



THE HOURGLASS

NORTHBOROUGH HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

CCLVIII

Northborough Historical Society
www.NorthboroughHistoricalSociety.org

March 2017

Next Meeting & Program: March 24, 2017

The Great Molasses Flood of 1919 presented by Doris (Parker) Blais Bonnell

This horrific catastrophe, which occurred in the North End neighborhood of Boston on January 15, 1919, is an often forgotten piece of history. A large, molasses storage tank burst, and a wave of molasses rushed through the streets at an estimated 35 miles per hour, killing 21 people and injuring 150. The event has entered local folklore, and for decades afterwards, residents claimed that on hot summer days, the area still smelled of molasses. The meeting will be held at 7:30 p.m., at the Society building, 52 Main Street, Northborough. The event is free and open to the public.



History Corner

by Bob Ellis

A Notable Teacher

Last month the History Corner discussed Northborough's schools in the eighteenth century. Now let us remember one of the many twentieth-century teachers of note, Helen Corey. To a great extent her career can be summarized just by reference to accounts of it dating on or later than her one hundredth birthday. At that time, July 10, 1981 congratulations came to her from Northborough selectmen, Representative Joseph Early, Senator Ted Kennedy, and President Ronald Reagan.

The daughter of Henry and Hortense Corey, she grew up on a farm on Whitney Street. She began her education at the red brick North School that more recently has served as a private home at the corner of Bearfoot Road and Whitney Street. She studied at Framingham Normal (now Framingham State University), and began teaching in other Massachusetts towns but returned to Northborough in 1919 to teach second-graders at the Hudson Street School. She taught regularly until 1944 and later as a substitute. Until her very late years at the Braemoor Nursing Home in Marlborough, she lived at 45 Summer Street.

One year after her return to Northborough, the pas-

sage of the Nineteenth Amendment to the Constitution conferred on women the right to vote. Miss Corey was the first woman to vote at the town election that year.

Shortly before she turned one hundred, the town presented her with the Boston Public Cane as the town's oldest resident. Although residing at the nursing home at the time, she had retained her home address.

Miss Corey was always good copy for reporters. At the ceremony when she received the cane, she insisted, "I don't like my picture taken. When I was young and good-looking no one took my picture. They waited until I got too old to take my picture." (By the way, two pictures of her, one early and one taken during the 1966 town celebration, may be found in a book published in 2000, *Images of America: Northborough*. If you don't have one, they are still available at the Historical Society.) At the same event, judging that a man at the event was writing illegibly,

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Membership

Annual Dues:

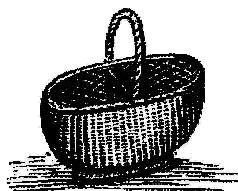
Single — \$20
Student/Senior — \$15
Family — \$45
Lifetime — \$250

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

*Please make checks payable to
Northborough Historical Society*

Reminder

If there is a red dot in the address panel of this Hourglass, it is time to renew your membership.



Curator's News

by Ellen Racine

The Museum Trustees are currently working on a WWI exhibit for the museum commemorating Northborough's contribution to WWI. If you have family artifacts relating to the era that you could loan or donate, please let us know, but regretfully, no uniforms. We have enough to outfit our own army!

We have had several interesting donations lately. During the interior stripping of the Gale Store building (37-39 Main Street) by Habitat for Humanity, several receipts from 1819 to 1846 shook loose from the rafters in the attic. We have the project manager Jon Bram, and volunteer David Hamilton to thank for passing these along to the Society. One great item is a sales journal from 1846 with names of local customers and their purchases. By this time, due to the temperance movement in town, no alcohol was sold, but sales included desirable items such as school books, shoes, lard, fish, salt, peppermint, tobacco, molasses, ginger, matches, soap and many yards of fabric and sewing supplies. The daily number of customers

ranged from five to twenty-five but on March 4, 1846, forty men and five women shopped in the store. It was probably the first warm, pleasant day after a long spell of bad winter weather!

