

The Hourglass

CXLVIII

Northborough Historical Society

March 2016

www.NorthboroughHistoricalSociety.org

Text only - recovered from MailChimp email, February 2022

To the Rescue! At the next meeting of the Northborough Historical Society, Paul Desautels, who joined the Northborough Fire Department in 1965, will share his first-hand knowledge of the history of the organization, including how it grew as the town grew, and how it was battled major fires over the years. Paul has been instrumental in having an historic fire “engine” returned to town. The meeting and program will take place at 7:30 p.m. Friday, March 18 at the Society’s building at 52 Main Street.

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.

Society Building Approved for National Register

The Northborough Historical Society’s building at 52 Main Street has been approved by the Massachusetts Historical Society for placement on the National Register of Historic Places. An application submitted by Northborough Historical Society members was approved December 9 and has been forwarded to the National Park Service.

The process was begun in 2010 by the Northborough Historical Commission, and, in 2014, Historical Society member Forest Lyford offered to follow through on the application. With lots of help from Bob Ellis, Ellen Racine and Norm Corbin, Forest prepared a draft document, and in 2015, the Massachusetts Historical Commission hired Kathy Broomer, a preservation consultant, to refine the initial draft and ensure that all required elements were included.

A portion of the application reads as follows: “The First Baptist Church of Northborough, 52 Main Street, Northborough is a well-preserved building at the town center, and an important presence in the community for more than one hundred fifty years. The building is significant for its associations with the local Baptist Church, from 1860, and as the headquarters of the Northborough Historical Society, from 1959. Constructed by Richard W. Newton as the Baptist Society’s second house of worship on this site, the wood-frame church includes additions at the rear built during the period of significance. First

Baptist Church is a prominent illustration of Italianate institutional architecture.... The building retains its original 1873 pipe organ, built by George Stevens and Company of East Cambridge, Massachusetts, and restored by the Northborough Historical Society in 2013 with financial assistance from Northborough's Community Preservation Act Funds. Taken together, additions and modifications to the building trace the growth of the Baptist Church and the Historical Society in Northborough. [The building] meets several criteria for the National Register of Historic Places at the local level: [the] "property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history; the property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction; and [it was] owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes."

Why is placement on the National Register important? It elevates the historical significance of the property, it reinforces the rich historical heritage of the town, and it expands educational opportunities. It also qualifies the property for Federal and State preservation grant assistance. A common concern is that future improvements to the property may be restricted, but that is not the case for National Register properties. The designation places no constraints on what owners may do with their properties when using private funding.

With approval by the Park Service, the building will be one of the few assets in town listed on the Register. It will join the Post Road Mile Stone on East Main Street (listed in 1971), the Wachusett Aqueduct (listed in 1990) and several buildings in the Northborough section of the Westborough State Hospital (listed in 1994). The original brick Town Hall built in 1867 was listed in 1972 but burned down in 1985.

The Northborough Historic District Commission is actively pursuing National Register nominations for the Howard Street Cemetery and Mary Goodenow's burial site. Anyone interested in helping with the process, please contact Norm Corbin.

-- Forest Lyford and Normand Corbin

History Corner by Bob Ellis

Colonial Northborough and Rev. John Martyn

From the time it became a separate precinct of Westborough to the time of its independence, the 1740s to the 1760s, Northborough was, like the vast majority of American communities, rural and agricultural. People depended on animals and small streams to augment human power. A few townspeople practiced the making of clothing, bricks, simple tools, and by the end of the period, tanning, but men were primarily farmers.

Life proved physically difficult and precarious. Diseases often raged unchecked; dozens of children, for instance, died from "throat distemper" in mid-century. Roads were poor. Men and

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

women spent their daylight time at work. Schools existed, but no comprehensive system had yet brought them within the reach of all children. War threatened not far off. Northborough sent a number of men (their names--Brigham, Carruth, Warren, Fay, Eager are familiar ones) to the French and Indian wars in the 1750s and 1760s, and some did not return. Such problems faced all communities in this region.

