



Fall 2017

# Newsletter

NORWELL HISTORICAL SOCIETY

P.O. Box 693

NORWELL, MASSACHUSETTS 02061

[WWW.NORWELLHISTORICALSOCIETY.ORG](http://WWW.NORWELLHISTORICALSOCIETY.ORG)

## SOUTH SCITUATE/NORWELL FOLK AND THEIR HOLIDAYS, PART II

by Sam Olson

*Society Board member Sam Olson has reviewed the year in holidays and noted how they were celebrated in Norwell of old. The December issue featured the first half, and the year continues here.*

### Independence Day (July 4<sup>th</sup>)

"I believe it will be solemnized with pomp and parade, with shows, games, sports, guns, bells, bonfires, and illuminations from one end of the continent to the other from this time forward forever more." (*John Adams writing from Philadelphia to his wife Abigail in Braintree on July 3, 1776. He was describing the date as July 2<sup>nd</sup> when the unanimous vote was taken. Instead the date chosen was July 4<sup>th</sup>, when the document, penned mainly by Thomas Jefferson, was accepted by the Second Continental Congress.*)

Through the years, the people of South Scituate/Norwell celebrated July 4<sup>th</sup> in the time-honored fashion. Local box factories provided pine for magnificent bonfires on the eve of the holiday. July 4<sup>th</sup> itself was a day that families and

neighborhoods gathered together for picnics and entertainment.

The eve of July 4, 1920 was marred by the mindless burning of the Jacobs Saw Mill as a 4<sup>th</sup> of July prank. Less harmful was a tradition that held for many years when young lads would climb the belfry of the Assinippi Universalist Church fixing the bells to ring incessantly.

Another "boys will be boys" prank of the time was tipping over outhouses (privies).

### Labor Day (First Monday in September)

Labor Day was first observed in 1884 as a tribute to the laboring men and women of America. Few Norwell citizens were enrolled in labor organizations until well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. However one can assume that a few Norwell citizens held membership in an early craft union—the Brotherhood of Shoe Workers.

Columbus Day (October 12<sup>th</sup>, but today observed on the nearest Monday to that date)

The World's Fair of 1893 (the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the discovery of America by Columbus) was held in Chicago and called The Columbian Exposition. The family of Barton Jacobs (who resided in the Jacobs Farmhouse) attended this World's Fair due to the generosity of Dr. Henry Barton Jacobs who sent the family \$500 so father, mother, and ailing brother Frederick could attend.

### Veterans Day (November 11<sup>th</sup>)

This holiday began as Armistice Day a century ago when the "war to end all wars" (WWI) ended at the eleventh hour

### DIRECTORS & OFFICERS

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Norwell, MA 02061  
781-659-1888  
[www.norwellhistoricalsociety.org](http://www.norwellhistoricalsociety.org)

### MUSEUM & LIBRARY HOURS

The Jacobs Farmhouse is open by appointment only. Please contact the Society for further information or to schedule a tour.

The Norwell Historical Society Library at the Norwell Middle School (328 Main Street) is open on Wednesdays from 2:00 to 3:00 during the school year or by appointment.

The Norwell Historical Society Archives Center on the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor of the Sparrell School is open by appointment only.

The purpose of this Society shall be: a.) to plan and arrange for the promotion of knowledge about the Town of Norwell by discussion, research, meetings and publications; b.) to collect, solicit and preserve documents, manuscripts, charts, maps, records, photographs, relics, and items of local interest; c.) to arrange, index, catalog and file/maintain such material for use by the members of the Norwell Historical Society and other interested parties; d.) to work with and cooperate with other entities, groups, organizations, and individuals directly and indirectly.



*The Grand Basin was the centerpiece of the 1893 World's Fair—celebrating the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Columbus' discovery. The Jacobs family of Norwell attended the Fair.*

**TOWN HISTORY IS OURS TO SAVE OR TO LOSE...**

## HOLIDAYS, PART II (CONT'D)

of the eleventh day of the eleventh month in 1918. In that war, fifty-five Norwell men and two women served "over there" in France. Most returning veterans joined the American Legion as their grandfathers (who had served in the Civil War) had joined the Grand Army of the Republic.

In 1954, with two subsequent wars destroying the hopes of 1918, President Eisenhower proclaimed the day as Veterans Day. Beginning in 1968 and for the next ten years, Veterans Day occurred on the last Monday in October. In 1978, traditionalists won out when the observance returned to the original November 11<sup>th</sup> date.

