



# THE HOURGLASS

## NORTHBOROUGH HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

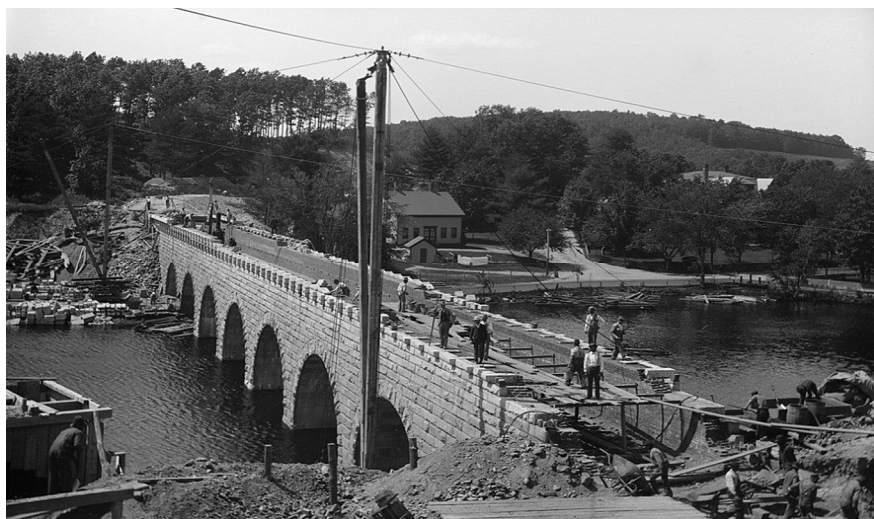
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Northborough Historical Society  
www.NorthboroughHistoricalSociety.org

April 2017

### Next Meeting & Program: April 28, 2017

**The Building of the Aqueduct** by Norman Corbin and Forest Lyford. The construction of the Wachusett Aqueduct, which spans the Assabet River in Northborough, began in 1897 as part the public water supply system for the communities of Greater Boston. The aqueduct's route and supporting structures were added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1990. 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

### Musical Instruments on Display

The musical history of Northborough can be traced back to the American Revolution. When the Minutemen joined the Revolution on April 17, 1775 (Josiah Kent tells us in *Northborough History*, p. 62), they started off "to the sound of Joseph Sever's drum and Ebenezer Hudson's fife." With them marched a composer whose works are still performed today, Abraham Wood.

We have no instruments from those days, nor do we have any from 1819 when a military band called the Grenadiers played at a Northborough funeral, but on the museum stage stands a piano that was brought by oxcart to the house at 38 Main Street in the 1820s for the benefit of the second Dr. Stephen Ball's wife, the former Lydia Lincoln, who shared the musical talent of many members of the Lincoln family of Hingham. Its maker, Alpheus Babcock, had invented a one-piece iron frame which brought "greater depth of sonority . . . more volume . . . [and] greater stability of tuning" to the instrument. Some attention has been given to

this piano, but to date the reconditioning that would permit us to hear these effects has not been done. The piano was given to the Society in 1917 by Sarah Searle, Lydia's daughter, then 89 years old.

Of the several musical instruments used by the family of Dr. Joseph Allen in the 1830s, one may be seen in the display of musical instruments in the northwest corner of our museum. It is a six-string guitar that Mrs.

Allen played while singing to her family and sometimes also to the students of the boarding school that they maintained in their parsonage at 49 Church Street. She even allowed students to play it occasionally. This instrument, nearly two centuries old, is too delicate to play today. Dr.

### Membership

#### Annual Dues:

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

#### Send dues to:

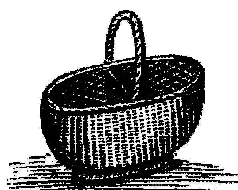
Northborough Historical Society  
Membership Secretary  
P.O. Box 661  
Northborough, MA 01532

*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.

(continued on page 2)



## Curator's News

by Ellen Racine

A museum exhibit commemorating the country's April 1917 entry into WWI will open on Sunday, May 7. The Northborough Senior Center Harmonica Group will launch the exhibit at 1:30 p.m. with a lively program of patriotic and popular songs of the era. The Museum will then open from 2 to 4 p.m. Complimentary refreshments will include foods and pastries from vintage recipes recalling the country's war conservation efforts.

The special display features military uniforms, field equipment, war diaries, propaganda posters, women's efforts on the home-front and the grand homecoming festivities of 1919 marking the end of the town's participation in the Great War. My thanks to the Museum Trustees who contributed to this exhibit.