Also donated was a 1942 Singer Surgical Stitching Instrument of Dolores Weaver, who was an operating room nurse for several hospitals during her career. This was donated by Atty. George Pember. Booklets published by Old Sturbridge Village were donated by Frank Bissett, and a sampler from 1829 along with Richardson family memorabilia from Llanda Richardson. We are always grateful to receive items from Northborough families, along with their stories.

History Corner, continued

she told him, “If I had you in class you would have learned to write so you could read it.”

On her birthday each year her friends and former students came to help her celebrate the occasion. At the one hundredth birthday, she said that she didn’t understand why teachers complained of having thirty children in a class. The rooms at the Hudson Street School, which was taken down in 1983, were large, and she did not disparage large classes. Asked why she chose teaching, she answered, “Because all my pals were teachers.” Of all her students, she said that she loved “troublemakers” best, for she was “mischievous” herself. Those mischievous boys couldn’t get away with much, however. “Oh, I used the ruler, and it was good for them,” she commented. One of her colleagues agreed, calling her “a strict disciplinarian who didn’t take any fooling around.” Nonetheless, she more than once commented on how “interesting” mischievous boys were. She once told a reporter that while people at these parties tried to depict her as an old-fashioned school-marm, “I feel like sticking my tongue out.” She did add, however, that “it probably wouldn’t be appropriate.” Although claiming not to like her second-century publicity, she clearly enjoyed the

opportunities to exercise her wit at these parties.

Miss Corey sometimes mentioned that she would like to teach again, so at her 103rd birthday party the nursing home staff attempted to replicate a schoolroom with her sitting at a desk at the head of a class. Warren LaBaire, a selectman at the time, read out a proclamation declaring it “Helen Hortense Corey Day.” Not being able to hear very well at the time, she read it over carefully. “She’s looking for mistakes,” LaBaire commented. After she claimed not to recognize any of the selectmen’s names, he, perhaps anticipating her explanation, made it for her: “They’re all just young whippersnappers.”

Aside from teaching, Miss Corey liked music because “You can beat time to it with your feet. Now rock ‘n’ roll, it’s not very pretty, but you can beat time.” She loved flower gardening and was a member of the Northborough Garden Club, and also of the Grange, the Historical Society, and Trinity Church.

No doubt people were looking forward to her 104th birthday party the next year, but she died a few weeks beforehand, on June 4, 1985.

We’re Going on Another Adventure!

We will meet at the American Antiquarian Society in Worcester for a members-only event on Wednesday, March 29, 2017. We will tour the Antiquarian Society, followed by the opportunity to view some materials from their collection relating to Northborough. To enable more of our members to participate, there will be a daytime tour and an evening tour. A boxed meal will be served between the two tours in the Goddard-Daniels House across the street from the AAS. Price is \$10 per person. Places are limited so please sign up, ASAP. If transportation is an issue, please let Norm know when you make your reservation.

Time

Daytime Tour: 1:30pm - 3:15pm
Boxed Meal: 3:30pm - 5:30pm
Evening Tour: 5:30pm - 7:15pm

Choose a sandwich:

- ☐ Ham ☐ Roast Beef
- ☐ Turkey ☐ Vegetarian

For reservations, call or email Norm Corbin.

Phone: 508-393-0181 Email: 77norlin@charter.net

Please bring your payment to the Welcome Table at our March 24 meeting or mail a check to:

Norm Corbin
35 Whitney St
Northborough, MA 01532

Checks should be made payable to *Northborough Historical Society*.



Founded in 1812 by Revolutionary War patriot and printer Isaiah Thomas, the American Antiquarian Society is both a learned society and a major independent research library. The AAS library today houses the largest and most accessible collection of books, pamphlets, broadsides, newspapers, periodicals, music, and graphic arts material printed through 1876 in what is now the United States.

Save time. Save money. Save space. Save our planet.

Would you like to receive the Hourglass by email?

Please email your request to northborough_historical_society@charter.net

