



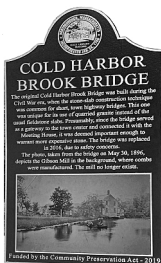
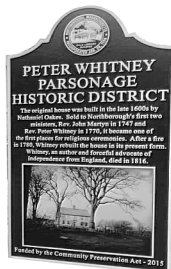
THE HOURGLASS

NORTHBOROUGH HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

CCCX

Northborough Historical Society
www.NorthboroughHistoricalSociety.org

January 2023



Next Meeting & Program: Friday, January 27, 2023

The Local Historic Districts of Northborough. Norm Corbin, the Chair of the Northborough Historic District Commission and a Northborough Historical Society member, will provide a virtual tour and an informative presentation of Northborough's historic districts.

The meeting will be held at 7 p.m., at the Society building, 52 Main St., Northborough, MA. The event is free and open to the public. Masks required.



History Corner

by Ken Bennett

Some Local History of Contra Dancing

Back in the late 1970s, my wife Debbie and I met each other at a square dance convention in Danvers, MA. After we got married, we did not do any more club square dancing. About 18 years ago I was curious about a contra dance sign in the center of Berlin on route 62 that I was noticing. After a long time, I finally checked it out and have been hooked on contra dancing ever since. The dances in the local area were on Saturday nights usually from September through June with Berlin on the first Saturday, Worcester on the second Saturday, Northborough on the third Saturday, and Westford on the fourth Saturday. Quite often I would also go to the weekly contra dances at the Concord Scout House on Monday and Thursday evenings.

So, what is contra dancing? Contra dancing is a popular form of recreation enjoyed by people of all ages in over 200 cities and towns across the United States. It has a long history that includes European origins with over 100 years of cultural influences from many different sources. Almost all contra dances are danced to LIVE MUSIC.

The music played includes, but is not limited to, Irish, Scottish, old-time, and French-Canadian folk tunes. The fiddle is considered the core instrument, though other stringed instruments can be used, such as the guitar, banjo, bass, and mandolin, as well as the piano, accordion, flute, clarinet, and more. Some contra dances are even done to techno music. Music can consist of a

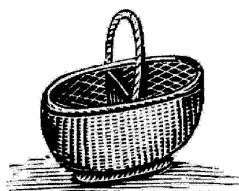
single tune or a medley of tunes, and key changes during the dance are common.

Is Contra Dancing similar to Square Dancing? The calls are similar and there is a caller, but square dancing is more difficult in that it is done with four couples, and contra dance is done with two couples. In contra dancing, couples dance in lines with another couple for around 30 seconds and then pass on to the next couple in the line to repeat the calls. When I did club square dancing, I had to take 20 lessons before I could attend a club dance. Square dancers were expected to dress for the occasion and not make mistakes. With contra dancing, it is a relaxed event with people dressing to be comfortable (some will wear shorts) and totally new people are welcomed and encouraged to come. It is a very friendly atmosphere, and nobody gets upset when mistakes are made.

The Northborough Contra Dance started in the mid-1990s with Jon Weinberg who organized and played a hammered dulcimer in his band Polymorphous String Band. The dances were held at First Parish Unitarian Church at 40 Church Street in the surplus army chapel that was moved there after the Church building burnt down in 1945. Jon continued to organize this dance for 14 years. Lucy



(continued on page 2)



Curator's News

by Ellen Racine

The Assabet Club was organized in 1899 by prominent men in town: Thomas H. Blair, C. F. Palmer, Rev. J. C. Kent, W. M. Farwell, Asa B. Fay, C. J. Mack and others. Its purpose "...shall be the promotion of mutual acquaintance and social intercourse among its members and the consideration of matters of public welfare and more especially those of local interest."

Members were voted in, dues charged, lectures presented and women were invited upon occasion. Cards were played,

debates held, and pool and billiard tables were added to the entertainment. Gambling, alcohol and profanity were prohibited and would result in dismissal.

They first met at Blair's Factory and later were located upstairs in the G.A.R. building beside Trinity Church, until the building burned in 1922.



The G.A.R. building is on the left, decorated for 1916.

They then moved across the street to the second floor of the Arcade building, later

the site of Shattuck's Pharmacy.



The Arcade Building

The club rented their space to the Foresters Club, and later joined with the Odd Fellows Club. By 1926 it appears to have been disbanded.

Our thanks to Walter Jones for donating the collection of their bills, receipts and miscellaneous papers, and previously the four Secretary and Treasurer's notebooks.

History Corner, continued

and Gary Phillips took over the dance in 2009. Besides doing an awesome job running the dance, they did a great job setting up a website and starting a Facebook page which were major factors that enabled the dance to continue. They ran the dance for one year and then my wife Debbie and I took over the dance in 2010. We have had many different bands play for the Northborough dance including Jon Weinberg's bands Allemande North and Wilde Card, on many occasions. The last dance that Jon played for us was November 16, 2019, with Sandy LaFleur calling and the Wild Card band (with Vince O'Donnell on fiddle, Robin Kynoch on whistles and button accordion, and Susan Creighton on piano). Jon played guitar and not the hammer dulcimer because he was very ill at the time and sadly died a few months later. Our last dance before Covid 19 hit was February 15, 2020, with Tod Whittemore calling. Tod is famous for starting and running the weekly Thursday night dances for 12 years and also for singing and yodeling square dances.

Tod started the weekly Thursday series in February of 1978 at the Cambridge YWCA. I also ran some summer contra dances at the

Finnish Heritage Hall in Rutland MA for several years. A few years ago, the Worcester folks asked me to be on their committee where I served until this September. The Worcester Contra Dance was the first large dance to bring back indoor contra dancing in Massachusetts since Covid shut everything down. A year ago, we started having monthly dances from November 2021 to last June. Worcester has had monthly dances this fall starting in October to the recent dance on January 14, 2023, and has dances scheduled through June. Northborough had dances last May and June and is planning to have dances in February, March, and May. We hope to have Tod Whittemore call again for us in Northborough at our March dance.

In the url below, scrolling down you will come to four YouTube links, one is Jon Weinberg's band Allemande North at Tower Hill Botanic Garden, and the other three of his bands playing at the Northborough Contra Dance.

<https://northborocontra.com/jon-weinberg/>

Welcome New Member!
David Backus

Next
Board of Directors
Meeting
Tuesday, February 14

AmazonSmile is Ending

Amazon is will end its AmazonSmile program on February 20, 2023. Until then the Society will still receive credit earned by your Amazon purchases.

<https://smile.amazon.com/ch/04-6156604>

Thank you to all who supported the Society through AmazonSmile

Custodian Needed

The Property Committee is looking for a custodian. If you are interested in the position, or if you would like more information, please contact Paul Derosier at stude38paul@yahoo.com or phone 508-361-7321.



The flagpole restoration is complete and our flags are flying high!
Many thanks to Chuck Liljestrand for driving this project.

Membership

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

If there is a red dot in the address panel below, it is time to renew your membership.

► 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