

## **Talk on the History of Church Hill/Tiffany Road**

Typically, during our Neighborhood History Parties, I only briefly touch upon the very first history of Norwell because it doesn't usually directly relate to the neighborhood in which we are meeting. That is NOT the case with Church Hill.

Norwell began as a section of Scituate, and Scituate was first populated by Europeans around 1628 (although the town wasn't actually incorporated until 1636). Settlers came to Scituate from Europe via two different places: Boston and Plymouth. Scituate was mostly founded by a group of people from Kent County, England via Plymouth. Timothy Hatherly led this group (often referred to as "The Men of Kent") to a large grant of land near the ocean on today's Kent Street (which is the continuation of the Driftway) toward Front Street and the cliffs.

In a short time after settling in Scituate, the population began to move inland up the rivers and soon the area around the North River Valley was generally settled. Remember that the river was a natural highway—much easier to navigate than Indian paths. Also, the river was a great source for salt marsh hay which was used to feed livestock.

The first settler to come to Norwell—specifically to the Church Hill area—was Cornet Robert Stetson and his wife, Honour, in 1634. A "Cornet" is a flag-bearer in a mounted military unit—an officer, and Cornet Stetson was considered an official in Plymouth County. The Stetsons brought their family to the area and other settlers soon followed. The original Stetson homestead was off of what is today Stetson Shrine Road. Given the proximity to this area, it is easy to imagine that settlement came to Church Hill soon after the Stetsons arrived.

Common Street, for example, got its name because in 1699 a communal pasture was created there that anyone could use for livestock.

In 1725, the first recorded meeting of what would become St. Andrew's Church happened at the Damon house (an unknown location, but it's referenced as being in Church Hill). The members wanted a branch of the Church of England—not to follow the Puritan tradition. In 1727, the parish was formally organized as St. Andrew's, and in 1731, the church building was erected upon Church Hill (within the Church Hill Cemetery today). It had seating for about 150 and was built on land donated by Ebenezer Stetson (and probably built with his funding).

Because St. Andrew's was part of the Church of England, it had a hard time during the Revolutionary War. In fact, Rev. Ebenezer Thompson died in 1775 "partly from bodily disorder and partly from

uncivil treatment from the rebels of his neighborhood.” There is a story that “patriots entered the Mr. Thompson’s house, seized and destroyed his library, [and] the records of the church since 1730.”

Around 1809, the Society of St. Andrew’s voted to erect a new church in Hanover Four Corners because the congregation was outgrowing the Church Hill building. The present-day St. Andrew’s was consecrated in 1811 and services at the old church were discontinued. The old building was sold and taken down. Today, the north section of Church Hill Cemetery is marked by a Celtic Cross to show the original site of St. Andrews Episcopal Church

Church Hill Cemetery is noted as originally being a private burial ground for the Palmer family, but I’ve also found reference to it being a burying ground for the Stetson family. Whichever the case, the cemetery contains the graves of many shipbuilders including the Stetsons, Torreys, Stockbridges, Sylvesters, and Winslows. Buried here in 1838 is Captain Thomas Stetson who is Norwell’s only veteran of the War of 1812.

Right around the time that St. Andrew’s Church closed, a Methodist “circuit” was formed between Dorchester and Duxbury—area Methodists would meet in private homes. The first Methodist meeting to take place in today’s Norwell was in 1844 at the home of Mary Kimball Stetson on Stetson Road (what is today the Sgt. Samuel Stetson House that is on the cul-de-sac on Stetson Shrine Road). By 1850, land was acquired and building plans were completed—the Church Hill Methodist Church sanctuary was dedicated in 1852.

New members to the Methodist Church were not admitted lightly. There was a probation period of 6 months during which one had to attend weekly classes, be on time, and speak plainly about the true state of one’s soul! Several memberships were withdrawn due to “backsliding” and, in one case, because of “cruel apostasy.” I had to look that word up—it means the renunciation of one’s Christian faith. Eek.

