



THE HOURGLASS

NORTHBOROUGH HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

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Northborough Historical Society
www.NorthboroughHistoricalSociety.org

June 2022



Next Meeting & Program: Friday, September 23, 2022

The Burnett Garfield House. Deborah Costine, a trustee for Southborough's Open Land Foundation, will present a treasure trove of pictures and historical stories of the incredible and fascinating Burnett family, the many famous persons connected to this home, and the steps taken to restore the home to its former grandeur.

The meeting will be held at 7:00 p.m., at the Society building, 52 Main Street, Northborough. The event is free and open to the public.

Masks will be available, but mask wearing will be optional.



History Corner

by Kathy Pierce

So What's Your Story?

A memoir is a firsthand account of the writer's life. Unlike an autobiography, it focuses mainly on a particular period in that life. That is how Dorrie Coffin Prouty wrote "That's Another Story", a reminiscence of her young life during the Great Depression that began in 1929.

Ms. Prouty, born in 1925, was the granddaughter of Dr. John L. Coffin, a noted Boston physician and prominent Northborough citizen, and his wife, Annie, whose large brick home still stands graciously in its neighborhood.

"Shadycroft was the name of my grandparents' home on (22) Pleasant in Northborough, Massachusetts. I loved to visit this busy household, people coming and going, telephone, doorbell ringing, tradesmen or neighbors chatting in the kitchen, company for tea, or an invitation to stay for dinner if it was late afternoon," the memoir begins.

While growing up in Westborough, she spent many



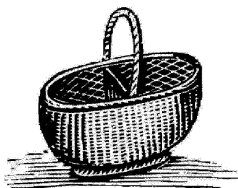
hours in her grandparents' house, which included their twin adult daughters, Louisa and Julia, as well as her grandmother's sister, 80-year-old Aunt Charlotte. There was also a permanent boarder and occasional paying guests who came from the city for a vacation in the country.

The twin sisters never married and lived in the home together for 65 years. They graduated from college circa 1903, with Julia becoming a teacher and Louisa serving for many years as an assistant librarian in town. She mostly walked back and forth to work, often coming home for dinner and returning for evening hours at the library.

Though Ms. Prouty's father lost his job and the family struggled financially during the Depression, her memoir of those times in Northborough presents a charming, comfortable and peaceful snapshot of life in the still pastoral town of just under 2,000 residents. She talks of summer mornings passed in Aunt Charlotte's painting studio on the third floor of the old house. Charlotte hand-decorated and sold pieces of porcelain tableware adorned with blossoms, leaves and vines. The studio "smelled of turpentine and the heat was unbearable in the summer time."

"We didn't talk much, but I loved to watch... We left the hot room and the paint smells, descended the attic stairs, then to the first floor where Aunt tried to solve the daily newspaper crossword puzzle and I found another mem-

(continued on page 4)



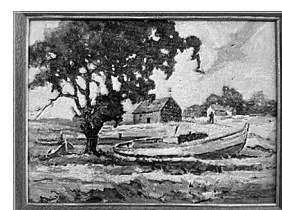
Curator's News

by Ellen Racine

The Northborough Art Guild's Annual Art Show and Sale was held on June 11th and 12th chaired by Diane Lyford. Flower arrangements were designed by the Northborough Garden Club. This year we displayed Walter A. Peinze's paintings and offered them for sale. Six of them sold and we were thrilled to have them

enjoyed by the public again. Proceeds from these sales will benefit the Historical Society.

Forty-five people also visited the upstairs museum where we shared stories, history, and sold several books. My thanks to Diane Guldner, Diane Rollins, Jo-Ann Sullivan, Nancy Harlan, Cathy Duchesneau and the Bennetts for hosting the museum during the two days. If you would like to view the paintings, ask the hosts on Sunday, June 26 or give me a call at 508-393-2343.



Northborough Historical Society

P.O. Box 661 · 52 Main Street · Northborough, MA 01532

Program Schedule 2022 - 2023

Meetings start at 7:00 p.m.

September 23, 2022 *The Burnett Garfield House.* Deborah Costine, a trustee for Southborough's Open Land Foundation, will present a treasure trove of pictures and historical stories of the incredible and fascinating Burnett family, the many famous persons connected to this home, and the steps taken to restore the home to its former grandeur.

October 28, 2022 *Challenger: Soaring with Christa McAuliffe* as performed by Judith Kalaora, a professional actor, and Director of History at Play. This multi-media Immersive Living History Experience pays homage to Christa's life, her role in the Teacher in Space Program and as a crew member on the NASA Challenger Space Shuttle. (Location - TBA)

December 2, 2022 *Before Brooklyn: The Unsung Heroes Who Helped Break Baseball's Color Barrier.* Ted Reinstein, a reporter for "Chronicle" at WCVB-TV Channel 5, will talk about his latest book, a historical journal of little-known heroes who fought segregation in baseball. Hear this inspiring story of ordinary, everyday Americans who performed extraordinary acts to overturn historic injustices.

January 27, 2023 *The Local Historic Districts of Northborough.* Norm Corbin, the Chair of the Northborough Historic District Commission and a NHS member, will provide a virtual "tour" and informative presentation of Northborough's historic districts.

