

The Hourglass

CXLVII

Northborough Historical Society

February 2016

www.NorthboroughHistoricalSociety.org

Text only - recovered from MailChimp email, February 2022

The Brigham Street Old Burial Ground will be the topic of the next monthly program at the Northborough Historical Society. Genealogist Beth Finch McCarthy has identified many of the individuals buried in this colonial-era cemetery and will present a program that looks at early life in Northborough and features some good gossip about some of the first families in town. The meeting and program will take place at 7:30 p.m. Friday, February 26 at the Society building, 52 Main Street.

Town's First Official Document Is Part of 250th Celebration

By Robert Marchetta and Jenifer Kahn Bakkala

In honor of the town's 250th anniversary, three members of the Historical Society set out last fall in search of the official record of Northborough's beginnings.

Historical Society Vice President Bob Marchetta, Membership Secretary and Newsletter Editor Jenifer Kahn Bakkala, and Society Member Rob Berger joined forces on November 5th, and paid a visit to the Massachusetts Archives in South Boston. The three came home with plenty of photographs to share, and a new appreciation for Northborough's rich past.

Bob Marchetta organized the trip. Bob, an archivist for the Naval War College in Newport, RI, is also a member of the town's 250th Committee. When planning began for the town's anniversary celebration -- and given his affinity for historical documents -- he decided to embark on a search for the town's original act of incorporation.

Bob quickly narrowed down the possible locations for the document and realized the most likely was the state archives. He made contact with the staff there and requested they look not only for the incorporation document, but also for any others that might be of interest regarding the town.

Bob soon heard great news: not only did the archives have the original engrossed act from 1766, but they also possessed a petition from 1767 requesting that Northborough become a separate town. He made plans for a visit to the archives in November.

Jenifer Kahn Bakkala, a professional genealogist who also has an interest in old documents, heard about the planned trip and immediately asked to be part of it. Rob Berger, who is usually researching the Civil War in his spare time, didn't hesitate to switch gears and offered his high-quality camera to the endeavor.

The engrossed act, signed by Samuel White, Speaker of the Massachusetts House of Representatives; Andrew Oliver, Secretary of the Province of Massachusetts Bay; and Governor Francis Bernard in 1766, is the first mention of Northborough in an official document. The act, which names Northborough as a district, marks the political severing of the community's ties to its mother-town of Westborough.

Before 1766, those families who lived in what is now Northborough were considered to be situated in the northern part of Westborough, and were citizens of that town. In 1744, this involved about 37 families -- and those families were slowly becoming disenchanted with their situation.

The northern residents felt that they were not well-treated by the town's constable and also claimed to be often neglected by their minister. They petitioned the Great and General Court in Boston, and asked to become their own precinct. On October 20, 1744, that wish was granted.

Although members of the new precinct immediately held organizational meetings and made plans to build their own meetinghouse for religious services, their independence was far from complete. The north precinct was still part of Westborough. So, seeking an even greater level of independence, northern residents asked to be named a district and in 1766, the region was named the District of Northborough.

Residents petitioned for full town status the following year in 1767, but for unknown reasons, that request was denied. Full status as a town would finally come in 1775, when the Massachusetts Legislature passed a single act by which all remaining districts became towns.

The 1766 Act of Incorporation marks the beginning of Northborough's journey of complete independence from its mother town. It is therefore the moment that we honor in this year's 250th anniversary celebration.

Bob, Jenifer and Rob found that although the 1767 petition has weathered well and is largely readable, the 1766 act of incorporation is in fragile condition. Handwritten on vellum, the document has a curved surface and must be handled extremely carefully. The ink is faded in many places, but the words, and especially the signatures, are legible.

Jennifer Fauxsmith, Reference Supervisor and Archivist at the archives placed weights on the edges of the document so that it could lay flat for the group to view and photograph.

To be able to view these precious historical artifacts in person was indeed an immense pleasure," said Rob. And "to represent our community at the archives and return with the digital images for Northborough was an honor."

A surprise came when Ms. Fauxsmith pulled a card catalog drawer out which several maps of Northborough. One caught the group's eye - a map created in 1795. This hand-drawn map showed the town's original borders, containing land that was eventually ceded to Berlin. They learned from Ms. Fauxsmith that the document was created as part of a project to produce the first state-wide map after instructions to each town were issued from Boston.

Bob, Rob, and Jenifer took photographs of all three documents, and images of the 1766 act were later on display at the town's 250th Celebration Kickoff on January 24th. The fragile state of the original act, however concerned all three members of the group. There is now a plan to have it conserved. Bob has worked with the archives staff, and an estimate has been received by a professional conservation firm. Funding sources are currently being evaluated so that the document may be digitally scanned and full-size color copies made for display.

"Finding these documents during the year of the town's 250th anniversary could not be more fitting," said Bob. "I'm very excited to have been a part of that process."

Sources: Josiah Coleman Kent, Northborough History (Newton, Mass: Garden City Press, Inc., 1921) and William H. Mulligan, Jr., Northborough: A Town and Its People (Northborough, Massachusetts: Northborough American Revolution Bicentennial Commission 1977, 1982).

Curator's News by Ellen Racine

Our Northborough Through Time book is currently available at LaLaJava, Shattuck's, the Library and the Town Clerk's office or by calling me at 508-393-2343. Many thanks to Lowe's and Davidian's for selling the books for us during the holiday season.

The 250th anniversary is generating much activity. Several reproduction fashions from our Sewing Group were showcased at the January 24th Kickoff Celebration. Members Linda Corbin, Jane Fletcher, Diane Lyford, Judy Bissett, Kathy Pierce and Marie Nieber added a splash of color to the event.

Two elementary schools have contacted us for assistance with their third grade projects on the town's history. One is planning a museum visit on May 26 with a bus tour to the town's monuments while another is planning a "then and now" presentation on sports, entertainment and amusements in the town. The Middle School librarian will assemble a showcase in the library with samples of primary source materials for the student to view.

And please save the date - Sunday, May 22nd for "Our Founding Fashions" : a fashion show of current residents portraying past residents of Northborough and the styles they might have worn. On display that day will be fashions from the collection. This will be on Sunday afternoon at 1:00, followed by refreshments and a museum visit.

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.

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

Upcoming Programs

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.

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.