



THE HOURGLASS

NORTHBOROUGH HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

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Northborough Historical Society
www.NorthboroughHistoricalSociety.org

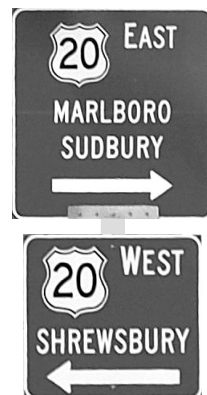
October 2016

Northborough's 250th Year



October 28 Program — The History of Route 20

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 miniscule segment of this historic highway. Bryan Farr, founder of the Historic Route 20 Association, will speak 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 will be held at 7:30 p.m., at the Society building, 52 Main Street. The event is free and open to the public.



History Corner

by Bob Ellis

Northborough, 1900-1945

In significant ways, life in Northborough in the early twentieth century developed differently from the national model. The population of the United States nearly doubled from 1900 to 1940, while Northborough, having reached the 2,164 mark in 1900, declined to 1,713 by 1910 as the manufacturing of combs and fabrics fell. A later spurt of growth brought the population back to something only slightly above the 1900 total by 1940.

Another national change did not affect Northborough. The population living on farms dipped from 38% in 1900 to less than 23% in 1940. Yet a report on country life in Northborough in 1941 found "practically no industrial activity in Northborough" and just about as many cows in town as there had been in 1900. Dairy farming and fruit cultivation still prevailed.

Small-scale agriculture and limited business and industry made Northborough less susceptible to the rigors of the Great Depression. Nobody starved. Neighbors helped those who were hard up. The Northborough National Bank, as the son of one of its officials later told the Historical Society, "almost never foreclosed."

As I wrote in the February 2001 *Hourglass*, the WPA (Works Progress Administration), perhaps the most famous of the 1930s New Deal projects, functioned in Northborough, less conspicuously, however, than in hard-hit urban areas.

Two world wars confronted people within thirty years. Kent's *Northborough History* provides much detail about activities in World War I, and the town's *Annual Reports* are more helpful than Northborough's later historian, William H. Mulligan Jr., in describing the efforts in World War II. "On December 30, 1941 . . . the Selectmen appointed three citizens to serve as a Ration Board. . . . The first function of the Ration Board was to supervise the issuing of tires and tubes for motor vehicles but some other commodities were added to the list." (If you do not remember rationing, some of our older members will be happy to give you details.) Several women served on the Surgical Dressing Class preparing dressings "for military use under Army regulations." (1942 report, p 5). For more than three years everyone contributed.

Membership

Annual Dues:

Single — \$20
Student/Senior — \$15
Family — \$45
Lifetime — \$250

Send dues to:
Northborough Historical Society
Membership Secretary
P.O. Box 661
Northborough, MA 01532

Please make checks payable to
Northborough Historical Society

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Curator's News by Ellen Racine



The Wayside Inn's stage coach made its fourth appearance in 100 years in our parade. It was here in 1916, 1966, 1976 and now in 2016! I would like to thank Ernie Racine for all his patience and help and Paul Derosier and his daughter

Amanda Milette for carrying the banner. The coach originally seated twelve inside but due to its age, only four deserving ladies received the pleasure: Mary Kennerly, Claire Swan, Jodie Martinson and Ellen Racine. Chip and Khaelan Tucker of Liberty Farms Harrisville, RI drove the coach with their team of Percheron horses – the only animals in the entire parade!

We are indebted to Andy DeWolfe of McFee and Newton for donating his time and equipment to transport the stage coach – three times. They were extremely cau-

tious and with the expertise of Karen Baldwin, secured the coach properly for transportation on their flatbed truck.

A plea – we need to gather photos of the parade and the cemetery tour for the archive. If you took photos, please send copies along. Actual prints for our files would be best.

