



THE HOURGLASS

NORTHBOROUGH HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

CCLXIV

Northborough Historical Society
www.NorthboroughHistoricalSociety.org

November 2017

Next Meeting & Program December 1, 2017

A Victorian Christmas. Diane Taraz presents beloved carols and the fascinating stories behind their origins, performing in a hand-sewn 1850s dress and playing dulcimer and parlor guitar. For years, Diane Taraz has been writing her own original songs and breathing new life into traditional ones. Born in the Berkshire hills of western Massachusetts, Diane has long made her home in the Boston area. She directs the Lexington Historical Society Colonial Singers and sings with Vox Lucens, a 12-member a cappella Renaissance choir, and the Uulations, a women's a cappella group. 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

Where Is Tannery Brook?

In the book by Zwinger and Teale featured last month, *A Conscious Stillness*, the two travelers, while canoeing down the Assabet under the Route 135 bridge connecting Northborough with Westborough, observed the spot where “just beyond, Tannery Brook, unlabeled on modern maps, empties into the Assabet. Once it carried the wastes from Davis’s tannery, established in 1778.”

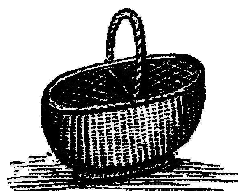
We’ll leave aside that violation of the environment, very common until quite recently, and go back just a dozen or so years ago when I joined a group of people setting out to clean up the Assabet. I thought that I would be patrolling the shore; soon I learned that I was expected to wade into the river. Our late friend, Betty Tetreault, patrolled one shore with her faithful dog, and a young couple from Hudson, I believe, well-dressed for

the water, and I began our wading at the School Street bridge. We discovered that many things, some as large as automobile wheels, had been thrown into the river at that spot. Our job was working upstream to the bridge mentioned above.

Away from School Street, most of the clutter consisted of tree limbs. Eventually I could hear the recreational clatter from the Ellsworth-McAfee Park. I was wondering about the damage to my fairly new shoes when time was called somewhat short of our goal and we were free to return to our meeting ground for the celebratory pizza. As a result I stopped short of Tannery Brook spilling into the river. I arrived, the latest and wettest person at the culminating celebration---and the pizza was gone.

Now if I were able to do it today, I would follow Tannery Brook on foot, where I certainly could stay out of the water, and see exactly where it comes from. But now I haven’t the agility, so I depend on such things as historical maps. Maps from 1830 and 1855 show the tannery as just west of South Street and just north of a short later road, Davis Avenue. The first map does not show the stream at all; the second has it unaccountably trailing

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Curator's News

by Ellen Racine

As the Museum closes for the winter season, our work shifts mostly to the Archive. We have had recent requests from Orleans, MA, New York, California and Nova Scotia on fascinating subjects. In answering these requests we learn and share Northborough’s history. We will always open the

Archive and the Museum during the winter when requested. The winter is a good time for your research projects.

New Accessions:

Two vintage telephones and a Victorian side chair from Kevin Carroll.

Richard Pierce

Our sympathies go to Kathy Pierce and family on the passing of long time member Richard Pierce.

November 10, 2017.

Dick was a former director of the Society.

off in low-lying land just to the north.

Passing along Davis Avenue recently, I noticed something that looked like a stream down below. Going to a Department of the Interior geological map of Marlborough (which includes all of Northborough), I found the course of the stream. It parallels South Street on the west, cuts through land that was once agricultural and now constitutes the Northgate development, and emerges on higher land west of the hill which runs across South Street at its highest point just north of Northgate.

A tiny stream, it proved useful to the Davises, who may have placed the tannery there precisely to take advantage of this little brook. Like other nineteenth-century industrialists, they knew how to make use of a waterway that we barely notice today (although we would if provision were not made for that brook under every road that crosses it).

Unlike Marlborough, Northborough never developed shoemaking on a large scale, but it had its shoemakers. In the early 1800s Isaac Crosby “built a brick shoe shop on South Street, a quarter of a mile north of

the Davis tan-yard and manufactured shoes there.” (Kent, *Northborough History*, p. 169) In our time, steel can be produced on one continent, hauled across the Pacific Ocean, and made into automobiles that are then carried back across the ocean to consumers. Early in the nineteenth century Crosby observed that shaping your raw material near its source made sense.

Other shoemakers, such as Jeremiah and Stephen Hunt, were more extravagant, willing to drive a wagon a mile or two to reach the tannery. Jeremiah made boots and shoes in the house on Main Street between Maple and Brigham in the room that still stands out at the rear. His brother Stephen made them nearby in a house that not long ago gave way to the implementation of twenty-first-century commerce on Main just west of Brigham Street.

In the nineteenth century you did not have to leave town to buy your shoes, and you knew the people responsible for them. Today, of course, is different. You travel farther—but you have more variety.

Bob Ellis can be reached by email at rpje1@aol.com

News From the Board of Directors

- The Property Committee has had a busy month. Two fuse boxes have been replaced, some caulking has been done around the building, and a temperamental refrigerator has been dealt with. Thanks go to committee members Paul Derosier, Chuck Krouse and Ernie Racine, and custodian Forest Lyford for their efforts.
- The Board has been working on ways to improve communication within the Society. Being able to reach all of our members by email would be fast, efficient and free. To make sure that we have your current email address please send a blank email to:
northborough_historical_society@charter.net
We do not share members’ email addresses with any other organization, nor do we use them for anything but Society business. This will not affect your Hourglass delivery preference.
- There are still several vacancies on committees and the Board of Directors. If you would like to join one of these merry bands, please email Hilary Wilson at hilarywilson@charter.net. For full committee descriptions please go to www.northboroughhistoricalsociety.org or call Hilary Wilson at 508-393-3869.
- No Hourglass will be published in December, so the Board would like to take this opportunity to wish all of our members Happy Holidays!

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.

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

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Please email your request to northborough_historical_society@charter.net

Next
Board of Directors
Meeting
Tuesday, January 9