



THE HOURGLASS

NORTHBOROUGH HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

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Northborough Historical Society
www.NorthboroughHistoricalSociety.org

November 2020

COVID-19 Closure Information

At this time there are no Friday meetings planned at the Society. The museum and archive will remain closed until further notice. Enquiries regarding the museum and archive should be directed to Historian Kathy Pierce and Curator Ellen Racine. They can be reached by e-mail:

Kathy: Historian@NorthboroughHistoricalSociety.org

Ellen: Info@NorthboroughHistoricalSociety.org

Stay safe and well!



History Corner

by Kathy Pierce

A Burning Issue: The KKK on Assabet Hill

A burning cross on Assabet Hill? Men with torches fleeing the scene? In Northborough? Really?

While it is an ugly incident that some might prefer not to recall, apparently it did happen on October 24, 1924. Thus, it is history and shouldn't be swept under the rug.

In a letter to her daughter a few days after the burning, town resident Harriet Johnson recalled the event.

"The KKK shared the fiery cross on Mt. Assabet Friday night. It was scout meeting night and they all went up to see what the fire was _ and saw some men just running off with lights and the cross in full extent made of R.R. torches, I believe."

That is all Mrs. Johnson wrote about the incident. A search of our archives found no other mention of the cross-burning. However, in a memoir of his youth here from 1937 to 1950, which recently appeared on the society's Facebook page, Bill Flynn mentioned it. Bill had the date wrong, but described the

rumored burning.

"On or about 1935, it was said that a cross-burning on Assabet Hill took place by some town members of the Ku Klux Klan. (KKK) dressed in white robes that masked facial features from fellow townsmen. It was a one-time event, never repeated," he wrote.

In what may be a related discovery, the late Betty Tetreault, a Northborough native and long-time society member, found a KKK medal in the kitchen wall of a house she owned at 55 Main Street. It bears the KKK monogram and the inscription "member in good standing."

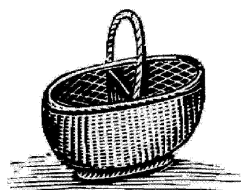


Medal found
at 55 Main St

There was some thought the medal may date to the Civil War era since the house was around at that time as was the KKK. But in view of the 1924 incident, others speculate that the medal was linked to that more recent period.

So why would the KKK have been active in Northborough in the 20th century? A chapter in the book "Once-Told Tales of Worcester County" by Albert B. Southwick sheds light on the question. Mr. Southwick is a historian, columnist, author and retired chief editorial writer for the Worcester Telegram. The chapter, entitled "Worcester Klans and Kleagles," details the rise of the Klan in Worcester County and around the country during the early 1920s.

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Curator's News

by Ellen Racine

This quiet month of lock-down has given many people time to clean out family memorabilia and papers. Our most recent donation was full of surprises - from wedding gowns and uniforms to cow laxatives! Cassius (age 67) and Carrie Rich, and their son Irving and wife Bertha, moved from Shrewsbury and bought Everett Valentine's farm on 25 Rutland Road, just off of Pleasant St. in 1932.



25 Rutland Rd.
Photo by Bob Ellis

This farm had also been the home of Jairus Lincoln, one of Northborough's illustrious residents in the mid-1800s. Cassius was a farmer, meat and milk inspector, dentist and veterinarian so several syringes, large and small were

donated. Three generations were represented, with Donald and Phyllis Beckstrom Rich building their own home below Cassius' farm on Pleasant Street. There are farm journals from 1915-1934, bank records, cash journal, weekly employee records, nurse's cape, pins and student notebook, Navy uniforms from WWII, several garments that needed mending and ironing and a Doll "Eleanor" with her trunk of hand-made clothing from 1931. The articles have been accessioned and photographed and now the challenge is storing the variety of articles. Our thanks go to Alan and Ethel Rich for donating their family history and stories.

Thanks to Ernie Racine for his patience and technical skills, the computer is up and running. We have been transferring files and digitized photos from the lap top and our home computer. We look forward to the day when we can again have our volunteer Wednesdays to assist in scanning and record keeping. We now have a waiting list of volunteers who are interested in helping out.

