



THE HOURGLASS

NORTHBOROUGH HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

CCCXXIII

Northborough Historical Society
www.NorthboroughHistoricalSociety.org

January 2025



Next Meeting & Program: Friday, January 24, 2025. The Agricultural Branch Railroad. Ride the rails through time with Ed Sterling and Dave Westerling as they unveil the story of railroads crossing through Northborough and other farming towns of central New England. Join us as we explore how these trains once fueled agricultural communities.

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 Normand Corbin, Historian

Northborough Tea Party Part-1

In May of 1773, the English Parliament passed the Tea Act which ultimately led to the Boston Tea Party of December 16, 1773. Northborough citizens participated in their own local tea revolt. Our tea party has been referenced by Northborough historians including: Rev. Allen (1866), Kent (1921), Parmenter (1966), Mulligan (1975, 1977) and Ellis (2013). According to these authors, the Northborough event occurred in February of 1773 and was reported in the "*Massachusetts Gazette and Boston Post-Boy*" newspaper, which would have been 10 months before the Boston event. **However, recent investigations have found the Northborough event actually occurred in February of 1774 and was reported in the "*Boston Gazette and Country Journal*" newspaper (see image), which was two months after the Boston event.**

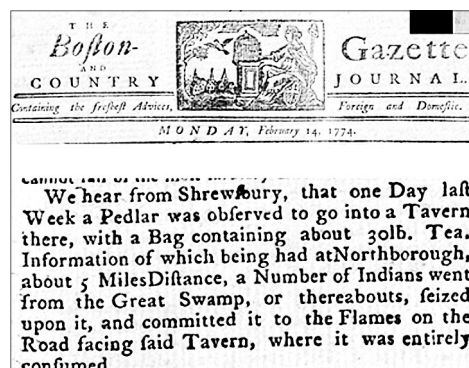
The 1774 article reads: *"We hear from Shrewsbury, that one day last week a peddler was observed to go into a tavern there with a bag containing about 30 pounds of tea. Information of which being had at Northborough about 5 miles distance a number of Indians went from the great swamp or thereabouts, seized upon it and committed it to flames in the road facing said tavern where it was entirely consumed"*.

Some observations about this article:

- The distance today between Shrewsbury and Northborough centers is 4.4 miles, which is consistent with the mileage in the article.
- In 1866, Rev. Allen had mentioned "*These 'Indians' were no doubt young men of Northborough, disguised as Indians...*". Rev. Allen makes no mention of his source regarding the "Indians".
- The article implies that the event occurred in front of a tavern in Shrewsbury. If it occurred in Shrewsbury, a plausible location could be the Farrar/Pease tavern located on the Old Bos-

ton Post Road between Northborough and Shrewsbury centers. It still stands as a private home on Main Circle. If the tavern was in Northborough, two possibilities are: the Martyn/Monroe Tavern in Northborough Center or possibly the Old Ball Tavern that was located behind the current day Saint Rose of Lima Church. Both are also located on the Old Boston Post Road.

- Where is "The Great Swamp"? Looking at Valentine's Northborough Map of 1830, there is a location identified as "Cedar Swamp" in the southwest region of Northborough. On today's map it is surrounded by West Main Street, Davis Street, the Southwest Cutoff and Bigelow Nurseries. Currently it is part of the Hop Brook Flood Control Zone. This swamp would be just off the Old Boston Post Road between Northborough and Shrewsbury centers.
- Who was the peddler? A strong possibility, but not confirmed, is a Mr. Ebenezer Cutler, who eventually lived in Northborough. In James H. Starks 1910 book "*The Loyalists of Massachusetts & the Other Side of the American Revolution*" he documents that Mr. Cutler "*went quietly at night, and purchased a quantity of it (meaning tea), on the return with his supply a masked band interrupted him, took the tea from him and burnt it*". Mr. Cutler was a vocal opponent to the Revolutionary Cause which resulted in him being charged by the Northborough Committee of Correspondence as an enemy of this country. He made his way to Boston and accompanied the British Army as they evacuated to Halifax Nova Scotia.



Taken From the
February 14, 1774,
edition of The
Boston Gazette and
Country Journal

(continued on page 2)



Curator's News by Ellen Racine

I imagine most curators have a favorite artifact in the collections under their care. Mine is the largest item that we have and a pleasure to hear it played. It is our Tractor Organ, built by George Stevens in 1874. It was built in place in our Baptist Church and included in the purchase price of the

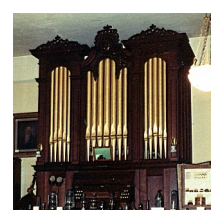
building by the Northborough Historical Society in 1960.

In December, Ernie and I heard of an organ concert to be given by the Harvard Historical Society. They bought their former Baptist Church in 1966, and it too came with a pipe organ – built by George Stevens in 1870. Their building, though smaller than our church, has a delightful meeting room and a museum in the other half of the building. Archives are housed separately in a back building. We enjoyed

the concert by Gavin Klein, currently an organ scholar at Holy Cross, who has cared for this organ since 2020. Gavin is excited to play our organ in the spring when the weather is warmer.



Gavin Klein, Harvard
Historical Society



Northborough's
Tractor Organ

History Corner, continued

In the February 17, 1975 Towne Talk edition of the Northborough STAR, William Mulligan commented on the Northborough Tea Party. Mulligan wrote the 1977 book on Northborough History. He noted that the information about the Northborough Tea party is a “*sparsely detailed account*” of the event. He mentioned several possible locations for the tavern, one being the Martyn/Monroe Tavern in Northborough Center and another is Jothan (sp?) Bush’s tavern in current day Boylston (formerly part of Shrewsbury). He also speculates that the peddler was Ebenezer Cutler.

In James Fichter’s recent book “*Tea- Consumption, Politics and Revolution 1773-1776*” he states “**destroying tea could signal support for the Boston Tea party**” and was a very common occurrence up and down the east coast. He mentions the many ways tea was rejected by the colonists including banning the sell-

ing, purchasing, and consuming of it, along with sending ships back without unloading the tea, unloading the tea but locking it up, tossing it into the sea, public burning of it and even as violent as burning the ships carrying it.

I’m looking for a first-person account of this event. One would think that there must be a record of it in the local documents of Northborough and Shrewsbury.

Out of curiosity, I contacted Chief Brian Griffin of the Northborough Police Department and asked him if this event occurred today what would happen to the assailants? His response: “*The individuals could be arrested and charged with M.G.L. 266s. 25 Larceny from a person. This is a felony in Massachusetts with potential of up to five years in prison and/or a fine.*” This puts a different perspective on our local heroes!

Membership

<u>Annual Dues:</u>	Mail dues to:
Single — \$30	Northborough Historical Society
Student/Senior — \$25	Membership Secretary
Family — \$55	P.O. Box 661
Lifetime — \$500	Northborough, MA 01532

Please make checks payable to
Northborough Historical Society
Dues are due in September each year

Welcome New Members!

Dianna Doucette
and
Michael Langton

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

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 January 24 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>

Volunteers Needed!

We are looking for a few members who would be willing to print out a small flyer each month containing information about each program, and post it in a location around Northborough or the surrounding towns. If you can help us with this please email:
northborough_historical_society@charter.net

Next
Board of Directors
Meeting

Tuesday, February 11



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

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