Recent Accessions:

A picture history map of Massachusetts, 1930, from Llanda Richardson

Leather bound ledger book, 1860, from Donald Tibbetts

Ellen Racine, Curator

History Corner, continued

Finally townspeople could read on page 8 of the 1945 report, “The Northborough Rationing Board concluded its activities on October first. At present writing, sugar is the only commodity being rationed. The report notes that “one hundred and seventy-five men and women have been discharged from military service and returned to civil life.” (1945, p. 5) Nine men had perished; who knows how many returning combatants were seriously impaired?

Of disasters not created my humans, no doubt the most imposing occurred in 1938. In an interview late in his life, Allyn Phelps remembered that while he was delivering mail at 28 Whitney Street, a tree fell behind him. Regaining the street, he saw other trees falling. In 1938 a person did not learn of hurricanes days beforehand—only when they struck. He gained shelter in the middle of town, but one person was killed on Main Street. The little brick bank building withstood a large tree crashing onto its roof. Two church steeples fell, and the town had a major cleanup on its hands.

Few positive changes could have exceeded those generated by electricity, which had arrived to power the new

trolleys in 1898. Early in the century electric lights began to pop up in public places, and gradually other benefits increased. Electrical household devices replaced ones long operated by hand or foot. Among the new attractions, radio seemed important enough to inspire the 1930 federal census devisers to insert a question for each homeowner: do you have a radio in your home? In Northborough about a quarter of them did. By 1940, of course, it was a question not worth asking.

One or two automobiles appeared on Northborough streets at the beginning of the century. Henry Ford saw to it that people of ordinary means could own one. By 1920 nearly a million Model T’s rolled forth; for less than \$400 you could have one. A decade later East Main Street, once the path of the ancient Post Road through Northborough, became a side road to a new section of U.S. Route 20. Route 9 expanded and intersected with Route 20 at the western border of town to form one of the earliest American traffic circles. Yet Northborough would not see modern traffic lights for nearly sixty more years.

Northborough Historical Society Old Fashioned Harvest Supper



As part of the Town’s 250th anniversary celebration, the Northborough Historical Society will host an old fashioned harvest supper on Saturday, October 22, with two sittings, one at 5:30 p.m. and one at 7:00 p.m. Tickets are \$20 each and are available for purchase at the Historical Society Museum, 52 Main Street, on Sunday afternoons, September 11 through October 16 from 2:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m., and at Shattuck Pharmacy, 17 West Main Street. The menu will feature roast turkey with stuffing, gravy and cranberry sauce, roast pork loin, soup and salad, several side dishes, cider, coffee, tea and gingerbread. Tickets are available on a first come, first served basis. For information, call Forest Lyford at 508-393-6680 or Jane Fletcher at 508-393-2414.

Northborough turns 250 this year, and residents are celebrating! Both the Town and the Historical Society have a myriad of events scheduled for the year in order to honor the town in which we live, as well as its history.

- **October 22** Northborough Historical Society’s **Harvest Supper**. 5:30 p.m. and 7:00 p.m. at the Society Building. For more information see above.
- **October 28** Bryan Farr will present **History of Route 20**. See front page for details.
- **October 29 Northborough’s Final Soirée - Dinner Dance Celebrating 250 years** at the Double Tree Hotel, 5400 Computer Dr., Westborough, MA 01581. 7:00pm-12:30am. Cocktail Hour 7:00, followed by Buffet Dinner. Dance to the music of the exciting 8-piece band, "SPLASH". Cost: \$50.00 per person. Open seating of 10 per table. Dress in your favorite fashion from 1766 – 2016 - prizes for best dressed. Book online or purchase ticket at the Town Clerk’s Office. <http://tinyurl.com/250thFinale>



- **November 20** Trinity Church **Open House** at 2 p.m. Brief overview of the history of the church by Forest Lyford, a tour of the building, a short organ concert and refreshments.
- **November 20-26 Week of Gratitude**-Various Churches (Details not yet available)
- **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.
- **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.