



February 2015

Newsletter

NORWELL HISTORICAL SOCIETY

P.O. Box 693

NORWELL, MASSACHUSETTS 02061

WWW.NORWELLHISTORICALSOCIETY.ORG

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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 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.

1888 WEDDING ENSEMBLE DISCOVERED!

What began as a simple textile inventory and assessment project turned into a major find for the Norwell Historical Society this past summer.

At the 2014 Town Meeting, the residents of Norwell approved funding for the Society to restore historical textiles and “soft” objects housed at the Jacobs Farmhouse. The Society hired Textile Conservator Marie Schlag of Scituate—who had previously assisted both the Cohasset and Scituate Historical Societies with their textile collections.

Marie began her inventory of items stored in closets, in trunks, and in dresser drawers at the Jacobs Homestead. To our surprise, the collection was enormous. Previously undocumented items were



discovered, assessed for condition, catalogued, and stored in new, acid-free archival storage boxes in our Archives for future generations.

One of the most extensive discoveries during the inventory was the pristine wedding ensemble of Lucy Damon Waugh. Found were her wedding gown (*bodice shown at left*), her after-party gown, stockings, veil, and ivory fan, and a photograph of the minister, list of attendees, and wedding invitation—all packed away safely in a closet.

Lucy Damon was born in (what was then) South Scituate on October 12, 1866. On February 7, 1888 (NOTE: the year South Scituate became Norwell!), she married Varnum S. Waugh, a clerk from the Roxbury section of Boston. The ceremony took place in Roxbury and the couple went on to live in Boston. The quality and the handiwork of the items found display the wealth of the Damon family and the importance of this occasion.

ABIAL FARRAR'S CIVIL WAR

by Bill Slattery

Editor's Note: The following is the third installment of a Society newsletter article originally written in 1990 by Society Archivist Bill Slattery. Because 2014 marked the 150th anniversary of South Scituate (Norwell) resident Abial Farrar's (pronounced "aah by'el fair'aah") entrance into the Civil War at age 17, we are re-publishing this article. The final portion will appear in the next issue of the Society newsletter.

As said [in previous installments], the order to move out [from Fort Alexander Hays toward the front lines] came on

the 28th [of November, 1864]. This was welcomed by [Abial's] regiment, but they were shelled by the enemy while passing near the front line at Fort Davis. While no casualties were reported, the pickets on both sides continued to exchange fire from that day into the next. The regiment reached Yellow Tavern where it began constructing winter quarters. This included log huts with fireplaces (probably for officers). However, after only eight days, General Grant ordered the regiment to report to General Governor Kemble Warren of the Fifth Army Corps to continue the destruction

continued on page 2

ABIAL FARRAR, CONT'D.

continued from page 1

of the Weldon Railroad, a major supply route between North Carolina and the rebel capital city at Richmond, Virginia.

With the Fifth Corps, Abial's regiment would have moved down the Jerusalem Plank Road, crossed the Nottaway River, and marched to Jarrett's Station on the railroad line. They proceeded south along this stretch of track to Belleville, tearing up the track, burning ties, heating up the rails until flexible enough to twist them around tree trunks.



The rails were heated, twisted, and turned into "Sherman's hairpins."

This latter procedure was copied from the actions of General Sherman's troops when they had marched through Georgia. The twisted rails were alternately referred to as "Sherman's hairpins" and "Sherman's bowties." The only fighting during this raid was between a small enemy force and the Second Cavalry under Major General David M. Gregg. Writing to his mother, Abial mentioned, "we did not fight much to get the railroad but the cavalry fought some." Belleville was only ten miles short of the border with North Carolina. This march had taken the Union soldiers completely around rebel General Robert E. Lee's right flank and deep into enemy territory. A total of 93 miles had been covered in a matter of one week. As one soldier described the work of the Corps, "As far as the eye could reach were seen innumerable glowing fires, and thousands of busy blue coats tearing up the rails and piling up the ties. It was a wild, animated scene, and the fatigue of the long day's march was forgotten."

It wasn't easy work, nor was it made any easier by the weather. Abial wrote, "It was cold I tell you. It snowed some. It rained. It hailed and we had all kinds of weather." From December 6th it rained heavily, causing the artillery and the wagons to cut deep ruts into the roads. By the third night the temperature had dropped to near zero degrees. From that night to the following day a northeast storm caused sleet, rain and snow to fall on the marching soldiers. Abial wrote, "some of our men froze to death." Frostbite occurred caused by foot exposure from worn out shoes and from soldiers without shoes having only rags around their feet. Four men from Abial's regiment were captured by the enemy after they had fallen behind.

In writing to his mother, Abial spoke of the destructiveness he had witnessed: "We burned up all the houses on the way..., took their slaves,... hung all the

garillers [guerillas] we caught... they burned five or six in a house. The boys got gold watches out of the houses and killed the pigs and the hens and the cows. They got molasses—any amount of it—go right in and help themselves. If the folks said anything, they would tell them to pass on their preserves and they would have to do it."

On the last three days of this raid, Abial contracted diarrhea so badly that he was transported to a hospital in an ambulance. He reported what he had heard in his letter when he reported that the return trip was a rough one for Union soldiers. Irregular rebels attacked any soldier who got separated from the main force. He wrote, "they was stripped to their hides and their throats was cut from ear to ear and were shot through the head besides." How much of this was accurate is hard to say, but such stories added motivation for soldiers to destroy the enemy and civilian property.

