

The Hourglass

CXLIX

Northborough Historical Society

April 2016

www.NorthboroughHistoricalSociety.org

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A Lost Art: The next meeting of the Northborough Historical Society will feature Megan MacNeil speaking on "The Lost Art of Etiquette." Focusing on the 1880s to the 1940s, Ms. 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. The meeting and program will take place at 7:30 p.m. Friday, April 22, 2016 at the Society building, 52 Main Street. The event is free and open to the public.

History Corner by Bob Ellis

Northborough's First Half-Century

Northborough built a town while the new nation proceeded from its Revolution to its victory in the War of 1812. From 1767 to 1816, Northborough had one minister, Peter Whitney. He carried out a long and largely successful ministry but with some signs of future divisions, such as the dissatisfaction of one young member of his flock, Luther Rice, who would later become an eminent Baptist missionary.

Otherwise, Whitney displayed great patriotism and became the first of several local clergymen to write local history. His sermons on the Declaration of Independence and the death of President Washington express his love for the new nation which surrounded the new town of Northborough. Although Whitney may have perceived our first president as a deist who believed in a remote superior power rather than a God who answered to the personal needs of his creatures, he gave Washington credit for expressing the importance of "religious principle" in his Farewell Address.

Of his History of Worcester County (1793, dedicated to John Adams), Whitney said that if he had known how much trouble it would cost him, he never would have written it. But it stands as the prime source of the histories of virtually all communities in the county. Local histories were composed earlier a good example being Bradford's Of Plymouth Plantation but it remained a manuscript until 1856.

It is difficult, if not impossible, to find a published history of a New England community or region before Whitney's book.

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

Before Captain Samuel Wood led the local response to the British attacks on Lexington and Concord on April 17, 1775, Whitney “commended them to the protection of God, in an earnest prayer,” as Kent’s History puts it. Many of the minutemen served for only a few days, some for a three-month stretch, while several enlisted for as long as three years. One of the latter, Joseph Gold married to Patience Goodenow and the father of two children survived the ordeal at Valley Forge in the winter and spring of 1778, returned to his family, and the couple had 10 more children.

One interesting typed page pertaining to Northborough men at Valley Forge, where food was scarce and clothing (especially footwear) unavailable, was submitted to the Society by Pat MacFarland, who was probably responsible for some notes added in pen. Who composed the paper we do not know, but to the extent that I can check, it is accurate.

One of the added names is that of Joel Pratt, whose military career is revealed in a 54-page book by a descendant. A native of Oxford, Massachusetts, Pratt was learning the clothier’s trade from Abraham Wood when he enlisted from Northborough. (Wood’s musical compositions, like Whitney’s sermons, by the way, display intense patriotism.) Pratt’s name was missing from the original list, probably because for a time he was ill and had been taken in at a farmhouse near Valley Forge. Three Northborough men William Carruth, Ebenezer Hudson, and John Tenney died in or as a result of the Valley Forge encampment, most likely from disease. Many stories about the dozens of Northborough participants in the Revolution must unfortunately remain unknown to us.

General Washington endured severe criticism during the war. As first president, he emerged not only as a military hero but as a political one. After his death, Parson Weems rushed a biography into print, and the man who pleaded vainly for food and clothing at Valley Forge was now remembered in a hoard of sentimentalized memorabilia. As Alexis de Tocqueville, the celebrated author of *Democracy in America*, said in 1835, politics was the “biggest concern and, so to speak, the only pleasure an American knows.”

Many studies of local history in the new nation have been written, even specifically of this region. Life in Northborough should be considered representative. About 100 families dwelt here when Whitney published his book. Farmers needed substantial land to survive; there was only room, he judged, for about 50 more. Their lifestyle, by our standards, was messy. People cast broken vessels and trash out windows; food scraps were thrown out for the benefit of domestic animals. Grassy lawns were rare; the mostly one-story houses remained unpainted. One scholar summed up the central Massachusetts countryside at the time as “slovenly.”

Inside these houses were few books, the Bible being the most important. Children, however, borrowed schoolbooks, for the town had systematic elementary education from 1770 on. Northborough had no newspaper, but Isaiah Thomas’s *Massachusetts Spy* was published in Worcester throughout this period. Few pictures or other refinements graced homes.

Important things were happening, however. The first federal census in 1790 showed Northborough with 103 households, one of them African-American. The town’s first typically “New England” church replaced the plain earlier building in 1808. Northborough, long served by the northern branch of the Boston Post Road, by 1810 had the Worcester Turnpike (a toll road, the route of the future Route 9) at its southern border. These and other changes foretold a new era.

Curator's News by Ellen Racine

The elementary schools have been busy with their own research and historical projects to educate their students on Northborough's 250 years. They are studying the monuments, leisure activities and sports in town and also viewing primary source materials.

Tickets are now available for the May 22 program at 1:00 of "Our Founding Fashions". This fashion show, sponsored by the Museum Trustees, will feature prominent figures from Northborough's past with outfits befitting their stature and era. Tickets are \$10 (\$5 for children under 12) and reservations are required, as seating is limited at the Society's building. Call 508-393-2871 or e-mail fhbissett@gmail.com.

Recent Accessions:

- 1866 Centennial Commemorative Book from Bob Mattaliano

Northborough turns 250 this year

Residents are planning to celebrate! Both the Town and the Historical Society have a myriad of events scheduled for the coming 12 months in order to honor the town we live in, as well as its history.

On **April 9**, Trinity Church will hold an **Anniversary Tea** from 2 to 4 p.m. at 23 Main Street. Raffles, games and crafts will be featured. The price is \$10 for adults, \$5 for little ladies. Tickets are available at the church office or by e-mailing: lornahelms1@gmail.com.