Jo-Ann Sullivan gave a presentation on April 2 to the Worcester District County Medical Society at 30 Main Street, the former home of several doctors. Now the home of C'est La Vie Bistro, it was built by Dr. Stephen Ball III as his summer residence. Later Dr. Henry J. Barnes, Dr. Gregory Pincus and Dr. Robert Bush resided there. My thanks to Jo-Ann for speaking to the group.

More thanks go to Forest Lyford and Paul Derosier who have been keeping tabs on the two furnaces and also to Paul Derosier for replacing a worrisome light switch in the shed storage area.

### New Accessions:

An unidentified oil portrait donated by Guerdon and Debra Bennett

Photos of 1985 Memorial Day parade from a former resident and Barbara O'Mara

1934 thesis on Gov. John Davis by Rita Marie Kelley, derby and tall silk hat donated by Kevin Carroll

Photos from June Corey French and Deb Emery

**History Corner, continued**

Allen, pastor of the First Church from 1818 to 1873, remembered that before an organ was available in his church, instruments used in religious services included a bass viol, a violin, and a clarinet.

Another instrument in our display which can be played is a bass viol that belonged to James Bowes, who died in 1907. His family was also musical. George Bowes served as director of the Northborough band in the late nineteenth century, and James’s daughter Alice, whose two marriages made her Alice Brigham and then Alice Kimball. She played the organ now part of our collection, taught music in the early years of the twentieth century before becoming president and later the initial curator of this Society, when she researched old-time music in our town.

This instrument, in rather poor condition, was standing in a corner of our archive in 2003 when Barbara Bonvallat, a woman from Vermont who just happened to be Alice Kimball’s granddaughter, visited us. Our curator accepted her offer to pay for the refurbishing of her great-grandfather’s viol, and now it is playable, but no one, to my knowledge, has played it. I hope somebody will, but bring your own bow if you wish to do so, for we don’t have one in the collection.

Other musical instruments on display include a cornet played by Norman Potter from 1911 to 1916 as a member of the Northborough band of that era. Potter, whose father

was president of the Northborough National Bank, became a banker himself. He also served as town treasurer for fifteen years. The display contains several other items, such as music books and pictures of the band, many part of a large donation that Mr. Potter made to the Society late in his life. Two places in Northborough can be associated with bands. At one time the musicians practiced in a small house that stood in the present Trinity parking lot behind the long-demolished house in which Noah Wadsworth and, later, Dr. Stanley lived, and they performed on holidays such as Memorial Day on a bandstand in Assabet Park.

Small musical instruments were also part of Northborough life, such as the ocarina used by Edgar Ashley in the 1870s. Ashley’s father was a Northborough clergyman and a missionary to freedmen in the Civil War. Parts for musical instruments were also made in Northborough; you can see fittings for violin instruments made by the Mosso brothers, who made instrument parts for several decades beginning in the 1890s.

Two pianos, only occasionally used as such, occupy our meeting room. The piano in the rear, dating from around 1900, apparently belonged to the Baptist church. On the square piano in the front of the room Mabel Brigham taught many Northborough people to play in the middle decades of the twentieth century.

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**Visit to the American Antiquarian Society**

On Wednesday, March 29, 2017, thirty Northborough Historical Society members met at the American Antiquarian Society in Worcester to tour the Antiquarian Society, and to view some materials relating to Northborough from their collection.

Founded in 1812 by Revolutionary War patriot and printer Isaiah Thomas, the American Antiquarian Society 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, as well as manuscripts and a substantial collection of secondary texts, bibliographies, and digital resources and reference works related to all aspects of American history and culture before the twentieth century.

The visit got rave reviews. Many thanks to AAS Outreach Coordinator Kayla Hopper who made our visit possible. Members were impressed by the resources available to them for their various research projects, and several people are planning return visits.

A boxed meal was served between the two tours in the Goddard-Daniels House, giving members the opportunity to socialize in one of its beautiful old rooms overlooking Salisbury Pond. We are extremely grateful to Hannaford Marlborough for their generous contribution towards the boxed meals, and to Starbucks Northborough for providing coffee for the event.

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**Save time. Save money. Save space. Save a tree.**

Would you like to receive the Hourglass by email?

Please email your request to [northborough\\_historical\\_society@charter.net](mailto:northborough_historical_society@charter.net)

**Next  
Board of Directors  
Meeting  
Tuesday, May 9**