February 24, 2023 *Code-Breaking.* Chuck Pross, a retired NASA engineer, will present the intriguing history of code-breaking and the role it played in significant WWII events including the pivotal role coding played in the Allies' final victory. He will further enlighten us on the vital role codes play in today's society.

March 24, 2023 *Northborough's Nineteenth Century Lyceum* by Kathleen Howland, Ph.D. This presentation will outline the early days of "adult education" as we hear about the speakers, many of whom were renowned orators, who presented educational, political and social issues at the town's Lyceum as early as the 1700's and through the late 1800's.

April 28, 2023 *18th to Early 20th Century Medicine: Doctors and their Times.* Esteemed physician Dale Magee M.D. has, in retirement, devoted his time to researching local doctors and historical medical practices. Dr. Magee is an animated speaker with extensive knowledge of medical history, medical practice during specific eras, and when and how science replaced outdated medical theories.

May 19, 2023 *Eleanor Roosevelt - The First Lady of The World* as portrayed by Sheryl Faye, a professional actor. Eleanor Roosevelt is one of the top ten most admired people of the 20th century. She advocated for the rights of women, minorities, immigrants and refugees, and accomplished many historical firsts as the First Lady. In her words "...as individuals we live cooperatively, and, to the best of our ability, serve the community in which we live...our own success, to be real, we must contribute." - Eleanor Roosevelt

Officers, Board & Committee Members 2022 - 2023

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	Kathleen Howland
	Karen Ruszkoski
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	Peter Stone
	Chuck Liljestrand
Kitchen	Cindy Atwood
	Marcia Parsneau
	Rhonda Van Buren
Legislative	Ernie Racine
	Kenneth Bennett
	Rob Van Buren
Nominating	Kenneth Bennett
	Jane Fletcher
	Laura Ziton
Ways and Means	Michael Duchesneau
	Mark Bashour
	Michael Mills

Thank you to those who
have volunteered to serve
the Society for the next year.



Northborough
Historical Society



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when all of the purchases of all of our members and
friends are aggregated, this donation from the
AmazonSmile Foundation can be a significant contribution
to our funding.

Questions? Email:

northborough_historical_society@charter.net

Membership

At the May 20, 2022 Annual Meeting, a
proposal to raise annual membership dues
was approved. New rates are as follows.

Annual Dues

Single — \$30

Student / Senior — \$25

Family — \$55

Lifetime — \$500

Send 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 each September

ber of the family to visit.”

Warm afternoons might be whiled away, after naps, in a roofed, open-sided summer house on the property. It was the author’s favorite place. “One by one they would arrive bringing a sewing basket or reading material… Grandpa stayed in the house, perhaps to get away from so many women,” she wrote. The summer house blew down in the 1938 hurricane.

Shadycroft had a large barn, which never held a car during Ms. Prouty’s years there. Her father, Holland Coffin, told of hitching up a horse-drawn conveyance every evening and driving to the local train station to pick up his father after a day in his Boston medical office.

People mostly got about town by walking or took a bus for longer distances, she recalled. The grocery store delivered, local farmers peddled fruits and berries, and the “fish man” came Friday morning. “When both my sister and I were at my grandparents, we were given a list along with a shopping basket and allowed to walk downtown to the store. After making our purchases, we stopped at Shattuck’s Drug Store to purchase a nickel ice cream,” Ms. Prouty wrote.

The 60-page, self-published, spiral-bound memoir is printed on heavy stock with photographs. It was donated to the society by JoAnn Sullivan, who came across it a few years ago in the Carlson Orchard store in Harvard.

Besides the gentle Northborough memories, it recounts Ms. Prouty’s young life in Westborough and her family’s survival efforts during the hard Depression years. “Everything our family did between 1930 and 1940 was tinted by ‘The Depression’, “she mused.

Her father was a salesman with International Business Machines when the crash hit in 1929. Factories weren’t buying IBM products after that and her father’s paychecks stopped coming. Though college-educated and a WWI veteran, he was unemployed for several years. He took a series of small jobs until landing regular work with the Works Progress Administration, a government program. Her mother earned money by selling baked goods.

As the depression eased, her father borrowed money to buy a Red and White grocery store franchise in Littleton and the family moved there. Besides running the store, Mr. Coffin served as town clerk and a selectman.

By 1964, only Louisa Coffin remained in the Northborough family manse. Dr. Coffin died there in 1935. His wife, Annie, lived to 94, dying in the home in 1951. When 81-year-old Julia died at home in 1964, Louisa moved into a retirement home. “No one was hospitalized,” the author noted.

The contents of the house were auctioned and the home was sold. The elderly sisters had scraped along meagerly for many years, and the proceeds of the sales would pay for Louisa’s care in the home. Ms. Prouty opted not to attend the auction. “I felt I was losing a part of my childhood and I wasn’t ready to let it go.”

Ms. Prouty later became a school teacher on Long Island and once won a Teacher of the Year award. She died in 2013 at age 88 in Chapel Hill, NC.

Every life is a story and Dorothy Coffin Prouty tenderly preserved the memory of hers for future generations of her family. Importantly for the Historical Society, it’s a valued addition to our mission of preserving the story of Northborough’s past.



**Next
Board of Directors
Meeting
Tuesday, September 13**

Donations

It is now easier than ever to make a donation to Northborough Historical Society

Donations can be made online at our website.

www.northboroughhistoricalsociety.org/donate.html