



THE HOURGLASS

NORTHBOROUGH HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

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Northborough Historical Society
www.NorthboroughHistoricalSociety.org

November 2024



Photo credit: Phoenix-Five, CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons

Next Meeting & Program: Friday, December 6, 2024. Beaver Meadows to Farmed Wetlands and Back. Forest Lyford will discuss how former beaver activity helped shape the drainage patterns and the distribution of organic-rich soils in Northborough, the modification of wetland areas by farming, and recent beaver activities. His discussion will include how these industrious creatures alter streams in ways that are both beneficial to wetland ecology and, at times, challenging to humans.

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 – Native Trails

This article focuses on Native American Trails that existed in our region, and their use by early European colonists. Well before any European colonization of North America, Native Americans had trails that acted as routes to food sources and neighboring tribal nations. Four significant trails have been identified within the Boroughs region: The Old Connecticut Path, The Bay Path, one trail connecting Marlborough and Grafton, and The Narragansett Trail. The attached map by Michael Weishan compares Native American trails and villages to current day roads and towns. I've highlighted the four trails of interest on the map.



Map Overlaying Native Trails and Current Day Roads by Michael Weishan of the Southborough Historical Society. Highlights for the 4 Trails added by Norm Corbin

The Old Connecticut Path

The Connecticut Path was the major trail connecting Massachusetts Bay to the Connecticut River. It headed due west from Boston, then southwest from Sudbury going through Hopkinton and Westborough on the way to the Connecticut River near Hartford.

When the Massachusetts Bay Colony in Boston ran short of grain during the early 1630s, Nipmuc farmers from the Connecticut River Valley brought maize to them along this path.

The first Englishman known to travel along this path was John Oldham of Watertown. Oldham's trek was reported in Gov. John Winthrop's journal on September 4, 1633. His safe journey fanned the interest of groups from Cambridge, Dorchester and Watertown to relocate to Connecticut. In 1636, Thomas Hooker was at odds with the colony leadership in Cambridge. He led a group of about 100 of his followers along this path to

establish a settlement near current day Hartford Connecticut. Today he is called "The Father of Connecticut" because of his involvement in founding the Connecticut Colony.

The Bay Path

This path headed west from Sudbury, where it separated from the Old Connecticut Path and led to the Connecticut River near current day Springfield, Massachusetts. From Sudbury it went through current day Marlborough, Northborough, Shrewsbury, and Worcester toward Springfield. This path became the route of westward colonial settlement starting with Cambridge then Watertown, then the Sudbury and Marlborough Plantations. It eventually became the northern Boston Post Road, a key transportation route for colonial New England. In 1645, John Winthrop Jr. is known to have traveled this path on his way to Springfield as part of his overland journey through southern New England.

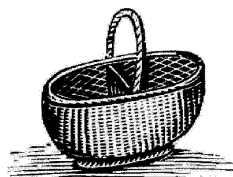
The Trail connecting Marlborough and Grafton

A key attribute of this trail is that it connected the native settlements in Marlborough and Grafton. Both settlements were converted to "Praying Towns" by Rev. John Eliot in the mid-1600s. The Marlborough natives were part of the Pennacook Federation of tribes that inhabited the valleys of the Merrimack and Connecticut Rivers. Locally, they were affiliated with the village called *Wamesit*, located where the Concord River emptied into the Merrimack River. The Marlborough location was called *Okommakamesit*. Their planting field was very near current day downtown Marlborough. In 1643, they had the foresight to request and were granted land by the General Court in Boston. This was well before the European settlers were granted the Marlborough Plantation land in 1656.

Grafton was the royal seat of the Nipmuc Nation and called *Hassanamesit*. Their territory included Central Massachusetts and adjacent portions of Connecticut and Rhode Island. It is estimated that there were 5,000 to 6,000 Nipmucs when the Pilgrims landed in 1620. Today, the Tribe is "state-acknowledged". Their reservation land in Grafton was granted in 1728.

This trail crossed the southeastern corner of Northborough. It started at the Old Bay Path near the cur-

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Curator's News

by Ellen Racine

With a grant from ARPA funding, our Meeting Hall is getting a face lift! The ceiling has been plastered, painted and new lighting will be installed. The contractor, Upper Construction, has done a wonderful job with our antique

building. Our thanks go to Mike Duchesneau for pursuing this opportunity, and to the Selectboard of Northborough for their support. Thanks also to Property Committee members Chuck Liljestrand, Paul Derosier, Rob Van Buren and Peter Stone for all their time supervising, removing furniture and picture frame molding, rescheduling rentals and touching up our meeting room.



The Plasterer

History Corner, continued

rent center of Marlborough, then along the southern shore of Lake Williams to the base of Rock Hill in Northborough. It continued southwest over Rock Hill onto the old Westborough State Hospital property then between Little Chauncy and Chauncy ponds to connect with the Old Connecticut Path in Grafton. Rock Hill is where there are the distribution centers of FedEx and A. Duie Pyle, Inc. on Bartlett Street. One can easily imagine Reverend Elliot traversing this trail as he taught Christian values to the Praying Town natives. In H. Ayres book, *The Great Trail of New England*, he documents that in June of 1675 Ephrain Curtis escorted several Mohegan tribe members to their lands in Connecticut via the trail through Marlborough to Grafton.

Rev. Allen, a Northborough historian, claimed in 1866 that Hooker’s group travelled along this trail in 1636 to settle Hart-

ford. However, recent field studies by Jason Newton clearly identify that Hooker’s caravan traveled along the Old Connecticut Path through Hopkinton and Westborough and not through Northborough.

The Narragansett Trail

I only found one reference to this trail. It mentions a trail that heads north from Rhode Island to the Canadian border. The reference mentions that it went through Westborough along Milk Street which would make it current day Route 135.

For additional information:

“The Great Trail of New England” by Harral Ayres, Meador Publishing, 1940
Jason R. Newton Old Connecticut Path (google.com)
Michael Weishan <https://southboroughhistory.org/author/michael-weishan/>

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



Last Call for Root Beer!

Our famous, homemade root beer will be available for purchase at our Friday, December 6 meeting, while stocks last. Once it’s gone it’s gone until next September!

\$15 per 6-pack
Pay by cash or check

Reminder: Dues are now overdue!

Please mail your check to the address above, or bring your payment, cash or check, to the membership table at the December 6 meeting. To ensure that your contact information is up to date, please complete a membership form (link below) and submit it with your dues.

<https://www.northboroughhistoricalsociety.org/pdf/Membership.pdf>

**Next
Board of Directors
Meeting**

Tuesday, January 14

Scan QR code
to donate via
PayPal



Welcome New Members!

Fred Leroy

Peter and Rae Carlsen

As we enter the season of thanks and giving, would you please consider making a small donation to the Society?
Any support would be greatly appreciated, and would help us to maintain our beautiful old building and care for our collection.

Please make checks payable to *Northborough Historical Society* and mail them to:

Northborough Historical Society Attn: HG TG
PO Box 661
Northborough, MA 01532

*Northborough Historical Society is a 501(c)(3) organization.
Your contribution is tax deductible to the fullest extent provided by law.*



The Northborough Historical Society is thankful for the support of all our members and friends. We wish you all a safe and happy holiday season!