



# The Hourglass

CCXVIII Northborough Historical Society February 2013

[www.Northboroughhistsoc.org](http://www.Northboroughhistsoc.org)

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## Meeting February 22, 2013, 7:30 PM Northborough Historical Society

**Program: New England Authors in the Making of the Modern World-** Roger Kolb will tell of writers from our region who introduced ideas, attitudes, and trends that helped define the modern world. We will examine these New England Founders of modern culture through mesmerizing presentations.

*Hosted by Judy and Frank Bissett*

### 63 Main Street

In the early hours of February 1, 1907, according to Rev. Kent's Current Events in Northborough, "Mrs. Samuel Clark's house was discovered to be on fire. The ell and northern end of the house was destroyed, and the interior of the whole house was gutted. Mrs. Clark narrowly escaped with her life. This is one of the old houses of the town, and was built by Mr. [Henry] Gassett. On the same date in 1774 the son of that man, also Henry Gassett, had been born.

### Membership

Northborough Historical  
Society

#### Membership Dues:

**Regular \$15.00; Student  
and Seniors (65 and over)  
\$10.00; Family \$35.00; and  
Life \$250.00.**

Dues should be sent to  
Judy Bissett  
300 Ball St.  
Northborough, MA 01532

Checks should be made out  
to the  
Northborough Historical  
Society

### Curator News

The Property Committee has been busy with several repairs and upgrades. The ceiling in the meeting hall is being patched, the front door has a new lock and

The Gassetts were originally French Huguenots. The father probably spelled his name "Henri Gaschet," but the younger Henry and others of the family adopted "Gassett." The father married Persis Howe of Marlborough in 1757; they presumably built their house at what is now 63 Main Street. In 1847 the younger Henry, at this point a substantial Bostonian, recollected his early years for the New England Historical Genealogical Society: "He, though only about four years old at the time [actually a few weeks less], remembers Burgoyne's army when marching through Northborough to embark at Boston for their own country. The town was the limits of the day's march, and his father's premises happened to be a central position of this encampment for the night of Nov. 2, 1777. His house, barn, out buildings, etc., were entirely filled and occupied by the American escort and the prisoners."

Was Henry's recollection correct? Not exactly. Johann Specht, one of the prisoners, kept a careful diary. Coming east from Saratoga where they were captured, the party had not reached Worcester by

crash bar, and the museum now has up-to-date light switches - no more push - buttons! Thank you Buzz Bostock, Chuck Krouse and Ernie Racine. Also a thank you to Helen Calverley who designed and donated seasonal door decorations for our building and Forest Lyford for hanging them on our five doors.

Several requests for information have come in with the new year. To mention a few: the girls' basketball team from the class of 1926; early maps and artifacts; and music of Northborough's early composer, Abraham Wood. An Eagle Scout candidate has also begun work towards his goal and a cub scout troop has visited the museum.

Occasionally someone leaves items for our collection at the door - and alas with no identification or history attached. Recently we found a very worn U.S. flag on a weathered wooden pole and rolled maps that might have come from a classroom. We would love to learn more about these items. Please give me a call at 508-393-2343 if you have any information.

**New Accessions:**  
Pencil drawing print of 253 Whitney Street by William

November 2. To Specht Worcester was "a well built town, has beautiful houses and many rich inhabitants." On November 5 "We marched through Shrewsbury and through Northborough up to Marlborough where we received quarters." Perhaps, then, they did not lodge at 63 Main Street, but they surely passed by it at least.

Before the 1907 fire Mrs. Clark, the widow of Northborough's principal lawyer of the nineteenth century, had already sold her house to the town. "The intention," Rev. Kent noted, was "to build a new High School on the site." The old school on the Unitarian Church common had long been regarded as inadequate. Mrs. Clark died a few weeks after the fire.

In 1907, Article 19 of the 1908 Town Warrant reads: "To see if the town will appropriate a sum of money not exceeding five hundred dollars to be expended in making a public playground of the Clark lot" (a playground, after all, being cheaper than a school). The next year Article 28 reads, in part: "To see if the town will rescind the vote whereby it voted at the annual meeting March 5, 1906, 'To build a school house in accordance with the recommendation of the committee.'" Article 29 is also interesting: "To see if the town will vote to sell the Clark lot if a fair price can be obtained for it." Also in 1908, under "Income from the Clark Property" the town acquired \$7 in rent from the late Mrs. Clark, \$6 from "sale of grass" (obviously neither a school nor a playground would need grass), \$26 from the sale of the barn and \$1 from the sale of the ruined house.

Shift ahead another decade to 1919. Northborough High School students have composed and published "The Needs of a New High School Building as shown by a Tour of Inspection," a temperate, well-expressed, and persuasive booklet. All of the young people involved in its production, however, will graduate from the old school. Still, things are beginning to move. In 1921 a building

Wallace, 1980s, 1864 deed for 62 Whitney Street from Ellen Racine.

Joseph Fay to Samuel McClure, two adjustable wood camera tripods, and selected magazines and newspapers from the 1960s from Rick and Marie Nieber, 48 Star U.S. wool flag from Kevin Carroll. Three large photos of Peaslee School, Hudson Street School and the Town Hall from George Falardeau.

Ellen Racine, Curator

**Our mailing address has  
changed  
Northborough Historical  
Society  
300 Ball St.  
Northborough, MA  
01532**

**Director's Meeting  
Historical Society  
Building  
7:30 PM February  
12, 2013**

committee is elected, the next year \$100,000 is appropriated, and authority is granted "to purchase or seize by right of eminent domain, a lot of land suitable for a school building," this lot being the one designated for that purpose (or was it?) fourteen years earlier. By 1924 Northborough had a new high school-that is, until March 27, 1938, when

another fire raged at 63 Main Street. Then came another school building, eventually the site of the Northborough Town Offices. May there be no third fire at that address.

Henry Gassett also established the Gassett Fund, which, gathered together with some other funds, still exists under the authority of a town trust fund committee. He specified a number of purposes, one of which was the establishment "at some central place" of a school "which shall be forever called and known by the name of Gassett School"-but the fund never rose to the necessary funding level.

Bob Ellis, Historian