Thanksgiving Day (Fourth Thursday in November)

Although Thanksgiving days were celebrated periodically in colonial days and thereafter to thank God for bountiful harvests or for the deliverance from a virulent epidemic such as small pox, Thanksgiving didn't become the most traditional of American holidays until the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

In 1863, Sarah Josepha Hale, editor of *Godey's Lady's Book*, called on President Lincoln asking him to proclaim a national thanksgiving in gratitude for the Union victories at Gettysburg and Vicksburg.

Succeeding presidents proclaimed the fourth Thursday as Thanksgiving until 1938. In that year, President Franklin D. Roosevelt changed the date to the third Thursday in order to extend the Christmas buying season during that still-persistent Depression time.

There was outrage throughout the nation with the meddling with tradition, particularly by "Roosevelt-phobes." Many Massachusetts families had two Thanksgivings that year when Governor Saltonstall proclaimed the fourth Thursday as the official Bay State holiday. The new date was continued in 1939. Thereafter, the time-honored date of the fourth Thursday was restored.

*Norman Rockwell's iconic "Freedom From Want" painting was created in 1943 to depict a typical American Thanksgiving.*



Christmas  
(December 25<sup>th</sup>)

Most Protestants in 19<sup>th</sup> century South Scituate/ Norwell were lukewarm toward the Christmas holiday since they did not recognize the trinity—Jesus Christ was considered a great prophet but not the Son of God. Unitarian beliefs spread to include members of the Universalist Church, and the majority of local church-goers belonged to either the First Parish Church on the Hill (in Norwell Center) or to the Universalist Church at Assinippi.

Most services honoring the birth of Jesus were held on Christmas Eve. Surprisingly, one Massachusetts Unitarian pastor authored the revered Christmas carol "It Came Upon A Midnight Clear."

Prior to the Civil War, Christmas was just another work day. In the opinion of many, Christmas practices smacked of papism and even paganism. In fact, Christmas had been banned in Massachusetts in the 1640s.

Charles Dickens, with his Christmas stories, and Prince Albert, Queen Victoria's consort, were two individuals often credited with popularizing Christmas. Prince Albert was responsible for the first decorated Christmas tree, a custom of his native Germany, to be placed in Windsor Castle. The custom spread to America and by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Christmas trees appeared in the White House. In 1924, Calvin Coolidge turned on the lights of the first Christmas tree displayed on the White House grounds.



The Hanover Historical Society  
and  
The Norwell Historical Society  
present



# Assinippi Memories

Saturday, September 30<sup>th</sup>  
6:00 pm

**First Universalist Church**  
484 Washington Street, Norwell

*Special Guests: Marie Anderson & Richard Whiting*

Please call to reserve:  
781-826-9575

Admission is free  
to Society members

Refreshments served

Non-members: \$5 donation

HELP US TO SAVE IT. JOIN THE SOCIETY TODAY!

## NORWELL HISTORICAL SOCIETY MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

DATE \_\_\_\_\_ NAME \_\_\_\_\_

MAILING ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

TOWN \_\_\_\_\_ STATE \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

TELEPHONE \_\_\_\_\_ E-MAIL \_\_\_\_\_

### MEMBERSHIP

3-Year Membership (\$35) \_\_\_\_\_

Life Membership (\$350) \_\_\_\_\_

Please make checks payable to the *Norwell Historical Society* and mail to: NHS,  
P.O. Box 693, Norwell, MA 02061

OR YOU CAN JOIN ON-LINE   
[www.norwellhistoricalsociety.org](http://www.norwellhistoricalsociety.org)

### AREAS OF INTEREST

Newsletter \_\_\_\_\_ Research Library \_\_\_\_\_

Tour Guide \_\_\_\_\_ Program Planning \_\_\_\_\_

## “HERE'S ONE” A MEMOIR

by Jody Vermette

In 1938 when my brothers and I climbed into my father's 1936 Chevy to go for our weekend drive in the country, we didn't have booster seats or car seats or even seatbelts. We sat three abreast in the back seat and, being the youngest (my sister had not as yet arrived on the scene), my older brothers made me sit in the middle so I had to kneel to see out the window.

On an unpaved road my Dad hit a rock, I flew up and banged my head on the roof. My brothers laughed and so did my father. My mother was horrified and I saw stars—a perfect case for seat belts.

There were no such things as iPads, iPods, or phones that do everything but make coffee. The only things we had for amusement were the scenery, a car game our mother taught us called Oskeewowow (instructions on demand), and Burma Shave Signs.

I recently found a book entitled *The Verse By the Side of the Road* by Frank Rowsome, Jr. The book chronicles the history of the Burma Shave signs, and it triggered some memories that I had almost forgotten.

Speeding down the roads in Maine at 30 miles per hour (which usually resulted in my mother reaching for her rosary beads), we looked for these shaving cream signs that were in 43 states—sadly Massachusetts was not one of them.

