minister of the town, serving 57 years in the

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

1800s, was Joseph Allen. He served as a reader in the Cambridge Episcopal Church while a graduate student at Harvard.

He very much liked the celebration of the Christmas and Easter holidays. Consequently, his family exchanged simple homemade gifts accompanied by simple verse. Thus, in town our festivities were more church-oriented than secular.

Observances began the Sunday before Christmas with special music and decorations. Dr. Allen, who had a lovely, large garden, was wont to bring decorations during the year for the pulpit.

For many, the Church Christmas tree was the only tree, and it was for all members and people in the church. The Ladies Meeting for Alliance made tarlatan bags sewn together with bright worsted and filled with ribbon candy. There were also popcorn balls wrapped in paraffin paper and there were homemade cookies as decorations.

The program of the church vestry would be a play or recitations by the children. Then, Santa arrived accompanied by sleigh bells through a window behind the Christmas tree. The Ladies Meeting had made Santa's suit and so of course it was of some concern that each year they had to obtain the same size man to play Santa.

Because the church observance was on Christmas Eve, those families with a tree and celebration to come held their observance later in the day. The tree which father used to cut came from the cedar swamp on Davis Street and was a hemlock different from today's commercial balsam or spruce tree.

Before 1910, real candles were in use on the tree. These were pretty but dangerous. At one time there was a tiny lantern, collapsible for storage, that looked like a miniature Japanese paper lantern, which held a small light. I can remember father standing in one doorway with a fire extinguisher and in the other, mother with a bucket of water. The candles were usually lit only for the gift-giving itself, and not rather indiscriminately as we do today.

In the church, the decorations for the tree were made by the children. They strung popcorn and cranberries as they do today. There was also store-bought tinsel. The branches were hung with small cards edged with tinsel and hung with the little imitation stained glass lanterns.

Christmas cards were not common until 1915. Picture postcards came first. Those cards in envelopes were handmade. The old cards were small, sometimes single sheet, but usually two sheets of paper tied together.

In those days, the stores did not make so much of Christmas promotions but had lovely laurel roping and wreaths. For us, the Christmas trip to Boston, to R. H. White's, Jordan's or Hovey's, and sights and toys, was a treat. I was intrigued by the mechanical trains wound by a string and replete with tunnels and railroad stations. There were laid out on the attic floor. There were also pedal cars by 1906 and for me, a walking doll from Italy named Rosalie. When wound up, she moved her head and arms and walked.

For family fun, there were games like Authors, Parcheesi, and the Vanderbilt Cup Race with instructions for the layout of Long Island. The books for children started with Beatrix Potter's Peter Rabbit series.

When in Worcester this fall, I spoke to a clerk about the pretty decorations in the store and asked her if people didn't tire of them by Christmas. She felt that early shopping could be more leisurely and thus mean more to the people.

Let us hope that she was right--that the wonder of the wise men as they saw the star would be kept alive throughout the year and that the Christmas spirit of good will toward men may continue to guide us in our relations with others.

Curator's News by Ellen Racine

Our Northborough Through Time book is now available at Davidian's, LaLaJava, Lowe's Variety, Shattuck's, the Library, and the Town Clerk's office, or by calling me at 508-393-2343. Please enjoy our town's history and support this important fund-raiser. Proceeds benefit the Society. If your club or organization is holding an event, please consider taking along some books to sell.

I am grateful to the Library for allowing us to sell books at their recent two-day book sale. Thanks go to Cindy Atwood, Kathleen Pierce, Jo-Ann Sullivan and Ernie Racine who helped with this endeavor.

Recent Accessions:

- Annual Town Report for 1862-63 from Ruth and Jarl Anderson;
- Northborough High School photo from 1921 from Robert Taft, courtesy of Carolyn Squillante.
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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.

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.

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.