The North River is famous for its shipbuilding. This industry flourished in the 1700s and in the early-to mid-1800s because of the forests around the river (which were an excellent source of ship timber), and because the tide allowed shipbuilding on the marshes and relatively easy launching at high tide. Over 1000 ships were built on the North River (and many more small boats not counted in that number). The last large ship built on the river was the Helen M. Foster in 1871.

During the Early Industrial Period (1830-1870), industry in Norwell shifted from primarily shipbuilding on the North River to manufacturing. Shoe making was a thriving industry in South Scituate (Norwell)

and other South Shore towns, and associated businesses were therefore created: tack factories to make shoe tacks, box factories to ship shoes, and chemical companies for “shoe factory specialties.”

Third Herring Brook was dammed by Charles Stockbridge originally for a grist mill in the 1670s at what used to be Tiffany Pond. The mill was later run by Recompense Tiffany, for whom the street was thereafter named.

In 1834, Capt. Zephaniah Talbot of Common Street and Capt. Samuel Salmond of Hanover established a tackworks at what was the Stockbridge grist mill site. This tack factory supported the growing shoe industry in the area. Agnes Salmond (son of Samuel) married Zephaniah Talbot and Scituate birth records show they had a daughter, Hannah Talbot. Hannah married George Sturtevant, who in 1879 lived at the historic home that once stood at 11 Tiffany.

Zephaniah Talbot died in his tack factory in 1851 while filling a lantern with oil. He was badly burned and never recovered.

According to Joseph Merritt’s History of South Scituate-Norwell (which was written in 1938), industry on the tack factory site “...has been carried on for 200 years” and the factory was “still in active operation under the direction of Samuel Salmond Sylvester.”

In May of 1983, the factory burned down. Its foundation and the dam remained until last year when it was removed to allow for a free flow of water.

I’d like to note certain Church Hill homes that are of special historical note. One is the Samuel Tolman House at 200 Tiffany Road (the home of the Mongeauss today). The home of Major Nathaniel Winslow (the brother of Mass. Gov. Edward Winslow) used to stand next to the Tolman house, but it was razed more than a century ago. Samuel Tolman was a housewright and we believe the home was built around 1784 (about the time of his marriage). Homes built by housewrights were often used as marketing tools—a business card of sorts that showed off one’s abilities. The Tolman house has a frieze design on the interior that appears in the 1789 edition of *William Paine’s Practical House Carpenter*.

Although the Nathaniel Winslow house no longer stands, a fascinating story was recently unearthed by the Historical Society when research for the new “Civil War Driving Tour” brochure was being done. Nathaniel Winslow was orphaned at the age of 13 and the 1855 census shows Nathaniel living with his sister Sarah Winslow Tolman and her husband, Samuel, at 200 Tiffany Road (next door). Sarah died in 1855 and in 1860, Nathaniel was living with his neighbor from childhood, Abigail

Gardner, and her husband George Knapp at 589 River Street (the home of the Downeys today). Nathaniel enlisted in the Army in August 1862, and within a month was killed in action near Shepherdstown, West Virginia. Three months later Abigail received the news that her brother Henry Gardner had also been killed in battle.

Also of note from the Civil War research was the Henry Gardner House at 65 Tiffany Road (the Donahues house today). Henry lived here with his father John, a tackmaker, his mother, and several brothers and sisters. He is the younger brother of Abigail Gardner Knapp. Henry was a merchant, and he enlisted in the Civil war at age 21 and within four months was killed at the battle of Fredericksburg.

Today the building next to the Methodist Church is the parsonage, but it used to be the store of Melvin Little until WWI. Part of the old building was once a school house which was moved from the other end of the old training field (which is the field at the corner of Common Avenue and River) and a portion of the building was once a tannery that was moved from Common Street. The building is believed to have been built by Consider Howland who made shoes in the little shop.