I would be willing to bet that the Burma-Shave signs taught many a child how to read. They were placed along the side of the roads where the land was rented from the owners who would watch out for them. The signs were placed about 100 feet apart, and were usually five or six in a row with the last sign saying “Burma Shave.”

Although they began as simple ads, they evolved into one of the best advertising campaigns ever when they

decided to make them rhyme. The signs were like Lays Potato Chips—you couldn't read just one sign. The signs were a story and you had to know how it ended: *His face | was smooth | and cool as ice | and oh Louise | he smelled so nice | Burma Shave*. People loved them. Business boomed.

With the growing auto industry (and the accident rate growing along with it), the Odell family, the Burma Shave company's founders, decided to do some community service along with their signs: *Drinking drivers | nothing worse | they put the quart | before the hearse | Burma Shave*.

During World War II, the signs helped the war effort: *Maybe you can't | shoulder a gun | but you can shoulder | the cost of one | Buy defense bonds | Burma Shave*.

When they ran out of ideas for rhymes, they held a nation-wide contest for them. The winners received a hundred dollars. The company was overwhelmed with entries—most were printable.

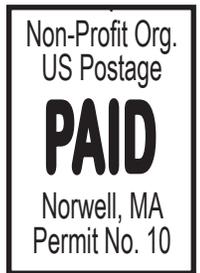
In 1963, the Burma Shave Company was sold to Philip Morris, Inc., who felt that TV and radio were better advertising methods, and the signs came down. Former owner Leonard Odell was asked to bring a set of the signs to the Smithsonian, and he and his brother Allen chose: *Shaving brushes | you'll soon see'em | on a shelf | in some | museum | Burma Shave*.

For those of you who know I am a fan of Little Red Riding Hood, I couldn't leave this one out: *The wolf | is shaved | so nice and trim | Red Riding Hood | is chasing him | Burma Shave*.

I can remember it all—my brothers teasing me, the cry Oskeewowow when one of us won the game, and my father's voice from the front seat of that old Chevy “Here's one.”



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**RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED**

## NEXT NEIGHBORHOOD HISTORY PARTY PLANNED FOR CHURCH HILL

The Historical Society has hosted two Neighborhood History Parties in the Assinippi/Jacobs Pond area and in the Ridge Hill/High Street area. Both events were very successful—bringing together neighbors in a local antique home to discuss their neighborhood's history.

The Society is pleased to host another Neighborhood History Party for the Church Hill area this coming fall. Please note that a future party is planned for the Stetson/Barstow area, so if you live in the vicinity but don't receive an invitation, you may be invited at a later date to *that* event.

If you are interested in hosting one of the future Neighborhood History Parties or would like to see a Party initiated in *your* neighborhood, please contact the Society at [info@norwellhistoricalsociety.org](mailto:info@norwellhistoricalsociety.org).

The Hingham Historical Society is busy planning its annual Historic House Tour for Sunday, October 1, 2017.

Interested in volunteering at one of the houses on the House Tour? If so, please email the Tour Coordinators at [HinghamHouseTour@gmail.com](mailto:HinghamHouseTour@gmail.com).

### NORWELL HISTORICAL SOCIETY PUBLICATIONS (AN ABBREVIATED LIST...)

- THE ABCs OF NORWELL** \_\_\_\_\_ \$10  
 by Gertrude Daneau  
 This coloring book is perfect for children (of all ages!). This illustrated book can be used as a text for teaching budding historians, or as a quick guide to Norwell's many famous personalities and historical features.
- HISTORIC HOMESTEADS OF NORWELL** \_\_\_\_\_ \$15  
 Learn more about our stately houses and the people who lived in them. This book, well-illustrated with drawings, discusses architectural features and includes genealogical information on over 45 antique houses in Norwell.
- A NARRATIVE OF SOUTH SCITUATE-NORWELL** \_\_\_\_\_ \$20  
 by Samuel H. Olson  
 This book chronicles the life and times of our town from 1845-1963 through a collection of articles previously published in *The Norwell Mariner*. A wonderful read!
- NORWELL 1903 MAP REPRODUCTION** \_\_\_\_\_ \$25  
 This 16" X 20" reproduction of the 1903 Plymouth County Atlas map of Norwell is a high quality digital copy of the original hand-colored version. Suitable for framing.

*All the above items are available at the NHS Library in the Middle School on Wednesdays during the school year (2-3:00 p.m.) or you may e-mail the Society via our website, or you may request a publication using this form and enclosing a check (made payable to NHS).  
 Mail to: NHS, P.O. Box 693, Norwell, MA 02061.*