

# The Hourglass

CXLX

Northborough Historical Society

May 2016

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

Text only - recovered from MailChimp email, February 2022

**What Do YOU Remember?** - Bring your memories to the next meeting of the Northborough Historical Society on May 20, when the topic will be "Living in Northborough," as recorded in the Society Archives and remembered by several members of the Society. Enjoy highlights of the town's past, remembered by those who were there to witness it. Anyone with special memories of Northborough should come prepared with a story or two to share. An optional Pot Luck Supper will begin at 6:30 p.m.; the meeting and program start at: 7:30 p.m. The program will take place at the Society building on 52 Main Street and is free and open to the public.

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, **May 15**, 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.

"**Our Founding Fashions**" historical fashion show is planned for Sunday, May 22 at 1 p.m. Sponsored by the Museum Trustees, it will feature prominent figures from Northborough's past with outfits befitting their stature and era. Tickets will be available when the Museum opens on Sundays, May 1, 8, and 15 from 2 to 4 p.m. or by calling 508-393-2871 or e-mailing fhbissett@gmail.com. Reservations are required because of limited seating.

## History Corner by Bob Ellis

### The Town from 1820 to 1850

For early nineteenth-century New England towns with even a small stream, flour mills and sawmills were not enough; cotton

#### 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

and wool also had to be processed. By 1826 the Northborough Cotton Manufacturing Company on the Assabet River had “700 spindles for cotton, 100 for woolen, 10 looms, a fulling mill, carding machine, &c., and manufactures 80,000 yards of cloth annually,” in the words of its minister and early historian, Joseph Allen.

As events unfolded, fabrics from reprocessed wool dominated the local textile scene over the next 100 years. For many decades, beginning in 1839, the town’s second industry was comb manufacturing, but farming, of course, remained the main occupation.

Beginning around 1820 our politically independent nation began to declare its cultural declaration of independence. Several writers born in the early years of the republic James Fenimore Cooper, Washington Irving, and William Cullen Bryant attracted American readers who once depended on European authors. Other artists, especially painters, flourished also. Americans were discovering that culture did not need to be imported.

It cannot be said that Northborough then produced any great artists, but definite signs of interest rose in the arts and education. In the 1820s the second Dr. Stephen Ball brought the first piano to town for his wife. Rev. Allen, sensing his townspeople’s need for enlightenment, began to offer lectures. His course of talks on astronomy in 1827 gave the audience “a newer and larger world of intellectual life than they had ever known before.” (Kent, p. 54) Soon these programs were absorbed into a new educational institution the lyceum which began in nearby Millbury, came here shortly thereafter, and spread across New England and far beyond.

News of the regular lectures and debates in the new lyceum appeared in the town’s first newspaper, the Meteor, actually the production of the boys in Rev. and Mrs. Allen’s private school in the 1830s. Elmer Valentine, who in Boston had taught several boys who would become famous, founded a private school in Northborough where he specialized in the teaching of a valued achievement at the time: fine handwriting. Northborough’s public schools came under the influential guidance of Horace Mann, secretary of the Massachusetts Board of Education from its inception in 1837.

Religious diversity also developed in this period. The first Baptist Church in Northborough rose on the site of the present Historical Society, in 1826. The Evangelical Congregational Church took root in 1832. Similar developments occurred in a number of Massachusetts towns with clergymen like Rev. Allen, men who had studied under the compelling Unitarian professors of religion at Harvard College. With the arrival of scores of Irish people escaping from famine just before mid-century, Catholic worship also became common, although the first permanent Roman Catholic church, St. Rose’s, would not be constructed until 1883.

At church and in the lyceum Northborough adults heard much that reflected topics that generated two national organizations. My October 2009 article in the Hourglass on temperance revealed that young Ralph Waldo Emerson, visiting Northborough in 1822, observed many townsmen spending their time between Sunday morning and afternoon religious services in the tavern, just one of many examples of the frequent and worrisome use of alcohol in early nineteenth-century America. The American Temperance Society, organized in 1826, struggled against excessive drinking habits.

The American Anti-Slavery Society began in 1833, and several states also formed their own organizations. By the 1840s townspeople jammed the lyceum hall on the church green to hear abolitionists, including escaped slaves such as Frederick Douglass, William Wells Brown, and William and Ellen Craft.

The 1840s also spawned more general efforts at social reform. Enthusiasts formed new communities at Hopedale and Brook Farm (in West Roxbury) to challenge the status quo. Smaller groups such as the Alcott family's Fruitlands, in the town of Harvard, tried new, and they hoped purer, modes of social life. I have not found accounts of Northborough people in such groups, but I have noticed a strong tendency among young men to break away from prevailing lifestyles. Men previously featured in Hourglass articles left Northborough in the 1840s for a different sort of life. These include Abel Warren, who established an Indian trading post in Texas; John A. Rice, who became a book collector in Chicago; Dr. Benjamin Lincoln Ball, who visited China and the Philippines and died climbing Mount Washington alone during a snowstorm; and John Wyman, who traveled far as businessman and public speaker. These men were younger sons with little chance of receiving farms or other property from their families.

Events of years after 1850 would alter lives in Northborough and in America even more profoundly.

**Northborough turns 250 this year, and 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 **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.

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- 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.

- On **June 18**, **The Soular Jazz Festival** will take place at First Parish Church Unitarian Universalist Church, 40 Church Street. The event is a celebration of life, music, and technology and will bring local and international jazz artists and the innovators and entrepreneurs of green technologies together.

- On **June 21**, Dr. Gary Hylander will speak on the **Spanish-American War** as part of the “Historical Events Affecting Northborough 1776-2016” speaker series at the Northborough Senior Center. The program will begin at 6:30 p.m. and is open to all.

- On **July 26**, Dr. Gary Hylander will speak on the **Great Depression** as part of the “Historical Events Affecting Northborough 1776-2016” speaker series at the Northborough Senior Center. The program will begin at 6:30 p.m. and is open to all.

- On **September 23**, Dr. Gary Hylander will present “**John and Abigail Adams: An American Couple**” at the Northborough Historical Society. 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. The meeting and program will begin at 7:30 p.m. and are free and open to the public. An optional Pot Luck Supper will begin at 6:30 p.m. and is open to all.

- On **September 27**, Dr. Gary Hylander will speak on the **Cold War** as part of the “Historical Events Affecting Northborough 1776-2016” speaker series at the Northborough Senior Center. The program will begin at 6:30 p.m. and is open to all.

- On **September 24**, the Town and the Historical Society will host a **Cemetery Tour**. Important characters from Northborough's history will be present at the sites of their graves. Rain date is October 1.

- On **October 22**, the Historical Society will host an old-fashioned **Harvest Supper** at the Society building, 52 Main Street.

- On **October 28**, Bryan Farr will present "**History of Route 20**" at the Northborough Historical Society. 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. The meeting and program will begin at 7:30 p.m. and are free and open to the public.

- On **November 29**, Dr. Gary Hylander will speak on the **Middle East** as part of the "Historical Events Affecting Northborough 1776-2016" speaker series at the Northborough Senior Center. The program will begin at 6:30 p.m. and is open to all.

- On **December 2**, Beth Finch McCarthy will present "**A Portrait of the Victorian Age: Letters of the Holbrook Family of Northborough.**" Town figure, Levi Holbrook 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. The meeting and program will begin at 7:30 p.m. and are free and open to the public.

## 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).

## 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.

**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.