



THE HOURGLASS

NORTHBOROUGH HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

CCXLIX

Northborough Historical Society
www.NorthboroughHistoricalSociety.org

November 2016

Northborough's 250th Year

December 2 Program



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. 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

Post-World War II Northborough

Vast changes in population, housing, transportation, education, and other essential resources marked Northborough between 1945 and 1985. The population rose from little more than 3,000 in 1945 to 10,712 in 1985. The number of houses quadrupled over those four decades, much enabled by a new phenomenon, large residential developments, of which Northgate in the 1950s was the largest.

For many of these years commercial development in town changed little, although the establishment of the Boroughs shopping plaza in the 1950s in Marlborough did increase shopping possibilities. Nor did the population growth herald any improvement in moving traffic within town. In 1985 the town still lacked functional traffic lights.

More people, however, meant more of many things, schools in particular. In 1945 Northborough had two public school buildings, an elementary school with four classrooms on Hudson Street and Northborough High School on Main Street. The elementary school, with some assistance from a temporary additional structure and some appropriation of the high school building, had served for a half century. In 1945 a mere eleven students graduated from Northborough High School.

The "baby boom," as famous in its day as "millennials" are in ours, guaranteed dramatic shifts in the school-age population. In the early 1950s children flooded the early grades; by the late 1950s they reached high school, in the 1960s college. Thus, between 1951 and 1966 the town had to erect four new elementary schools. In 1959 Northborough High School gave way to the Algonquin Regional School, and 1971 a new Middle School opened. All schools had extensive campuses and all required additions of qualified teachers and administrators. By the 1980s Algonquin had as many as 200 yearly graduates, roughly two-thirds of them from Northborough.

In the 1960s two interstate highways, Route 1-495, the first major north-south highway within a mile of the town's eastern border, and I-290, east and west through town, joined Routes 20 and 9 in confirming Northborough as a town central to Massachusetts and New England.

Membership

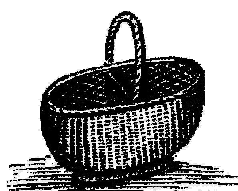
Annual Dues:

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 Historical Society was well represented at the 250th Anniversary Costume Ball of October 29th. We wore costumes from 1776, 1860, 1920 and 1950. Dick and Cindy Atwood won first prize for their 1950s outfits:

Cindy in a felted-wool poodle skirt, and Dick in a collegiate sweater. Ernie and Ellen Racine won a prize for her 1776 silk gown and Ernie's linen casual wear. Outfits were made by the gals. Prizes were baskets of great 250th Anniversary items.

The Museum is now closed for the season, but we will open up when requested. Visitors from out of town, researchers and scout troops often visit us during the cold winter months.

Our thanks to Helen Calverley and Carolyn Squillante for planting chrysanthemums at the Historical Society building, and to Forest Lyford for repairing the embossed metal cap on a walking stick in our collection.

Recent Accessions:

Tambourine from Chris Davis

Photos of every entry in the Applefest Parade by Joyce Sullivan McNeil, and all are identified by Jo-Ann Sullivan.

History Corner, continued

More people required more water. In 1945 the Northborough Reservoir (in Shrewsbury and Boylston) supplied Northborough’s needs. After a 1957 drought temporarily emptied the reservoir, it was essentially abandoned, and for a while a town well at Brigham Street chiefly sufficed, but by the 1980s, despite the establishment of other wells, the town required increasingly more water from of the Metropolitan District Commission.

The increasing population pushed the town to endorse a Home Rule Charter with important governmental changes, including five selectmen instead of the perennial three and the installation of a town administrator. Other governmental changes were more social than legal. On the positive side, in 1956 a Northborough woman, Bessie I. Murray, was elected state representative, and by the 1970s women were serving for the first time as selectmen. Negatively, as early as 1957 Town Clerk William H. Casey registered (in the Town Report!) a growing concern. He claimed to be trying to serve as a buffer between “the cold impersonal government on one side and the little citizen on the other.” When he died the next year, the town report not so coldly devoted a full page to his photograph.

The means of informing and entertaining Northbor-ough also shifted. Radios and movie newsreels supple-

mented newspapers in 1945. Everyone read the daily paper, often supplementing it with local weekly papers. Of several weeklies in these years the most ambitious was the *Northborough Star in the 1970s*. There you could learn about local politics, local people, and local problems. Mosquitoes, for instance, were a local problem. You learned that Northborough had become the location of Central Massachusetts Mosquito Control. But the *Star* also satirized the matter: “The Board of Selectmen agreed last night to join the United Nations Mosquito Control Dis-strict.”

One development of the 1980s, the proliferation of computers, especially personal ones, started altering every-body’s behavior, and the arrival of one new communica-tions outlet, cable television, in 1985 revised habits of tele-vision watching.

Many one-time events also marked these decades, events as spectacular as a 1966 bicentennial celebration that seemed to include the whole population, and as dismal as a 1985 fire that destroyed the 1867 town hall, vital to governmental, cultural, and recreational activities for more than a century. The disappearance of the town hall signaled the end of an era; such things as computers and cable sys-tems the onset of a new one.



Parade Grand Marshall Bob Ellis, along with his wife Christine, ride in style in the 2016 Applefest Parade.



Claire Swan and Jodie Martinson chose transportation from earlier times. Mary Kennerly and Ellen Racine are also on board.

Northborough turned 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.

- **November 20** The Trinity Church **Open House** scheduled for November 20 has been CANCELLED.
- **November 20-26 Week of Gratitude**-Various Churches
- **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 Hol-

brook was a very interesting character. Beth Finch McCarthy has obtained a small collection of family letters which colorfully illus-trate the life and times of Victorian Northborough. Themes include rail travel in New England, private school culture, Victorian medi-cines, slavery, boarding in family homes, local commerce, infidel-ity, 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.