



THE HOURGLASS

NORTHBOROUGH HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

CCLXXIII

Northborough Historical Society
www.NorthboroughHistoricalSociety.org

November 2018

Next Meeting & Program: Friday, December 7, 2018

The Spirit of Christmas Past: Four Centuries of Christmas in New England – presented by Ken Turino, Manager of Community Engagement and Exhibitions at Historic New England. This well-illustrated lecture traces the development of the celebration of Christmas from the 17th Century, when it was outlawed in New England, to the 20th century with its trappings of a traditional Christmas. We will learn many customs, such as Christmas trees and Santa Claus, are more recent. 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

An Early Celebration of Christmas In Northborough

Some of you were not members when your historian wrote “Christmas at the Parsonage” for the *Hourglass* eighteen years ago, and this month I am returning to the topic. This time I am calling attention to two people who inspired the first such celebration in Northborough, Lucy Clark Allen and Charles Follen.

Rev. Joseph Allen, later made Dr. Allen, the Unitarian minister from 1818 until his death in 1873, also established a boarding school in his home—but it was his wife Lucy who sustained it. She housed, fed, guided, instructed, and entertained as many as two dozen boys at a time for many years. For them as well as for her own family of seven children and for parishioners, she established in the 1830s a celebration of Christmas not seen previously in Northborough.

She owed this idea to a man who had become the first instructor of German in Harvard College, and who also, according to one biographer, introduced the sport of gymnastics to the United States and established the first college gymnasium in the nation at Harvard. According to a grand-

daughter of the Allens in a book called *The Children of the Parsonage*, “The Christmas tree was not common in America then. The first one was introduced, I think, by Dr. Follen, a German Unitarian minister.” But Lucy surely would have met Follen on one of her visits back to the Ware family home, for she was the daughter of the professor of religion who made her husband and many other young men in New England Unitarian ministers.

A well-known English writer, Harriet Martineau, had visited the Follen home in Cambridge and seen there what was perhaps the first decorated Christmas tree in the United States. Lucy also met Martineau, perhaps at the same time, for she had also visited the Wares.

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Membership

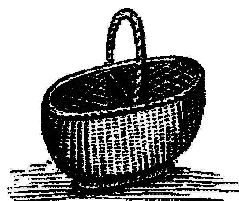
Annual Dues:

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*

**If there is a red dot in the address
panel of this newsletter your dues
are past due!**



Curator's News by Ellen Racine

The mystery is solved! The box of very old deeds, wills, high school programs and athletic letters was donated by our long-time member Donald Haitsma. Don spent many years collecting Northborough documents and antiques and great local stories. His family dairy farm was Stirrup Brook Farm, Rt. 20, on the Marlbor-

ough line. Thank you, Don!

Jeff Koopman, new owner of Hays Funeral Home, along with a copy of an 1855 map, donated a large framed photo of the Winn-Whitaker building when it was first built in the 1880s and had three floors. In exchange, we have lent Jeff several photos to be used as a slide show in his waiting area.

We'd also like to thank police officer Dan Murphy for donating a copy of his 60 page *History of the Northborough Police Department*.

While you are downtown, don't forget to stop in to the Library and see the great exhibit Chris Lindquist has pulled together for their 150th anniversary. Many of our documents and dishes are included in their display.

Welcome New Member!

Julianne Hirsh

History Corner, continued

One aspect of Lucy Allen’s interest to Follen is suggested by a Wikipedia article on Follen, which included the following item: “Follen’s friendships with the prominent Unitarian minister William Ellery Channing drew him to the Unitarian Church. He was ordained a minister in 1836.” At this time Follen’s career at Harvard had ended, explained by the *Encyclopedia Britannica* as “apparently because of his antislavery agitation, and rather than accept demotion.” Antislavery feeling was also strong in the Allen family, especially in some of the children.

Follen accepted the minister’s post in Lexington, Massachusetts and served for four years. Then, ironically, he died on the night of January 13-14, 1840 when a ship called the *Lexington* burned and sank in New York Harbor.

At Lucy’s first Christmas party the tree was hung with presents. Guests, including many parishioners, received almonds and raisins, heard musical compositions played by some of the boys and by Lucy herself on her guitar (now displayed in the Society museum) and Christmas poems written by her children. One by her second son, Joseph Henry Allen, ended, “Thanks, gentle muses, that you so propitious have been, / A better Christmas ode *in* Allenville was never seen.” (It is a fact that mail directed to the non-existent town of Allenville would regularly be delivered in Northborough.)

Many people in conservative towns like Northborough resisted such Christmas celebrations as excessively Roman Catholic (although in Germany Lutherans also celebrated Christmas). The input of Irish and French-Canadian settlers in Northborough in the second half of the nineteenth century, however, proved influential, and by late in the century other townspeople had developed enthusiasm for Christmas trees, cards, music, and the exchange of gifts, thus bringing to an end in this town one of the cultural barriers between Protestants and Catholics.

Bob Ellis can be reached by email at rpj1@aol.com

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Would you like to receive the Hourglass by email?

Please email your request to northborough_historical_society@charter.net

Silent Auction of J. Thurston Marshall Print

At our December 7 meeting, final bids will be accepted for the Society’s silent auction of John Thurston Marshall’s painting titled “Fisherman’s Catch.” Proceeds to benefit the Northborough Historical Society.

As discussed at our October meeting, the silent auction of a 1972 print, donated by Jodie Martinson, will extend to the December meeting to allow others time to view the print, which will be displayed on his easel donated by the late artist’s family to the Society.

Mr. Marshall (1908-1982) was a 30-years resident of Northborough and an artist of national renown. His work was represented in hundreds of private collections, museums, corporate headquarters, and academic institutions. The CEO who purchased Fisherman’s Catch had prints made to give to associates, including Mr. Marshall, who gave one to Jodie.

Today you can see Mr. Marshall’s work in the Society museum, the Northborough Senior Center, and in gallery postings via Google.



**Next
Board of Directors
Meeting
Tuesday, January 8**