



# THE HOURGLASS

## NORTHBOROUGH HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

CCCXX

Northborough Historical Society  
www.NorthboroughHistoricalSociety.org

September 2024



**Next Meeting & Program: Friday, September 27, 2024. Backyard Astronomy.** Jim Zebrowski, from the Aldrich Astronomical Society, will present a talk on backyard astronomy. This program will provide practical tips for exploring the skies with Jim's demonstration of a six-inch Dobsonian telescope and an 80mm refractor. Learn how to use a smartphone for sky navigation.

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 will be optional.



## History Corner

by Norm Corbin

### Early Boroughs Archaeology – The Woodland Time Period

This is a continuation of my previous article about the early inhabitants of our Borough's region. The previous article reviewed the *Paleo Time Period* (14,000 to 10,000 years ago) and the *Archaic Time period* (10,000 to 3,000 years ago). This current article reviews local sites from the *Woodland Time Period* (about 3,000 to 500 years ago).

During the Woodland Time Period indigenous inhabitants were farmers who also hunted with bow and arrow and cooked in pottery. About 1,000 years ago, inhabitants of Massachusetts began farming corn and other crops, which gave them more storable foods and allowed them to live together in groups through the cold months of the year. Woodland artifacts like arrowheads and tools have been found at several Northborough locations. Some are on display in the Northborough Historical Society Museum. There are two very significant Woodland archaeological sites located nearby; the *Cedar Swamp Archaeological District* in Westborough and the *Flagg Swamp Rockshelter* in Marlborough.

The *Cedar Swamp* site is about 3 miles from the Northborough town line near the interchange for Interstates 495 and 90. This site was extensively studied with results reported in the *Bulletin of the Massachusetts Archaeological Society*, Vol. 53, No. 1



Stone Artifacts from the Stirrup Brook area of Northborough on display in the Historical Society Museum

(1992). Cedar Swamp is an area of more than 2,600 acres of wetlands that include the headwaters of the Sudbury River. The archaeological artifacts, dated from 2,655 to 390 years ago, are primarily found on a 22-acre island within the swamp. There is also evidence of stone tool-making at a stone outcrop on the northern edge of the swamp.

Other features of this site include a fire hearth and a large refuse pile containing animal fragments such as turtle shells and bones. The use of turtles as a food resource was widely practiced by prehistoric man in New England. Turtle species identified at Cedar Swamp include; painted, snapping, spotted, among others. Snapping, box, painted, and spotted turtles are still present in the swamp today. The archeologist proposed that Cedar Swamp was likely a winter site where the inhabitants would have collected turtles in the early spring. Additional archaeological deposits found at the site include; wood, bark, nutshells, seeds, stems and roots.

The **Flagg Swamp Rockshelter** site is about 2.5 miles from the Northborough town line and was located along the highway extension to Hudson, near the current interchange for Interstates 495 and 290. Rockshelters are places where bedrock overhangs provided people with natural shelter protecting them from the weather elements. This rockshelter was identified as being occupied in the Late Archaic through the Woodland periods. It is proposed that the shelter was a winter camp, and because of its small size, was thought likely to have been a location as a hunting blind for a particular seasonal activity rather than a habitation site.

The site was discovered in September 1978 during an archaeological survey as part of the highway extension project. The site was fully excavated before its complete destruction for the highway in 1980. Results are published in the *Bulletin of the Massachusetts Archaeological Society*, Vol. 67, No. 1 (2006) and in the report *Ancient Winters: The Archaeology of the Flagg Swamp Rockshelter in Marlborough, Massachusetts Historical Commis-*

(continued on page 2)

## Northborough Applefest 2024 - September 19, 20, 21 and 22

### Events at Northborough Historical Society

**Saturday and Sunday, September 21 & September 22 12 noon – 4 p.m.**

**Northborough Historical Society Museum.** Visit our Museum and take a dive into Northborough's rich history.

Explore our exhibits, and discover the stories that shaped this community.

**Applefest Art in Bloom.** Art work from local artists, accompanied by stunning floral arrangements, showcase the creativity of Northborough's artistic community. Sponsored by the Northborough Art Guild and the Northborough Garden Club.

**Northborough Historical Society's Famous Ice Cream Social!** Featuring ice cream sundaes, our homemade root beer, and root beer floats.

**On Saturday, September 21 only!**

Our ice-cold root beer will be available for purchase at the Historical Society information booth on Blake Street.



SEPTEMBER 19, 20, 21 & 22

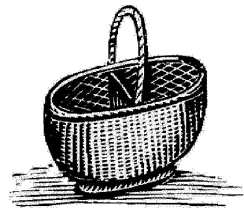
History Corner, continued

sion (2011). The later report is very readable for those who are not professional archeologists.

Stone tools found at the site include points, knives, scrapers, awls and a large axe. Spearpoints were the most common type of point found and would have been used as tips for throwing spears. Ceramic pot sherds were typical for their time period, and represent some of the earliest ceramics in New England. One of the most unexpected results was the discovery of elk bones. This was the first time elk bones had been found in an archaeological site in Massachusetts. Other mammal bones found at the site include white-tailed deer, beaver, muskrat, woodchuck, rabbit, raccoon, fox, bobcat, and skunk. They mention that the most exciting find of the dig was a nearly complete bear skull. Its jaw

bone had been placed on top of the skull as if showing appreciation and respect for the bear. The specialists also identified bones of two other animals that are or had been extinct in Massachusetts: turkey (this turkey was different from those we see today) and heath hen. These small to medium-sized ground dwelling birds were once abundant in the scattered areas of open country within the eastern forests. Reptiles included four varieties of turtle as represented by more than 1,000 pieces of shell. Most abundant were spotted turtles and painted turtles. Fish bones were found from several species including tomcod, alewife, eel, brook trout, and perch.

As you can see, our Boroughs lands have been important to indigenous peoples for many thousands of years.



Curator’s  
News  
by Ellen Racine

One request that came in over the summer asked if we had any portraits done by Robert Peckham in the early 1800s. I remembered Bob Kennerly mentioning him, and I found the painting in question. Up until that time the artist of our Isaac Davis (1749-1826) painting was unknown. Isaac Davis operated a tannery and was part owner in two cotton mills. His portrait is displayed in the museum.

We also received several boxes of books, papers, town reports, etc. from the Library. They are disbanding their History Room and their resources are now ours to share. We are thankful that they thought of transferring the materials to our facility.

Next  
Board of Directors  
Meeting  
Tuesday, October 8



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.

Information about future programs and more is available on our website.  
[www.NorthboroughHistoricalSociety.org](http://www.NorthboroughHistoricalSociety.org)

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