Although there is much about him that we do not know, Northborough's first minister, John Martyn, illustrates important aspects of life at this time. Born in the first decade of the eighteenth century like two famous Americans Jonathan Edwards and Benjamin Franklin - Martyn seems to have spent the first two decades of his life after graduating from Harvard as a businessman.

By the 1730s he would have known Franklin, probably by the nickname he used in publishing an enormously successful periodical, *Poor Richard's Almanac*, with its clever hints ("Early to bed and early to rise....") for farmers and the few businessmen of the day.

Later he would know Franklin's many later achievements, including one as postmaster of "America." In 1763 Franklin spent several weeks around Boston, inspecting post offices in nearby communities. We have no evidence that these visits included Northborough, but the stone on East Main Street reminds us that he was once our postmaster. He and the people of Northborough also shared dismay over the first, though only temporary, exercise of "taxation without representation," a tax on all paper products, in 1765.

Why did Martyn, a merchant and office-holder in the town of Harvard, living in Franklin's world, more than twenty years after his graduation from Harvard College, decide to become a minister? Today we cannot look into his head, but we can speculate that in the late 1730s and early 1740s he must have been much influenced by "the Great Awakening," whose theological father was Jonathan Edwards. We know what he thought: that religion had suffered a sharp decline, that it had ceased to provide the emotional basis of a Christian life. His most famous sermon, delivered in Enfield, Connecticut in 1739, is titled "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God."

When Martyn decided upon the religious life, George Whitefield, a traveling English minister, was sparking this reform. In 1745, while Westborough minister Ebenezer Parkman sponsored Martyn as a candidate for the position of minister in Westborough's new northern district, he found that other local ministers, invited to investigate Martyn's suitability, were more interested in what Whitefield was doing. When they did start concentrating on Martyn, they did not approve of some of his interpretations of Biblical passages.

Nevertheless, Martyn got the position. Whether he shared Edwards's conviction of God's anger at sinners we do not know, but he certainly agreed with Edwards that one's religious faith should animate a Christian's life - not just on Sunday but throughout the week. He makes the point clear in the one sermon that we have (thanks to a later Northborough minister, Dr. Joseph Allen, who copied it). If Martyn delivered any fire-breathing sermons, Allen, who learned a less emotional version of Christianity about 100 years later but clearly admired this sermon, would not have copied them.

It is clear that Martyn's twenty-one years as Northborough minister were not untroubled. He frequently and justifiably complained about the town's failure to pay him in an adequate and expeditious manner. Unlike his two successors, Peter Whitney and Allen, in their 20s when they began their service, he was 40 at his ordination and probably far less malleable. Like them, however, he lived his entire life from ordination to death serving Northborough, and the available evidence suggests that he served

conscientiously and skillfully. Parkman, thoroughly devoted to his flock and not happy at losing one-third of it to the new minister, remained Martyn's friend.

Martyn lived only a few months after Northborough gained independence in 1766, although it was not a town until 1775. Probably no one suspected that in that latter year its minutemen would march against the English.

Curator's News by Ellen Racine

The fashion committee and the Museum Trustees have been working hard on planning "Our Founding Fashions" scheduled for Sunday, May 22nd. The biographies for the fashion show have been written and selected items from the collection are being readied for display. This fund-raiser will be a great event for all "fashionistas" of the 1800s.

The Northborough Through Time book is available at LaLaJava, Shattuck's Pharmacy, the Library and the Town Clerk's office, or by calling me at 508-393-2343.

Recent Accessions:

- Bicentennial scrapbook, banner and news articles from Arthur Phelps
- Photos of Juniper Hill Golf Course from Dudley Darling
- Three photo postcards, c. 1900 from Robert Bolduc
- Generous cash donation from Will Oliveira of Cold Harbor Brewing Company, Westboro
- Vintage clothing from the 1800s from Bill and Mary Ellen Webster
- Former Kiwanis Club flag, hand bell, and 100 photos from the 1966 Bicentennial events and parade from Betty Clarke

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.

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.

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.