Another house of note in Church Hill is the Thomas Barstow, Sr. house at 691 River Street (Lisa Delphin's house today, and previously the Bartlett's house). The Barstow family operated the Two Oaks Shipyard on the North River. Mr. Barstow's business partner in the Shipyard (and his cousin) was Robert Eells. Barstow oversaw the woodworking and Eells oversaw the ironwork. Two of Barstow's sons married two of Eells' daughters and it is believed that they all lived in that house (which has two distinct sides and two bake ovens). The most interesting feature of this house is the large, barrel-ceilinged room in the rear on the second floor. It is believed that this room served as the Counting Room of the Barstow yard as it would have overlooked the fields to the Shipyard.

Although I've pointed out two famous 1700s houses, what makes the Church Hill area so unique in Norwell is the prevalence of 1800s houses—mostly Greek Revival, Gothic, and Italianate farmhouses. Tiffany Road and the area immediately surrounding the “green” at Church Hill is filled with historic homes that are a testimony to the evolution of Norwell industry—from shipbuilding and farming in the 1700s to manufacturing in the 1800s. Early on, shipbuilders built grand homes on big plots of land on which they would also farm. When large-scale farming wasn't as necessary (and a small garden would suffice) those homes sold off acreage to local tack makers and mill workers—and these are the smaller farmhouses of the 1800s that you see in the Church Hill area today.

Regarding the house that we are in tonight—Bev has passed on some of her knowledge regarding the house’s history to me. In the Society’s records, the house is listed as the “Lemuel Cushing Waterman House.” Bev believes (and I agree) that this is probably the 3<sup>rd</sup> house to stand on this site.

Let me begin by saying that Route 3 divided two major streets in our town and many of us never consider that they used to be continuous roads: Stetson Road and Pine Street. Stetson Road (formerly Elm Street) used to be a loop that combined what is today Stetson Shrine Road and Stetson Road. When Route 3 was built, the road was divided and the small Stetson Road continuation (parallel to Route 3) was created.

A similar small continuation road was created for Pine Street also. The former Pine Street was actually today’s Leonard’s Lane—where we are today.

We believe the house that first stood on this site was owned by the Sylvester family. Bev’s records indicate that that first house burned in an Indian raid in 1676. This account is confirmed in Joseph Merritt’s *History of South Scituate/Norwell* book:

“In King Philip’s war of 1676, a war party of Narragansetts and Nipmuks made a raid in this section of the country. They came by way of Hingham into Norwell and Hanover probably following very closely what is now... Washington Street down to Cornet Stetson’s mill which was located on the Third Herring Brook at the junction of Tiffany Road, Norwell and East Street, Hanover. They burned this mill and continued down what is now River street to the ‘Block House’ [on Block House Lane].”

It’s possible the original house on this site was burned during that raid because, in looking at the Church Hill map, you can see that we are in the path between the original Stetson Mill and River Street.

In 1761, the Sylvesters sold this land to Anthony Waterman, who in 1762 built the second house on this site. Mr. Waterman owned Waterman’s Tannery off of Leonard Lane on the small brook that runs into Third Herring Brook. A tannery is a messy business—turning animal hides into leather. Using water and tree bark (which contains tannins), many water pits (including the brook itself) were used to soak the hides. Account book entries from the Waterman site go back to 1766—so it appears this was an active mill/tannery early on in Church Hill history. The Historical Society has some of the Waterman factory account books in their archives.

The Waterman house on this site also succumbed to fire (sometime between 1911 and 1922). According to the *Historic Homesteads of Norwell* book, the “The Lemuel Cushing Waterman house and barn stood on Common Street facing down Common Avenue. The beautiful white residence was lost by fire.” Bev has found a large wide stone outside the foundation on the Common Street side. If the house faced as stated, the stone is just where the front stoop would have been!

The current house, built around 1920, faces Leonard’s Lane, and eventually purchased by Elizabeth Barry Leonard (after whom the street is named).

The history of Norwell is wonderful, but sometimes neighbors need to know the history of the village immediately surrounding them. In Norwell, we have so many of these villages—Assinippi, Mount Blue, Ridge Hill, Church Hill... just to name a few. I, personally, think the history of Church Hill is one of the most fascinating!