Abial's illness, which he called diarrhea (today we'd call it dysentery), was common to soldiers on both sides in the War. Living on a steady diet of salt beef or pork, hardtack and coffee contributed to the problem. Physicians of the time would first try salts to no purpose, then castor oil, then laudanum (an opiate). This could cause a patient to lose appetite, thereby weakening him to other diseases. But, such was the state of medical knowledge.

From mid-December to its end, Abial remained in a hospital tent. In a letter he praised the work of the U.S. Sanitary Commission, which provided paper, pens, pencils, pen holders, pocket handkerchiefs, shirts and stockings for sick soldiers. Describing the routine of hospital life, he cited the doctor's arrival at nine o'clock to write down the medicine and to note whether the soldiers' meals would be "heavy diet" or "light diet." About an hour later nurses would distribute any medications. Also, after the physician left, a clergyman would visit each soldier to care for any spiritual needs. Among Abial's possessions [and currently stored at the Historical Society] was a small religious tract that conceivably might have been given to him at one of these visits. Abial asked [his mother] Mary Ellen to encourage letter writing to him during his convalescence. He suggested she inform his brother Charles, younger by two years, and friends or neighbors. And, he added to his 14-year old sister, rather tellingly, "give my love to all the girls that I know." When Mary Ellen asked him about his favorite hospital food, he wrote, "I had soupe- bean soupe and bread and butter, applesauce and other stuff." Abial made no comment concerning the supposed sumptuous Christmas feast provided Union soldiers. However, Abial mentioned seeing his comrade, Private Allen Bates, at the dinner on Christmas, and wrote, "it was the first time that he had been out of Doors. He said he was weak. He looked pretty slim."

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ABIAL FARRAR, CONT'D.

continued from page 2

During his hospital stay, Abial began sending home pictures of his comrades that he had collected. Some of those that still exist were from his days at the camp in Boston Harbor. One of the photographs was of Allen Bates, but because that name is not written on any of the pictures, it would be difficult now to identify him.

As soon as Abial left the hospital tent around New Years 1865, he began requesting homemade goods from his mother. Apparently, this was a common request of soldiers. Excluding liquor, the soldiers were allowed to receive food from relatives and friends. Many an envious eye must have passed over such treats, when on-looking comrades viewed gift packages being opened by the fortunate recipient. Abial wrote home, "I would like it if you would send me a box of eatibles as soon as you can. The boys are having them sent to them." Later, he wrote his sister, "tell mother to send a plenty of bread and butter in the box if she sends one." In early February, he would add "send me some butter and cheese and some apple pies and some short cakes" and "hurry up my box." After two weeks, he received a letter promising the box was on its way to him. He replied, "I hope it will reach me safe."

While Abial was pleading for homemade food in January of 1865, his regiment was ordered into a dense pine forest between the Halifax and Vaughan roads in the left rear of the Petersburg lines. However, most of their time was spent building roads and approaches, and doing picket duty. By the end of January, Abial was complaining of the return of diarrhea, but he decided to remain with his regiment anyway. Undoubtedly, his hopes were flattered by the desertion of rebel troops at the average rate of thirty

men per day. In large measure this was due to the success of the Union blockage by land and sea that caused shortages of food and supplies for General Lee's army. Abial could be proud of his role in destroying the Weldon Railroad—that had been one of the last lifelines into the rebel's capital city.

On February 5th [1865], Abial's unit proceeded to a stream called Hatcher's Run. There at 3:00, the Union soldiers attacked a rebel picket line. Quickly they built a bridge to cross the stream and follow a rebel retreat. By the time Abial reached the scene of the main battle, the enemy had fled into the forest. Only three men in his regiment were injured, even though many of the soldiers had crossed the battlefield during heavy firing. That night turned bitterly cold and few of the men could sleep. In the morning the number of rebel dead lying on the battlefield astonished the victors.

By February 8th, at 4:00 in the morning, the regiment marched to the Vaughan road where they stacked their weapons and began building a "corduroy road" —a road made of logs placed side by side over a swampy terrain. The next day, they marched to Humphrey's Station on the Vaughan road and there made camp. After spending a hard day chopping trees and cutting brush, the regiment bivouacked in the open field without shelter. This caused the cold soldiers considerable discomfort. By February 10th they were camped in the woods, however, they were in tents on ground that was "ankle deep in mud at this season." By February 16th, Abial was writing, "I have arrived from the rade [sic] alive once more but I have got a bad cold owing to laying in the wet while we were gone but I guess I shall live through it..."



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Book Signings

NEW BOOK!

THE History
of a Country Chapel



BY Gertrude H. Daneau



Wednesday, February 25th at 2:00 pm
at the Norwell Public Library
63 South Street in Norwell

Friday, February 27th at 2:00 pm
at the Scituate Historical Society/Little Red Schoolhouse
Cudworth Road in Scituate

Books will be available for sale for \$10.⁰⁰

THROWBACK PHOTO OF THE MONTH



Where are these homes? This early 1900s Norwell postcard shows the Victorian-era front porch that used to adorn the home on the left. Today, the porch is gone and the home harkens back to its original 18th century style. The home on the right was built by Caleb Torrey, Jr. who was a housewright (a term for a house carpenter). The decorative turned posts and frieze pediment over decorative wood spindles surrounding the front door would have served as advertising for his carpentry skills.

(Answer at the bottom of page 3)