



# THE HOURGLASS

## NORTHBOROUGH HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

CCXCVI

Northborough Historical Society  
www.NorthboroughHistoricalSociety.org

May 2021

### Northborough Historical Society Annual Meeting

The Northborough Historical Society **Annual Meeting** will be held via ZOOM on Wednesday, May 26 at 7:30 p.m. Current members will receive an invitation to the meeting via email, along with information on how to connect to ZOOM. The annual report will be emailed prior to the meeting.

To add or update an email address, please email: [northborough\\_historical\\_society@charter.net](mailto:northborough_historical_society@charter.net)

Those without internet access may join by phone. For information, call 508-393-3869



### History Corner

by Kathy Pierce

#### Miss Ball Goes to Dixieland

Nearly 200 years ago, Northborough-born Louisa Ball set off on a 700-mile, three-week journey by boat, train and stage coach to teach at a private academy in Danville, Virginia. While there, the young New England woman got a taste of life as a well-to-do Southern belle.

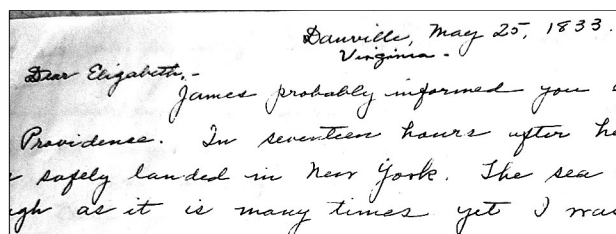
"How easy white inhabitants live here compared with those at the north. Though I think I should prefer doing a little more of the work to having so many servants and seeing that all their tasks are performed daily," Louisa wrote in a May 1833 letter to her sister, Elizabeth, back in Massachusetts.



Louisa, born in 1804, and Elizabeth, born in 1812, were the daughters of Dr. Stephen Ball II and Lydia Lincoln Ball, who raised 13 children in the spacious antique house still standing at 38 Main Street, just east of the library.

Her letter is part of a copious collection of Ball/Barnes family records and memorabilia donated to the Society in 2019 by Gilbert and Laura Graves of New Hampshire.

The eight-page letter recounts the rigors and pleasures of

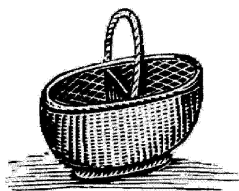


Louisa's long trek to Danville, a small city on the Dan River in south/central Virginia. She suffered seasickness when the boat from Providence to New York rounded the rough waters around Point Judith, R.I. But she took particular delight in a 16-mile train ride. "It was the most pleasant way of traveling that I ever experienced, We had no idea of the velocity with which the cars moved except fixing our eyes upon some fixed object on the way."

The last leg of her trip by stage coach from Richmond was not as enjoyable. There were few "public houses" to stop at and refresh the horses or passengers. "I was sorry that I came that way on account of the unpleasantness of the roads...The heat became very oppressive two days before I got here, but we suffered less from it by riding in the woods."

Once in Danville, she stayed at "one of the best boarding places" in town. It was on a plantation owned by a wealthy widow and had "an abundance of the good things on earth." Among those was fresh buttermilk churned every day with a "pitcher of sweet and buttermilk placed upon the table three times a day."

(continued on page 2)



### Curator's News

by Ellen Racine

The Museum Trustees met in person for the first time since last April in the meeting hall. It was so nice to see everyone again, even with our masks.

Now that more people have had their vaccinations and have been able to escape their confines, we have had fewer enquiries. One interesting enquiry was from William Friedlander, a possible descendant of the Huntfam-

ily. The dates confirmed that he was related to Capt. Jeremiah Hunt, 1785 - 1875 of 140 Main Street. I sent him copies of the house plan, the Historical Commission Survey, a newspaper article and genealogy, and, thanks to Bob Ellis' previous research, this was an easy one.