On **April 21**, the Senior Center Walking Club will take a **Northborough History Walk** at the Mary Goodenow gravesite and Stirrup Brook Trail, led by Forest Lyford. The walk is open to the public. Walkers will meet at 10 a.m. at the trailhead parking lot across from the Jehovah's Witness church. The walk has gentle slopes and some uneven trails, and will last about two hours. Rain date is June 23.

- On **April 28**, the Senior Center Walking Club will take a **Northborough History Walk** at Rocky Pond, led by Forest Lyford. The walk is open to the public. Walkers will meet at 10 a.m. on the road shoulder on Green Street, near the Boylston town line. The walk has moderate slopes and some uneven trails, and will last about two hours. Rain date is June 23.

- On **April 30**, the Northborough Garden Club will hold a **Tea Reception and Floral Display** from 1 to 3 p.m. at the Northborough Library, 34 Main Street. "Art in Bloom" will feature floral arrangements depicting art that is of historical significance to the town.

- On **May 5**, the Senior Center Walking Club will take a **Northborough History Walk** in the town center, led by Forest Lyford. The walk is open to the public. Walkers will meet at the Trinity Church parking lot, 23 Main Street. The walk is flat with few slip-trip hazards, and will last about two hours. Rain date is June 23.

- On **May 7**, the Northborough Area Community Chorus will present "**America in Song**" at 7:30 p.m. at Algonquin Regional High School, 79 Bartlett Street. Admission is \$5.00; tickets may be purchased in advance at Lowe's Variety, Shattuck's Pharmacy, or at the door.

- On **May 12**, the Senior Center Walking Club will take a **Northborough History Walk** through the Northborough Historic District, led by Norm Corbin. The walk is open to the public. Walkers will meet at 10 a.m. at the parking area near the athletic field and Zeh School, Howard Street. The walk is flat with few slip-trip hazards, and will last about two hours. Rain date is June 23.

- On May 14 and 15, the Historical Society will sponsor a **Hunt for History**. Participants will be given a map and a description of 10 historic places to locate near the center of town. Results will be recorded and returned to the Historical Society for scoring. Hunt packets will be available from noon to 2 p.m. on Saturday, May 14, and must be returned by 2:00 p.m. on Sunday, May 15. **An Ice Cream Social** will take place from noon to 5 p.m. on Sunday, which is open to all. Results of the Hunt for History will be tallied and a prize awarded at 4:00 p.m. during the Ice Cream Social.

- Also on **May 15**, **Historical Trolley Tours** of Northborough will take place at 11 a.m., 1 p.m. and 3 p.m. Each tour leaves from the Historical Society Building at 52 Main Street and lasts about 90 minutes. The tours are free, but seat reservations are strongly recommended. For reservations contact Beverly Shafner at BShafner0330@gmail.com or 508-393-3665.

- On **May 19**, the Senior Center Walking Club will take a **Northborough History Walk** through the Howard Street Cemetery, led by Bob Ellis. The walk is open to the public. Walkers will meet at 10 a.m. at the parking area near the athletic field and Zeh School, Howard Street. The walk is flat with few slip-trip hazards, and will last about two hours. Rain date is June 23.

- On **May 22**, the Historical Society will be host to "**Our Founding Fathers Fashion Show**," featuring period clothing modeled by some of our members. Tickets are \$10 (\$5 for children under 12) and reservations are required. Call 508-393-2871 or e-mail fhbissett@gmail.com.

- On **May 20**, the Historical Society's program will be "**Living in Northborough**," and will feature Society members and others sharing their memories of the town. The program will begin at 7:30 p.m., and will be preceded by a **Pot Luck Supper** at 6:30 p.m., which is open to all.

- On **May 21**, the **250th Road Race** will take place, and will feature a 5K race and a 1K fun run. The race will begin at 9 a.m. at the Zeh School, 33 Howard St. Online pre-registration is recommended; the entry fee through May 1 is \$30. The 5K will be timed, and prizes will be awarded in several categories. Same-day registration will start at 8 a.m. on race day.

- On **May 26**, the Senior Center Walking Club will take a **Northborough History Walk** at the Chapin Canal and Coyote Trail, led by Forest Lyford. The walk is open to the public. Walkers will meet at 10 a.m. at the parking area at Yellick Conservation area on Hudson Street. The walk has gentle slopes and some uneven trails, and will last about two hours. Rain date is June 23.

- On **June 2**, the Senior Center Walking Club will take a **Northborough History Walk** at Assabet Park with a tour of the Northborough Historical Society building, led by Forest Lyford. The walk is open to the public. Walkers will meet at 10 a.m. at the parking lots at Assabet Park on Gale Street. The walk has moderate slopes and some uneven trails, and will last about two hours. Rain date is June 23.

- On **June 9**, the Senior Center Walking Club will take a **Northborough History Walk** on Brigham Street, including the Brigham Street burial ground, led by Beth Finch McCarthy. The walk is open to the public. Walkers will meet at 10 a.m. near the town garage at the corner of Brigham and School Streets. The walk is flat with few slip-trip hazards, and will last about two hours. Rain date is June 23.

- On **June 16**, the Senior Center Walking Club will take a **Northborough History Walk** to the Wachusett Aqueduct from East Main Street to Bartlett Pond, led by Forest Lyford. The walk is open to the public. Walkers will meet at 10 a.m. Memorial Field on East Main Street. The walk is flat with few slip-trip hazards, and will last about two hours. Rain date is June 23. The 5K will be timed, and prizes will be awarded in several categories. Same-day registration will start at 8 a.m. on race day.

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.

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.