September 2010

Newsletter

Norwell Historical Society
P.O. Box 693
Norwell, Massachusetts 02061

Guardian of Norwell's Past Celebrates its 75th Anniversary!

by Samuel H. Olson

On Wednesday evening, August 28, 1935, a group of approximately fifty Norwell citizens met in the west parlor of May Elms, then the home of Mary Louisa Foster Nash Power and her husband Arthur Power. They quickly arrived at a positive consensus on the question they had gathered to consider: Does Norwell need a historical society to better preserve the historical legacy that the community possessed?

As they looked out upon the grounds behind the house, once called the "Field of Waterloo," many may have felt the spirit of Reverend Samuel May, minister of First Parish from 1835 to 1842, who for most of those years used the home as his parsonage. In fact, it was believed that May himself had planted the elm trees that gave the estate its name.

May was an avid abolitionist, education reformer, temperance advocate, and champion of all who suffered from any form of injustice. He was a favorite uncle of Louisa May Alcott who often visited South Scituate as a child. The "Field of Waterloo" represented May's triumph in closing down the rum shops in town with his crusading "Cold Water Army" of Sunday School children. It was thought that it was at May Elms that May and the children broke open the rum barrels left behind and poured their contents upon the ground.

Soon after the meeting in the Power parlor, a slate of officers of the new organization had been nominated and voted upon, initial by-laws were drawn up and accepted, and a carefully articulated statement of purpose was recorded.

The first officers were Joseph Foster Merritt, Henry C. Ford, and Margaret Crowell as President, Vice-President, and Secretary/Treasurer respectively. Serving on the first Executive Board were Grace Farrar Cole, Dr. Tenney Davis, I. Austin Lincoln, Mary Power, Herbert Robbins, Maria Tolman, George C. Turner, William Gould Vinal, and Nellie Sparrell. The officers and board represented virtually every neighborhood in town, and three members of the Executive Board would eventually have schools named in their honor!

The first regular meeting of the Historical Society was held in the James Library on September 4, 1935--just one week after the May Elms gathering. The enthusiasm reflected in these early meetings is almost palpable as one reads the news coverage. At the first meeting, President Merritt gave a brief history of the town and Dr. Davis spoke on the importance of the past in gaining an understanding of the present. There were six other short talks given at that first meeting!

In 1936, the tercentenary of the founding of Scituate was celebrated with the "Up River" (Norwell) area of the original town participating in three major presentations: one at the Chittenden Yard, another at the Stetson homestead, and a third at Sherman's Corner: a pageant called "Running the Line."

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Directors & Officers

Wendy Bawabe, President
Robert Norris, Secretary
Robert Pashkowsky, Treasurer

Board of Directors
Gertrude Daneau
Samuel Olson
William Slattery
Gail Storm
Harold Tuttle
Joan Vermette

Contacting us

The Norwell Historical Society
P.O. Box 693
Norwell, MA 02061
781-659-1888

Museum & Library Hours

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

The Norwell Historical Society Library at the Norwell Middle School (328 Main Street--Route 123) is open on Wednesdays and Thursdays: from 1:30 to 3:30 during the school year, and 10:00 to noon during the summer.

The Norwell Historical Society Archives Center on the 3rd 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.

Guardian of Norwell's Past, cont'd

(continued from page 1)

In 1938, the Society's bank account was reduced by $18 when the Society sponsored the printing of two-hundred copies of George C. Turner's essay, "Forgotten Families of Valley Swamp." It was also in 1938 that the Society endorsed the publication of Joseph Foster Merritt's *History of South Scituate-Norwell Massachusetts*. This book remains an important source of Norwell history up to the early 20th century.

George C. Turner succeeded to the presidency in 1940 serving until 1952 (the longest tenure of any president). It might be noted that the Society held no meetings between 1942 and 1945 because of blackouts, gas shortage, and other wartime conditions.

William Gould Vinal, "Cap'n Bill," served from 1952 to 1955. Among the achievements of his presidency in 1954 was the initial use of the eastern portion of the Jacobs Homestead as the official headquarters of the Norwell Historical Society.

In reviewing the records of the Society, I was amazed to find that Margaret Crowell (later Dumas) served continuously as secretary from 1935 through 1955. Her carefully recorded minutes were meticulous: every account of a meeting also included a *Rockland Standard* newspaper article on the meeting attached to the minutes.

For reasons not fully clear, the Society experienced a low period in the late fifties and early sixties. Could one of the reasons be that this time was a golden age of television broadcasting and caused people to spend their evenings glued to their television sets? However, with John Chipman's taking the reins in 1963, the Society experienced a remarkable resurgence. In just one year, membership grew from twenty to one hundred.

Space does not permit more than a cursory review of gains made by the Society over the next seventeen presidencies. Informative talks were presented and a variety of fund-raising events were held including historical home tours and antique shows. Always an ongoing priority was assisting the schools in the teaching of local history.