Another request from Allan Bezanson involved the date when the Northborough boundary line changed (1807) that switched the Stirrup Brook Farm from Marlborough to Northborough, and also how Rte. 20 changed when it was straightened in 1930. Our maps of 1860 and 1973 revealed the changes.

I can't thank Lois Smith, Ken Bennett and Carolyn Squillante enough for all the work they have done over the past year. Lois and Ken have kept our town's history alive on Facebook, and Kathy Pierce and I have answered many enquiries from that. New members have joined because of all of our efforts. Carolyn Squillante is working on transcribing the last diary of Rosa Crosby Warren, and Carol Bostock is working on another one of Rev. Joseph Allen's journals - this one is about the Lyman School in Westborough.

**History Corner, continued**

In mid-May she enjoyed an apple pie made with apples grown that year and there were plenty of strawberries and cherries. "We shall have fruit now until October," she added.

In total, 44 people lived on the plantation including 15 so-called black "servants". Though Louisa referred to them as servants, she also used the term "their owners" and noted that their "huts are made of logs."

These "servants" cooked, washed, ironed, set tables and kept the dining room in order. During meals, "two generally stand by the table while we are eating with a bunch of long feathers in their hands to prevent the flies from settling on the food," she wrote.

One servant would attend to her every morning and evening, going so far as to take off her shoes and stockings as was customary - until she stopped the practice. "I do not wish for this sort of assistance."

In another anecdote, she told of a merry visit to a "very large, handsomely furnished" plantation. While there, she enjoyed a jaunt to the riverside in a carriage laden with female passengers, with males in the party trotting along on horses. "Ladies here ride in carriages and men ride by the side on horseback," she explained. Four servants also went along to tend the horses. Once at the river, the group rowed about "till the glimmering twilight reminded us it was time to return."

She also attended several dancing parties, which were "a very fashionable amusement here." On one of these occasions, a stage "drawn by six horses carried 11 ladies (other boarders) to the ball."

Louisa's chatty letter is full of her observations about life and social experiences in Danville, but she says virtually nothing about her teaching role. Nor did she indicate how she happened to be there, but the internet yielded some clues.

It appears by her letter that a Mr. and Mrs. Holbrook ran the school. Though she never gives their first names or her connection to them, an online search of Danville history finds that a Luther Holbrook founded a boys school in 1817. This evolved into Danville Male Academy which later admitted girls. When Louisa was there, Levi Holbrook, born in Holden, was affiliated with the school. He was married to Eliza Grout, who was born in Northborough. Eliza's sister, Susan, was the widow of Daniel Holbrook Jr. and later married Capt. Cyrus Gale of this town. So most likely the Ball family was acquainted with the Grouts/Holbrooks and knew of the Danville school.

Louisa wrote glowingly of "Mr. Fitch," a new teacher at the school. Two years later, she married Leonard M. Fitch. At some point, he became a dentist, they had two children and returned north. Louisa died in 1881 and is buried alongside Leonard in Howard Street and Cemetery.

**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](mailto:Historian@NorthboroughHistoricalSociety.org)  
Ellen: [Info@NorthboroughHistoricalSociety.org](mailto:Info@NorthboroughHistoricalSociety.org)



**Membership**

**Annual Dues:**

Single — \$20	Mail dues to:
Student/Senior — \$15	Northborough Historical Society
Family — \$45	Membership Secretary
Lifetime — \$250	P.O. Box 661
	Northborough, MA 01532

*Please make checks payable to  
Northborough Historical Society*

Dues are due in September each year

**A red dot on the address label below indicates  
that your membership is not current**

**Additions to the  
Nominating Committee Report**

**The following names have been added to  
the Nominating Committee report**

<b>Board of Directors</b>	<b>Term Ending</b>
<i>Kathleen Howland</i>	<i>2023</i>
<i>Karen Ruszkoski</i>	<i>2023</i>

<b>Kitchen Committee</b>	<b>Term Ending</b>
<i>Marcia Parsneau</i>	<i>2024</i>