New Accessions:

Framed N. High School Diploma, 1899 of her grandfather William Walter Staples, donated by Virginia Staples.

Early man's hair comb made of wood with metal grip. This comb was from Marla Collins' house at 137 E. Main Street, donated by Norm Corbin

Welcome New Members!

Guerdon Bennett
Becky Bennett
David Bennett
Clifford Martin
Mia McDonald
Barbara Rolfe
Dan Roop
Ann Verhage
Lyn Weinberg
Mary Westley

History Corner, continued

"The revived Klan gradually found fertile soil in a country faced with a flood of immigrants, many of whom were Catholic and Jewish. The social shock of World War I and its aftermath added fuel to the fire. In the minds of many small-town folk, the Ku Klux Klan, whatever its origins, seemed to stand for patriotism, Americanism, tradition and 'Christianity'," Mr. Southwick wrote. He added that a congressional investigation of the Klan in 1921 gave it nationwide publicity that led to a huge influx of new members.

As in today's politics, immigration became a hot-button issue after WWI. Returning soldiers needed jobs, as did thousands of immigrants seeking refuge here. This competition fueled ethnic prejudices and nativism in some Americans.

Additionally, a contentious 1924 Democratic campaign in which Catholic presidential candidate Al Smith introduced an anti-Klan plank stimulated the Klan's anti-Catholic activities.

The city of Worcester emerged as a center of that revival for this region. According to accounts of that time, secret and public Klan meetings were held in many county towns. Cross-burnings also flared in some of them. Among the targets of their resentment locally were Irish Catholics and other "foreign Catholics," Mr. Southwick wrote. In Connecticut, it was often aimed at Italians and in northern New England at French Canadians. Much of the prejudice was based on religion, but some of it had to do with immigrants gaining jobs at lower wages.

Even some clergyman joined the organization. A chronology of events in July and August 1924, compiled by a local college pro-

fessor, lists that on August 3 a Grafton minister announced that he was a "Kluxer." At the time of this Klan surge, the house where the KKK medal was found was the parsonage for a local church.

The chronology also notes that Klan meetings were held in Berlin, Shrewsbury, Stow, Upton, Paxton and other local towns. Riots broke out in Stow, Lancaster and Spencer. Police disarmed the KKK in Shrewsbury. A cross was burned in front of the Catholic church in Charlton and at a nuns' convent in Worcester. A Catholic school was burned in Leominster.

The fervor grew and in 1923, a Klan rally jammed Mechanics Hall in Worcester, attracting thousands of onlookers to the streets around the hall. That meeting generated 1,500 to 2,000 new members. A year later on October 19, the month that the cross burned in Northborough, a massive "Klanvocation" drew an estimated 15,000 people to the Agricultural Fairgrounds in Worcester. Tensions mounted and the rally led to rioting, beatings and injuries, as reported by the Telegram & Gazette.

That massive gathering seemed to be the peak of local Klan activity in Worcester County, according to Southwick. After that, membership began to dwindle and was no longer flaunted.

"By the 1930s and the Great Depression, it was little more than a bad dream in this part of the country," Southwick wrote.



Sunday Telegram
October 19, 1924

As we enter the season of Thanksgiving and giving, would you please consider making a small donation to the Society?

Any support would be greatly appreciated, and would help us to maintain our beautiful old building and care for our collection, especially this year when we have lost more than three-quarters of our rental income due to COVID-19.

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

Northborough Historical Society Attn: HG
PO Box 661
Northborough, MA 01532

*Northborough Historical Society is a 501(c)(3) organization.
Your contribution is tax deductible to the fullest extent provided by law.*



The Northborough Historical Society is thankful for the support of all our members and friends. We wish you all a safe and happy Thanksgiving holiday!

Would you like to receive the Hourglass by email?.

If you receive your copy of the Hourglass by US mail, please consider switching to email. You will receive your newsletter sooner, it is better for the environment, and it will reduce the expense to the Society.
Please email your request to northborough_historical_society@charter.net

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

Renewal of Membership

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