



THE HOURGLASS

NORTHBOROUGH HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

CCLXXXIII

Northborough Historical Society
www.NorthboroughHistoricalSociety.org

January 2020



Next Meeting & Program: Friday, January 24, 2020

The Collings Foundation. Ryan Keough Director of Development for the Collings Foundation, Stow, MA, will describe how the museum supports the preservation, exhibition and interaction of historical artifacts. As a living history museum they sponsor re-enactments of transportation related events such as antique car rallies, carriage and sleigh rides, and air shows. 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 Kathy Pierce

And They All Came Tumbling Down

A look around town as the new year begins illustrates that no matter how much things seem to stay the same, change is always occurring - landscapes alter, old homes disappear and new structures pop up.

The gracious Town Common, now nearing completion, is a welcome example of that change. It is a spacious gathering place in the town center that has long been needed.

But as one local realtor commented recently, Northborough is pretty well built out. So how and where is future development to occur? Well, one way is to tear down, build over and raise anew.

To make way for new housing, at least four antique homes came down last year, creating fresh looks in spots that appeared the same for decades, if not centuries. Those of us who revere such abodes hoped they would be there for many more years, preserving the charm and history of this old New England town. This is not to say the newly constructed homes aren't an attractive addition to the town. The builders have chosen designs well and the buyers can be proud of their "new builds."

But let's take a look back at the vistas and structures that are never to be seen again.

Perhaps most familiar was the red brick cottage that stood on three-plus acres at 222 West Main St., the corner of Lincoln Street and Route 20. Bordered by a white farm fence, it had a

huge red barn that dominated the property. Town records indicate a 1760 construction date.

As a neighborhood resident, I stop at that intersection regularly.

News that the picturesque house would be leveled saddened me, but I hoped what replaced it would be worthy of that highly visible entrance into town. Two pretty colonial-style homes now occupy the site. A couple more may follow. My fears are allayed. At least, it didn't turn into a condo development.

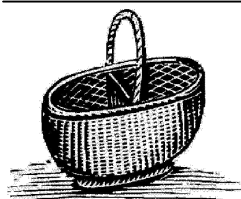
So who owned the corner property? Fred French Jr. and three generations of that family called the house home from the 1940s until it was sold in 2017. In a newspaper interview, French's daughter, Beverly French Keigwin, termed it "a gentleman's farm" with some livestock and a vegetable garden.

But Fred French made his living otherwise in a way that had a big impact on this town. He developed a sprawling tract of land that sweeps around from Crestwood Drive, across from his home, to an exit from Riley Road onto South Street. In the 1950s, dozens of buyers found their way to Northborough to raise their families in those small ranches. A chat with some brings up their fond memories of growing up in the new neighborhood.

Gone also at the opposite end of Route 20 is the stately brick Federal-style colonial owned for decades by Richard and Janice Hight. It stood at 181 East Main St., behind the Texas BBQ Co. A reproduction colonial-style house took its place.



(continued on page 2)



Curator's News

by Ellen Racine

The Northborough Library has graciously added the Historical Society's holdings list to their History site. This outreach device will give researchers insight as to what we have available.

Jo-Ann Sullivan and I recently visited the Marlborough Historical Society to donate items with a Marlborough connection. Jo-Ann donated bottles and a crate from Bill's Beverage Company, and I donated an 1866 Hotel Register from the Gates Hotel, formerly the Williams Tavern, and other Marlborough papers. We also learned their approach to computerizing their collection records.

We are also collaborating with Jon Maynard in providing information on the former Westborough State Hospital / State Reform School. His group's goal is to create a memorial and produce a book for fund-raising. Jon was astonished to see our collection of Lyman School photos from the 1880s and a 100-year anniversary booklet of the Reform School, not found elsewhere.

Again, I need to thank members of our Society who volunteer frequently. Linda Corbin and Beryl Krouse were tour guides for the students from the Fitzgerald Institute in November. Ernie Racine provided ventilation for the large glass showcases, as recommended by a museum expert in a workshop that I attended. And thanks also to Forest Lyford for skillfully repairing Walter Peinze's fragile toy horse and wagon from 1905.

Welcome New Members!

Roger Wentzell
Michael & Marcia Mills

Next Board of Directors Meeting
Tuesday, February 11

History Corner, continued

According to a 2007 Massachusetts Historical Commission report, the double-chimney, front section of the house was built about 1810 "when brick was emerging as a popular building material in Northborough." A seven-room ell at the rear, separate at one point, appeared to date to 1745 and maybe the Goodnow family.

As most Northborough history buffs know, the Goodnows were among the town's earliest settlers and owned much property at its east end. Who has not heard the tragic story of Mary Goodnow, the young woman scalped nearby while fleeing from attacking Indians in 1707?

Originally, the property included hundreds of acres of farm land which over the years were sold off for housing development. The Tall Pines neighborhood behind the property was carved out of it. The 2007 MHC report notes "the house and its outbuildings still convey a good picture of life in Northborough" in the 1800s. That picture is no longer. Time marches on.

Jumping over to 96 Whitney St., the historically-titled Joseph Fairbanks House, owned for decades by Eugene and Carol Bostock, also fell last year. Two new homes now stand on the site. Town records show the house being built in 1831, with Fairbanks listed as the owner from the 1870s into the 1890s. William Mulligan's history of Northborough reports that in 1842, Fairbanks



presented a staunch anti-slavery resolution to the Baptist Church, which adopted the measure. The statement called slavery "an odious and abominable system" and expressly forbade any slaveholder from occupying the church's pulpit, being a member of that society or participating in communion services.

Lastly, the empty white Georgian, center-chimney house at 156 Pleasant St., most recently wedged forlornly between three new homes, was finally razed near the year's end. Reports are that a replacement will be built on the same spot. Constructed by Timothy Fay in 1730, this historic property witnessed the evolution of the town from simply the north side of Westborough to a precinct with its own meeting house and minister in 1744 to a full-fledged town in 1766. Timothy Fay, a member of one of the town's earliest families, was active in both precinct and town affairs serving as selectman, town clerk and assessor at various times.



In 1967, Sanford and Betty Russell bought the house and the remaining 23 acres of the original farm. Betty presented an interesting, detailed program to the historical society in 1986 on the life of the house and their experiences in restoring it.

And so it goes. Perhaps some of the newly added homes will one day, too, be appreciated for their role in Northborough history. Time will tell.

Northborough Historical Society Fundraiser
Pancake Breakfast at Chet's Diner
Sunday, January 26
Seating: 9:30 a.m. - 10:45 a.m.

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|-----------------------------|-------------------|
| Chet's Traditional Pancakes | Home Fries |
| **Molasses Pancakes** | Homemade Muffins |
| Scrambled Eggs | Assorted Fruit |
| Sausage and Bacon | Hot Coffee or Tea |

**Molasses pancakes are an old New England breakfast item

Tickets: \$15.00 - available at Chet's Diner - they're going fast!
191 Main Street, Northborough, MA

Bar service will be available starting at 10:00 a.m. Try a Mimosa or Bloody Mary - additional charges apply.

Basket Raffle - \$5 for 6 tickets ▪ 50/50 Raffle - \$5 per ticket

Proceeds to benefit Northborough Historical Society

Snow Date: Sunday, February 9

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

Dues were due September 2019

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