



THE HOURGLASS

NORTHBOROUGH HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

CCXCII

Northborough Historical Society
www.NorthboroughHistoricalSociety.org

January 2021

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

Vaccines Coming to the Rescue Again

They're here, they're here. After nearly a year of trepidation and isolation, the advent of three vaccines for the dreaded Novel Coronavirus of 2020 has millions around the world breathing sighs of relief.

The months-long wait for these vaccines brings to mind the years-long wait for others, including the one for poliomyelitis. With its often fatal, deforming and paralyzing attacks, polio had been spreading the same fears, especially among parents, for decades. The first of several outbreaks in the United States emerged in Vermont in 1894. The last major epidemic here was in 1955. Massachusetts reported 2,000 cases of polio that summer.

One Northborough victim of polio was Janet Maccabee Richards. Now 89, Janet still has the limp left after she contracted the virus in 1944 as a 12-year-old. Janet was at Girl Scout camp in Harvard when she became ill and was placed in the infirmary.

Janet's cousin, Historical Society member Carolyn Squillante, has their grandmother's diary, which records the incident:

August 13: Went to Harvard with Elva (Janet's mother) and Vernon (her father). Brought Janet home as she had a stiff neck and back. Not feeling normal. Dr. Watson came up to see Janet and left medicine.

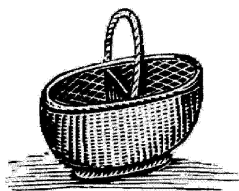
August 15: Harry (Grandfather Morse) and Elva went to Worcester and Janet remained at Memorial Hospital for a checkup.

August 18: Janet came home today. Hospital reports polio infection. Staying in bed a few days.

Janet was one of the lucky ones. Though she remembers her illness and a painful spinal tap, she recovered rather quickly and was back in school in September _ albeit with the lifelong limp. As for physical therapy or other treatment, she remembers only her mother massaging her right foot.

The disease is recalled mostly as having struck children with devastating results, but adults were victims also. President Franklin D. Roosevelt is perhaps the most famous of the latter. He was left unable to walk after being struck by polio in 1921 at age 39.

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Curator's News

by Ellen Racine

One of the more exciting recent acquisitions was a pristine copy of "I'm Forever Blowing Bubbles" by our own John William Kellette, along with a 78 orchestral recording of this waltz. A second big hit of 1922 is "Barney Google", also with a 78 record. We will be able to play both of these on our Victrola when the Museum opens again.



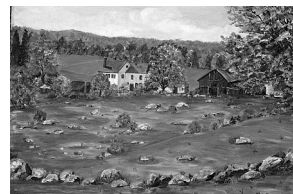
More items have been received from Alan and Ethel Rich. Alan's father, Donald Rich, had worked many years for Johnson Steel and Wire Co. in

Worcester, and we received three of his mechanical drawings, and a portfolio of 17 professional photographs of his project: "J-LOK Semi-automatic assembly equipment for handling 1000 lbs Spoolless Cores", 1960.

Donald's wife Phyllis was Northborough's school nurse from 1968 to 1984 following her predecessor, Phyllis Bostock. We now have both of Phyllis' nurses' capes in our collection. In later years she and Donald bought and sold antiques, and we have added some to our collection. There are also linens that were embellished skillfully by her mother Mabel Backlin Beckstrom, and Mabel's 1923 silk wedding dress that was hand sewn by her sister.



Phyllis had her own artistic talents and her oil painting of the Rich's farm at 25 Rutland road is pictured here.



New Accessions:

Blue print copy of Meeting House Common of 1745 drawn by John Estabrook in 1906, donated by Norm Corbin.

Welcome New Members!
Jim & Trish Holt

History Corner, continued

As more became known about the causes of the highly contagious virus, efforts to prevent it led to closing public buildings, social distancing, and swimming bans. Several lifelong town residents who were youngsters during the 1950s remember those restrictions.

"I do remember in the late 1940s and early 1950s wanting to go swimming at Solomon Pond and other local ponds and not being able to because there was an outbreak of polio in the state," said Carol Bostock. Beaches were closed; movie theaters were closed.

Jane Fletcher, another town native, said her mother, like so many others, "was scared of it. We played around the neighborhood."

Joyce Sullivan McNeil woke up with a stiff neck one morning and was rushed off to the doctor for fear she might have polio. She did not. The doctor diagnosed just a stiff neck.

In the 1955 Town Report, Tom Smith, playground director, gave a few reasons for a decline in attendance as the season progressed, adding that "of all these, probably the fear of polio was the greatest cause of this decline."

Early on, flies were thought to be polio spreaders because the disease occurred mostly in spring and summer. As a result, in the 1930s and 40s "neighborhoods were doused with the toxic pesticide DDT in the hope of banishing polio...Yet the number of cases grew larger each season," according to the History Channel website.

Ultimately, it was discovered that the virus, which attacks the gray matter of the spinal cord, spread primarily through feces, but also via airborne droplets. Hence the stress on social distancing and washing of hands, particularly after using the toilet.

Approval in 1955 of the vaccine developed by Dr. Jonas

Salk was greeted with much elation. "The news was broadcast both on television and radio, and church bells rang in cities around the United States," reports the National Museum of American History (NMAH) website.



Jonas Salk

Northborough, like scores of other communities, wasted no time setting up vaccination clinics. In his 1955 annual report, School Superintendent Roger Poole included the news that in the spring "a polio immunization clinic was run by the Board of Health with the cooperation of the School Department, at which time children in the first and second grades were given the first polio shot."

In 1956, the Board of Health reported that more than 1,500 residents under age 15 received their first and second shots, with the third shot scheduled for early 1957. That year the board held two polio vaccination clinics with a total of 1,300 shots given.

These were the first of several clinics sponsored by the town. Jo-Ann Sullivan got her first shot at one of them and was annoyed when her head was turned away strongly by a nurse. "I wanted to watch it," Jo-Ann said.

Eventually, in 1962, a cheaper and easier- to - administer oral vaccine, developed by Dr. Albert Sabin, replaced Salk's. The pendulum has swung back again, however, and now only the Salk vaccine is given in the United States. The CDC now recommends young children get four shots of the vaccine.

Thus, from these beginnings in 1955, the country soon eradicated the poliomyelitis scourge here. The last case caused by a "wild" virus in the U.S. was in 1979, according to an NMAH polio timeline.

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

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

Renewal of Membership

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

Next

Board of Directors
Meeting

Tuesday, February 9