



THE HOURGLASS

NORTHBOROUGH HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

CCLXXXVI

Northborough Historical Society
www.NorthboroughHistoricalSociety.org

April 2020

COVID-19 Meeting & Program Cancellations

The board meetings, Friday meetings, and programs scheduled for April and May, 2020 have been cancelled due to concerns regarding the COVID-19 virus. The Museum will not open as planned in May but will remain closed until further notice.

To provide you with updated information about when and how we will elect Society officers, board and committee members, we need your up-to-date email addresses. Please send an email with "election" and the member's name in the subject line to: **northborough_historical_society@charter.net**

If there is more than one member in your household, please send an email from each member's email address.

If you do not have access to email, please call Hilary at 508-393-3869.

If you have questions about your membership, please email Jean Langley at
MembershipSecretary@NorthboroughHistoricalSociety.org

Stay safe and well!



History Corner

by Kathy Pierce

Water, Water...But Not Everywhere

Tucked away in the recesses of our archives is an intriguing seven-foot-long wooden relic. Museum accession records say it is a water pipe.

"Water pipe dates back to when Northborough people got together and built their own water system. Found by Mr. Sinclair when excavating down behind the Gale House (Main St. house with pillars). This piece part of the old system. R. Sinclair has original handle that went with the water system." Society member Robert Sinclair donated the pipe in 1977.



Wooden Pipe

A wooden water pipe? Unaware of that system, I set out to find out more about it. The search was not particularly successful as it didn't "unearth" any more information about the pipe or such a system. Perhaps a reader may know more about it. It may have served to transport water from a well, brook or the river to the Gale store and / or a cluster of homes and businesses in the center, then called the village. Wooden pipes were used extensively for old water

works in Boston, New York and Philadelphia. Online research shows some are still in use.

One source on use of wooden pipes in Northborough is the 1793 "History of the County of Worcester in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts" by Rev. Peter Whitney of the First Parish Unitarian Church.

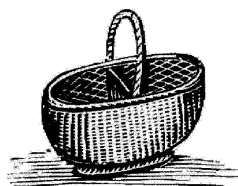
"There are, in this town, curious works for the conveyance of water to a great distance, the property, contrivance and execution of Major Holloway Taylor. I know not that there are any similar works in the county, and would therefore describe them."

Whitney explains how "this gentleman has raised a small pond, and from thence brings fine water (about seventy rods, through bored logs, underground, not only in low lands, but in some places higher lands where the water repeatedly ascends and descends) into the back part of his house, into a large vat, near three feet in height, by a tube, from the last log, entering the bottom of the vat, which is, or may be kept constantly full, and running over..." The spillover ran onto the grass. The system also filled a trough for his "great flock of cattle." Seventy rods is 1,165 feet.

Whitney points out that if a person wished "to convey water in this manner... yellow or pitch pine logs are much best for this purpose; they are harder and more durable; those of chestnut are too spungy (*sic*) and porous."

Taylor lived at what is now 302 Church St. The large prop-

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Curator's News

by Ellen Racine

In addition to the cancellation of all events at the Historical Society, our Wednesday hours at the archive have also come to a halt, but Historian Kathy Pierce and I continue to work from home and make frequent trips to the archive for information.

I can be reached by e-mail at **emaracine@verizon.net** or through our Website.

I received an e-mail from Debbie Myrick Martin of Hingham saying she had some items to donate to the museum – two top hats, a man's three-piece suit and a man's vest and slacks. Debbie and her sisters, Helen and Kathryn, are descendants of our third town minister, Rev. Joseph Allen, and they believe one of the suits and hats belonged to him. I was very excited to drive down to Hingham and retrieve the

donation. It will be on display in the fall. Last year they donated a document box with many of Rev. Allen's hand-written sermons from 1826 – 1872. Carol Bostock has transcribed several of them for us. Laura Zitton has been stirring up a lot of interest in our town's history and we thank her for her enthusiasm and energy. She has put daily and weekly places of interest on the Northborough Historical Society's Facebook page and it has been enjoyed by all ages of Northborough residents. Thank you so much Laura!

History Corner, continued

erty was in his family for many years and was known as the Holloway-Taylor farm. He sold the property in 1799 and relocated to St. Albans, Vt. He became a prominent citizen of that community and died there in 1839. His wife, Dinah, who he married in Northborough in 1783, is buried beside him.

The 1886 Daniel Wesson estate on Route 20, now the town-owned White Cliffs, was the site of an another elaborate water system. In a 1994 video, Historical Society member Brian Smith reports that the water was pumped from Bartlett Pond to an impressive stone pump house off Bartlett Street. From there, powerful pumps lifted the pond water to a brick-lined cistern on a hill overlooking present-day Wesson Terrace, off Leland Drive. Society member Forest Lyford, a retired hydrologist, calculated from measurements that the cistern would hold about 190,000 gallons. From the cistern, gravity took the water downhill and across the highway to the 100-acre estate for use in its mansion, fountains, greenhouse and ponds.



Wesson pump house

Most townspeople back then depended on brooks, wells and cisterns for their needs until in 1882, Wesson, Cyrus Gale Jr. and others proposed a municipal water works to serve homes and businesses in the Village. The state legislature approved the plan that year under "An Act to Supply the Town of Northborough With Water." It read:

Section I. The town of Northborough may supply itself and its inhabitants with water to extinguish fires, and to generate steam, and for domestic and other uses; may establish fountains and hydrants...and may fix and collect rents for the use of such water.

The act gave the town authority to take as much water "as

necessary from Cold Harbor Brook, at any point or points on its watershed, in the towns of Northborough, Shrewsbury and Boylston, and of any springs, natural ponds, brooks and other water sources within the town of Northborough." Three Water Commissioners supervised construction and operation of the new service.

An open reservoir and dam to store water for the works was completed in 1883. It is off Reservoir Street just over the Shrewsbury line, but is no longer used. An 1887 map shows the water line running along Church Street to the center and eventually, by that year, to Chapinville along Hudson Street. Cost of the original works was \$58,150.44.



Outlet of former Northborough reservoir

Like any major public project, it caused a stir as seen in these excerpts from a local newspaper of the time.

"In view of the large influx of laborers who will be employed on the water works, the Selectman have appointed about fifteen special police..."

And also, "The water works seem to occasion alarm, which it would appear to be premature. A request has been made that these men so employed be sold but little liquor while in town."

Despite those worries, the new service was soon ready for use. A Harvard Medical laboratory analysis in 1882 pronounced the flow to "be excellent water." Thus, in their 1885 annual report, the Water Commissioners proclaimed:

"The use of water in sprinkling door yards, lawns, and gardens, and the freshness of foliage, grass and flowers _ in wetting dusty streets and cooling the roofs of houses in hot weather _ has greatly changed the complexion of our village and enhanced the comfort of many of our citizens."

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Renewal of Membership

If there is a red dot in the address panel below, it is time to renew your membership of the Society.

Annual Dues: Single: \$20 Senior / Student: \$15 Family: \$45 Lifetime: \$250

Please make checks payable to *Northborough Historical Society* and mail to:

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