In the late sixties, through the prodigious efforts of the membership, the eastern section of the Jacobs Farmhouse was set up as a museum and display space for Norwell artifacts. Since that time, guided tours have been available by appointment. In June 1971, the first Strawberry Festival was held, and three years later the first Christmas Open House. The Society played a major role in planning events for the national bicentennial in 1976, and twelve years later for events marking the change of name from South Scituate to Norwell culminating in a long-remembered centennial ball at Tara, Ralph Tedeshi's hilltop estate.

Eleven years later, the sesquicentennial of the "Big Split" (1849) was observed with Gertrude Daneau preparing a script and members role-playing events and personages involved in the peaceable secession from Scituate.

I cannot conclude this article on our first seventy-five years without emphasizing a constant that is evident to anyone using the Society's Library and Archives or touring the Jacobs homestead. That constant is the enormous number of hours loyal members have spent in processing artifacts; cataloging acquisitions; filing newspaper articles, letters, photos, postcards and other ephemera and re-telling the history of our town. These volunteers' contributions go beyond inspiring.

Official Call For Annual Meeting!

Thursday, October 28th

7:30 pm

The James Library

Please join the Board of Directors of the Norwell Historical Society to celebrate our 75th Annual Meeting at the site of the first meeting: The James Library in Norwell Center. A short program on the history of farming in Norwell will compliment the agenda. Light refreshments will be served.



HISTORIC CEMETERY BROCHURE NOW AVAILABLE

The Norwell Cemetery Commission and the Norwell Historical Society recently updated a brochure on cemeteries in Norwell.

Pick up a copy at the NHS Library (at the Middle School) and tour the cemeteries in time for Halloween!

Norwell Historical Society

Membership Application

Date _____ **Name** _____

Street Address _____

Mailing Address _____

Town _____ **State** _____ **Zip** _____

Telephone _____ **E-mail** _____

Membership

Individual ($15)____ Business ($40)____

Family ($25)____ Life ($200)____

Benefactor ($500)____

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

Areas of Interest

Newsletter____ Public Relations____

Hospitality____ Program Planning____

Library Volunteer____ Historical Research____

Photo Cataloging____ Process Archival Material____

Other:

Did You Know?

...the answer to the last issue's Trivia Corner Question? The question was: **Why does the town-owned Stetson-Ford House include "Ford" in its name if it was built by the Stetsons?**

The answer is: The Stetson-Ford House sits on the site of the original Thomas Stetson homestead, but the house was greatly expanded to its current Georgian colonial structure with attached ell by ship builder Michael Ford between 1783 and 1785. Three generations of Fords lived in the house until 1903.

Trivia Corner

Trivia Question: One of the oldest graveyards in Norwell was established in 1644 at the site of the Second Parish Church meetinghouse. The cemetery was heavily vandalized in the early 1800s. No gravestones remain today, but a large boulder marks its locale. Where in Norwell is this burying ground?

Answer: in the next issue!

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Thursday, September 16th
6:00-7:30 pm
The James Library

RSVP by September 13, 2010 (seating is limited)
Geoff Gordon
P: 800-649-3252, ext. 203
E: geoff@agordon.com

Norwell Historical Society
P.O. Box 693
Norwell, Massachusetts 02061

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Is it time to renew your Historical Society membership?
Please check the expiration date on your address label.

Society to Publish 2 Books in Honor of 75th

Not since 1988, the Town of Norwell's centennial celebration, has the Norwell Historical Society published a book. In the Fall of 2010, in honor of its 75th Anniversary, the Society will publish two books on Norwell history. Each has been written for distinct audiences. Join the authors on Friday, November 12th and celebrate the release of these new publications! ***(See the next newsletter for details on the November celebration.)***

A Narrative of South Scituate-Norwell (1849-1963):

Remembering its Past and the World Around It

By Samuel H. Olson

Author and local historian, Samuel H. Olson, chronicles the life and times of our town through a collection of articles previously published in *The Norwell Mariner*. As the shipbuilding industry on the river waned, farmers, shoe makers and summer residents revealed their rugged individualism and their socially-progressive beliefs. Discover how the Norwell we know today was knowingly sculpted by the town's forefathers. By rejecting new-fangled ideas such as the railroad and other "big city" ways, Norwell has retained its solitude and rural landscape.

Throughout the book will be photographs of South Scituate and Norwell, and the cover will unveil the newly-restored painting of the Jacobs' mills that currently hangs in the Jacobs Farmhouse.

The ABCs of Norwell

By Gertrude Daneau

Gert Daneau was an elementary school teacher in Norwell for 35 years, and she knows how to make history both interesting and easy to understand for children (*of all ages!*). She breaks down the history of our town into 26 easy-to-remember topics (A to Z). With Betty Butterfly leading the way, we learn about Norwell's Almshouse (A), the Half Way House (H), the Litchfield Shoe Factory (L), and many prominent citizens. What was Ridge Hill Grove (R)? Where was the Valley Swamp (V)? These questions and more will be answered in this easy-to-read paperback that can be used as a coloring book, as a text for teaching budding historians, or as a quick guide to Norwell's many famous personalities and historical features.

This book will include a number of newly-created pen and ink drawings and many familiar renditions of local sites.