



THE HOURGLASS

NORTHBOROUGH HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

CCLXVI

Northborough Historical Society
www.NorthboroughHistoricalSociety.org

February 2018

Next Meeting & Program: Friday, February 23, 2018

30 Main Street Northborough - The Home of Many Doctors.

Since its construction in the late 1830's number 30 Main Street has been the home of four doctors. Long-time Northborough resident and Historical Society Trustee Jo-Ann Sullivan will introduce you to the doctors who have lived in this beautiful house. 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. Refreshments will be served after the meeting.



History Corner

by Bob Ellis

The Coming of The Old Town Hall

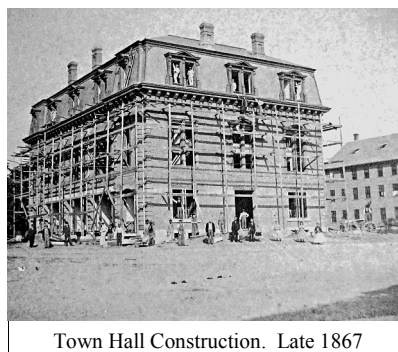
An important date in Northborough history is February 25, 1868, one hundred fifty years ago. A newspaper of the day, the *Marlboro Mirror*, estimated that 1,100 or 1,200 people gathered at a substantial building in the middle of town, perhaps noticing the settings of Mr. Stone's and Mr. Chesbro's future stores or the room where the new library would open in its west end, but they all ascended the staircase to the second floor for the program honoring the opening of a new Town Hall.

The reporter climbed to "the attic, under the French roof, where are two smaller halls, with several ante-rooms, which will many times be found of great convenience. The whole is nearly furnished in chestnut, and presents, both inside and outside, evidences of the taste of the committee, the architect, and the builder." Then the reporter hustled back for the ceremony, which included remarks by various people, the reading of scriptures, the singing of an original hymn by Mr. Chesbro, an address by Rev. Dr. Allen, and an immensely long satirical poem in rhymed couplets by a nationally well-known educator and native of Northborough, Thomas Valentine.

The new building had been envisioned eight years earlier but delayed by the Civil War.

It would occupy a prime location on Main Street near the railroad station, the road to Westborough, and other downtown establishments, including the store of the elder Cyrus Gale, who had headed the building committee and funded the project.

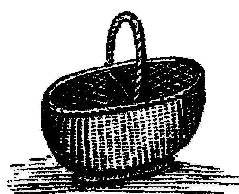
Ann Morton, our Historical Society curator for a few years in the 1970s, described the preliminary move of the tavern that had occupied that location as follows. "The Monroe Tavern was placed on rollers and pulled back with oxen-power to make room for the new Town Hall. . . . It has been recorded that the building was cut into sections and rollers, resembling telephone poles, were placed on the ground. As the building passed over the last pole, men picked it up, brought it around in front of the building to begin again."



Town Hall Construction. Late 1867

The *Mirror* periodically reported progress. As of May 4, 1867, "the digging for the foundation to our new Town Hall is nearly completed, and the foundation will be commenced next week. The estimated cost of the whole structure, which is to be

(continued on page 2)



Curator's News

by Ellen Racine

The Archive has been busy with many requests: Research for upcoming program speakers, the Habitat for Humanity project, the Library's 150th anniversary and numerous smaller requests.

I have attended the second workshop regarding disaster planning which explored the process involved in writing the actual plan. The next three workshops will be trial testing of the plan, a live burn out in Springfield with faux archival materials, and finally a salvage operation. This has been quite an in-depth learning experience.

New Accessions:

Wire frame eyeglasses, c.1900, men's union suit from Arlene Marshall.

Member Outing to the Willard Clock Museum

Save the Date!! On Sunday, June 3 members and their guests will enjoy a private tour of the Willard Clock Museum in Grafton. There will be two tours of the Museum, one before lunch and one after lunch. We will enjoy a picnic lunch in the Museum's barn between the two tours. Tickets will be \$15. More details to follow, but put this in your calendar now!

History Corner, continued

of brick with French roof, will be about \$40,000.” By August 14 “the new Town Hall in this place is progressing finely, the workmen now being engaged in putting on the roof. . . . The fact that this [building] is made of the most durable materials and should last 150 years, shows the necessity of building for future wants.” The foundation stones came from Fitchburg, the bricks from Howe’s brickyard toward the eastern end of Main Street

On May 16, 1956 someone challenged that prediction by starting a fire in the room of the Sons of Veterans on the third floor. Flags used in meetings were set on fire, but on the custodian’s round of inspections, he discovered that the fire had burned out with only some damage to the flags.

Already, however, deterioration was threatening. From 1946 to 1972 various town commissions studied the damage of the years and pondered attempts to rehabilitate or even destroy the historic building. One suggestion, to cut off the upper level, would have eliminated the mansard roof and other details that made the building visually compelling. The decision to rehabilitate it signified that towns-

people prized it primarily for all the things that flourished in it for over a century. It had housed at times the library, the post office, a traditional drug store, the Historical Society, concerts, dances, silent movies, and of course innumerable acts of local government. There was nothing else in town like it. But not until the early 1980s did its restoration begin.

Some of us can recall the fire on a September night in 1985 that destroyed it. That morning I found a small charred piece of it in my back yard over a half-mile away. Now that spectacular event is beyond the memory span of many Northborough citizens. The building that replaced it (a replica in its exterior features) was not a center of Northborough history; its more important clients came and went. It could replicate the Town Hall in no other way.

Had the rehabilitation of the Town Hall been completed with sufficient safety features, perhaps we would now be anticipating that 150th anniversary celebration.

Bob Ellis can be reached by email at rpe1@aol.com

News From the Board of Directors

- At the request of the Program Committee, dates have been set for member meetings for the Society year 2018 - 2019.
- Unfortunately, our Past Presidents board has deteriorated quite badly while in storage, necessitating the replacement of the brass header plate and 33 blank nameplates. The Board voted to have it restored, and updated with the names of presidents since 2009.
- The cost of heating the building has been very high this winter. There was discussion surrounding ways that this cost could be reduced in future. Oil contracts, programmable thermostats and ensuring that our renters leave the heating controls at the correct settings were considered.
- There are still several vacancies on various committees and the Board of Directors. We need to fill these positions for the Society to function effectively. If you would like to join one of these merry bands, please email Hilary Wilson at hilarywilson@charter.net or Bob Marchetta at marchetta4@verizon.net. For full committee descriptions please go to www.northboroughhistoricalsociety.org or call Hilary Wilson at 508-393-3869.

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.

Would you like to receive the Hourglass by email?

Please email your request to northborough_historical_society@charter.net

**Next
Board of Directors
Meeting
Tuesday, March 13**