

The Hourglass

CXLXI

Northborough Historical Society

June 2016

www.NorthboroughHistoricalSociety.org

Text only - recovered from MailChimp email, February 2022

Summertime is here:

The Northborough Historical Society will have no Friday night programs in June, July, or August. The Hourglass will be on hiatus for the summer as well. See you in September!

History Corner by Bob Ellis

Northborough, 1850-1871

By 1850, with the passage of the Fugitive Slave Law, the United States was becoming a sometimes violently confrontational society. Boston raged at the arrest, trial, and return to Virginia of the escaped slave Anthony Burns in 1854. In that year, the Kansas-Nebraska Act opened the possibility of slavery north of the 36° 30" latitude set by the 1820 Missouri Compromise.

The next year the Northborough Lyceum turned dramatic with a presentation featuring a play called Life in Kansas, written by one of the town's bristling anti-slavery persons, Jairus Lincoln (see my pamphlet, The Northborough Lyceum, pp. 40-42). The text is lost, but an existing placard indicates that its characters include the governor, a slaveholder, a committee, an officer, and a slave, played by "Anthony D. Burns," a name not otherwise found in town records of the time. Could it have been a pseudonym contrived to remind viewers of the Boston case? In Kansas the following year a band led by John Brown killed five suspected pro-slavery newcomers.

Important initiatives that mounted in Northborough in the 1850s included the first high school in town, which failed after six months despite a determined instructor and an impressive roster of students (Kent's History, pp. 98-104). A permanent high school began a decade later. Another achievement was the establishment of the Northborough (later "Northborough National") Bank in 1854, and the opening of the Agricultural Branch Railroad from Northborough to Framingham in 1856.

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

The 1850s also saw a dramatic increase in immigrants, mostly Irish people escaping from terrible famine. The 1850 federal census of the town lists eighty-four people born in Ireland; the total more than doubled by 1855, according to the state census. Add the children born here in large Irish families, and more than 15% of the town's population was quickly Irish-American. Most of the men found work as farm laborers; young unmarried women began to come as household servants. By 1870 the fabric mills, which now rivaled comb making as the chief local industry, had attracted a substantial number of Canadians, mostly French-Canadians. Perhaps only the inflow of Asian immigrants in recent decades has had the same cultural impact on the town.

I will give here only a few details of Northborough in the Civil War (having written more extensively on this subject). The monument on West Main Street names twenty-seven men who died. The male population in 1860 was 742; considering how many of those males were too young or too old to serve, one can see how high a percentage of men lost their lives. If the same percentage of males listed in the 1940 census had died in World War II, the toll would have been about forty-three instead of the nine that actually occurred.

It is known that several men of the Yeaw family suffered serious injuries in the war. On a recent trip to the Northborough cemetery I noted that Daniel Yeaw, a veteran, died in 1866. We do not know how many men lost their lives because of the war or their health thereafter. The publication of my book, *Northborough in the Civil War*, brought a letter from a descendent of one of Northborough's heroes, Frank T. Leach. Leach, by the way, had played the son of the slaveholder in Jarius Lincoln's 1855 play. His father owned 167 acres in Northborough, land which seems to have later become much of Northgate. Frank, however, as his descendent wrote, "was committed to Kankakee mental hospital [in Illinois] where he died," perhaps another war casualty.

The West Main street monument, which soon will be enhanced by the creation of a town common immediately east of it, came about mainly through the efforts of Columbus Eames, whose son Warren was the first Northborough man to die in the conflict. The date of its dedication, September 17, 1870, coincided with the date eight years earlier of the Battle of Antietam, which ended the lives of five other Northborough soldiers. On that date, more Americans lost their lives through violence than on any other single day in American history, including 9/11.

Northborough acquired a new Town Hall, dedicated in 1867. It served the town in many guises before burning 118 years later. On the night of July 21-22, 1871 a fire raged across the street, destroying three buildings on South and West Main Streets and damaging, and probably rendering useless, several others. Because the wind was blowing from the southwest, the most endangered building on Main Street was the Orthodox (now Trinity) Church, saved primarily, Kent tells us (p. 321), by the efforts of its pastor, Reverend Horace Dutton.

Curator's News by Ellen Racine

"Our Founding Fashions", a historical fashion show went off smoothly. The show consisted of 31 charming models showcasing 38 fashions accompanied with an informative script written by Kathy Pierce.

The committee of Kathy Pierce, Cindy Atwood and I would like to thank all the cast members who participated and those who filled in for two, last-minute cancellations due to illnesses. Thanks also to

the refreshment committee of Janice Ferencick, Lynne Derosier, Suzanne Williams and Helen Calverley supplying floral arrangements. Kathy Dalglish and her assistant Dana will edit the video and it will be aired on cable. And thanks to Jeanine Vitale, we have professional photos of some of the models. The set design was provided by Dick Atwood using three, hand-painted panels of Herman M. Pienze that adorned the stage of the old Town Hall back in 1936. Great job everyone!

The Zeh School third-graders toured the museum June 3 and were introduced to Northborough's history by members JoAnn Sullivan, Jane Fletcher, Beryl Krouse and Ernie Racine. Peaslee School will be coming on June 13 with Linda Corbin as an alternate tour guide. My thanks to all of them for volunteering for this annual event.

The wildly popular Trolley Tours, sponsored by the Town on May 15, were aptly narrated by Historical Society members Ernie Racine, Norm Corbin and Jean Langley. These three, along with Beverly Shafner, spent many hours updating the script from the 1970s

Recent Accessions:

- Collection of visuals and script containing news extracted from the Northborough Star in the 1970s written by Jodie Martinson and used for her program in 2006.
- Large photo of the Ben Franklin marker from Diane Guldner

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 **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.

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.