



THE HOURGLASS

NORTHBOROUGH HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

CCXCIII

Northborough Historical Society
www.NorthboroughHistoricalSociety.org

February 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

Where Did They Come From and Where Did They Go?

Population figures for the 2020 U.S Census have yet to be released, but a look back at the 10-year numbers over the past 200 years reveals some intriguing fluctuations in the Northborough head count.

As with most cities and towns, Northborough's population grew steadily from decade to decade with a couple of glaring exceptions. From 1900 to 1910, residency here fell by 20.8 percent. Considering the population in 1900 was a mere 2,164 people, that loss of 451 faces is startling. Where did they all go?

To help figure that out, let's travel back a couple of decades before 1900. From 1870 to 1880, the town gained 172 people. By 1890, another 276 heads appeared and by 1900, another 212 had moved in. Then came the plunge. From what would be the peak for years, the 2,164 townfolk in 1900 skidded to 1,713 in 1910. It would be 1940 before the population topped 2000 again.

After 1940, however, growth skyrocketed between some censuses. For example, from 1940 to 1950, the growth rate was 31.1 percent, up from 2,386 to 3,122. Even so that was like a drop in the bucket compared to the granddaddy decade of 1950 to 1960 when growth mushroomed by 114.2 percent, from 3,122 to 6,687. Wow, where did all those people come from?

During its early years, Northborough was primarily a farming community with a handful of small industries. The 1820 U.S. census tallied 1,018 residents. Of those, 171 were listed as "engaged in agriculture". Eighty-five earned a livelihood in manufacturing. Five were denoted as unnaturalized foreigners.

It was a homogenous community of mostly native-born farmers. Among the few businesses then were grist and saw mills, blacksmiths, a nail factory and the Northborough Manufacturing Company, makers of cotton and wool cloth and yarns.

Moving ahead to the 1865 Assessors records, we find considerable industrial growth. There was a cotton mill with 36 employees; two comb factories with a total of 25 workers, and a shoe factory with 52 employees, as well as some smaller enterprises. These ventures provided jobs for about 122 men and women and helped propel population growth for a time. The once-thriving shoe business dwindled by 1870, however, likely contributing to the small 3 percent population decline from 1860 to 1870.

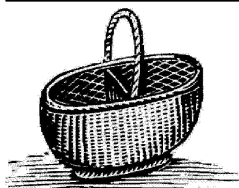
Local industry continued to grow after that with comb-making becoming the largest for many years, along with two textile mills owned by the Chapin family and David Wood. In 1899 the Westborough Chronotype reported that the Chapin mill employed "200 hands." These businesses attracted dozens of workers and their families, many from Canada.

A state census of 1885 reported 391 working in 29 manufacturing operations. Accordingly, population also inched upwards. The 1895 town census placed the population at 1,940, meaning 224 people cropped up over the next 5 years to reach the 2,164 peak in 1900.

So what else was happening here during those five years? The major project was local construction of four-miles of the Wachusett Aqueduct, including the picturesque bridge on Hudson Street. Work on the water course began here in the spring of 1896 and ended in fall 1897, according to reports by Society members Norm Corbin, Forest Lyford and the late Bob Kennerly.

In June 1896, a contractor for the works here told the Marlborough Enterprise that "about 200 Italians" would be arriving in a week from New York.

(continued on page 2)



Curator's News

by Ellen Racine

Tucked among the items from the Alan and Ethel Rich donation of December was a pottery pitcher from 1850 that Phyllis Rich had obtained from the Warren family after Alfred and Olive passed away. And speaking of the Warrens, the transcription of Rosa Crosby Warren's diaries is near completion. There are eleven books spanning the years from 1866 through 1948; the last few years were written by her daughter Olive. Carolyn Squillante has enjoyed transcribing

them and has shared entries of town and world events with me. Carolyn grew up next door to the Warrens and knew Olive and her brother Alfred. The Warren's barn is now Mayo's Pet Store at 173 W. Main Street. According to Dave Benton, the Warren men always had some kind of business: farming, rendering, poultry supplies and wet wash (laundry) to name a few. It appears that Rosa, her sister Ellen and sometimes Olive were very busy washing and ironing.



William H. & Rosa Warren



Olive in her later years

While working on finding more space in the archive, I cleaned out half of a file drawer of documents, photos, etc. that belong with other towns. I have mailed them to the appropriate historical societies and will hand deliver the bulkier books, maps, etc.

One item that will be donated is a Meerschau pipe that was awarded to Cassius Rich's brother William. A little research revealed that he had received it from the G.A.R. Post 135 in Shrewsbury in the 1930s.

Another object is a bronze commemorative medal from Norton Company for 40 years of service to Charles Lucius Allen, 1938 of Worcester – no Northborough connection.

History Corner, continued

A cluster of primitive dwellings, called the Italian Camp, was being erected. Other laborers were already at work clearing wooded land. Engineers, surveyors and others associated with the pipeline also took up residence in town.



Men digging the Aqueduct



The Italian Camp

"Assistant Engineer Charles E. Wells ... has leased Nath. Whittaker's house...and will soon move his family to town," the Enterprise reported.

At its peak in August 1897, the workforce here totaled 2,001. Among other effects, this surge impacted town schools as noted in the Superintendent's reports of the day. Pupil count went from 356 in February 1896 to 428 a year later. The next year, when aqueduct work pretty much finished locally, the count dropped back to 368.

So, between the aqueduct workers and growth in local industries, Northborough population flourished in the last decade of the 19th

century. After 1900, likely most of the waterworks laborers had moved on and the top local industries waned. The decorative hair comb industry faltered due to changes in fashion. Also, the Wood and Chapin mills closed in 1900 and 1908 respectively after their owners died.

Then came the eye-popping 114 percent growth from 1950 to 1960. Why? There was, of course, the 19-year national baby boom beginning in 1946. That added 197 new citizens to Northborough in 1959 alone. The big driver here though was residential development. In 1949, the town had 743 dwellings, according to Town Reports. By 1960, that number had risen to 1,729 homes. During that span, two sweeping family-friendly neighborhoods sprang up - Northgate, with its Cape-style homes, and the Crestwood Drive / Riley Road swath, with its ranch styles.

Unlike past times, few of the new breadwinners worked in town. Many were WWII veterans proud to raise their young families in new homes in a quiet town and commute to work elsewhere.

Membership

Annual Dues:

- Single — \$20
- Student/Senior — \$15
- Family — \$45
- Lifetime — \$250

Mail dues to:

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

Please make checks payable to
Northborough Historical Society

Dues are due in September each year

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, March 9



Northborough
Historical Society



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Questions? Email northborough_historical_society@charter.net