



December 2013

# Newsletter

NORWELL HISTORICAL SOCIETY

P.O. Box 693

NORWELL, MASSACHUSETTS 02061

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

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The Norwell Historical Society  
P.O. Box 693  
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.

## ALONG THE NORTH RIVER

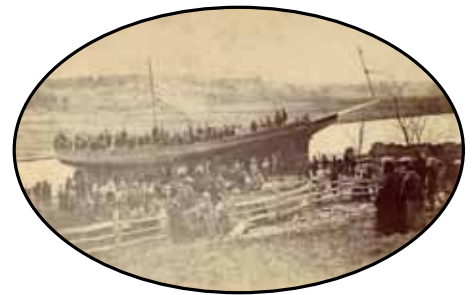
*Editor's Note: The following is the sixth installment of an article titled "ALONG THE NORTH RIVER: Stream of Indian Canoes, Pioneer Ships, and Modern Craft" by Margaret Crowell (later Margaret Crowell Dumas) written for the May 27, 1938 edition of The Hanover Branch and Norwell Advertiser (7<sup>th</sup> Annual Edition), and transcribed with parenthetical notes by Society Archivist Bill Slattery. The last portion of the article will appear in the next edition of the Society newsletter.*

[Shipbuilder] Benjamin Franklin Delano was educated under the tutorage of Reverend Samuel Deane. He showed considerable talent and ability as a draughtsman and designer. In 1833, he and his brother built seven vessels on Grand Island in the Niagara River. This was quite an undertaking for the young men, and, they took with them about twenty ship carpenters from the North River valley [in today's Norwell]. Just think, at that time, they probably traveled by stage coach, taking a number of days to make the trip and with no chance to telephone home to tell the family of their safe arrival or news of their work.

Benjamin Delano was later a Naval Constructor at the yards in Portsmouth, N.H. and Brooklyn, N.Y. On the stairway of the James Library, you may see a testimonial to him in [a] massive frame with elaborate carvings. He married Jane Foster, the daughter of Captain Seth, who lived in the Bullard house on River street and used that place as their summer home [435 River Street--Crystal Spring Farm].

Edward Hart Delano, like his brother, Benjamin, served at the Brooklyn Navy Yard and later at Pensacola, FL; Norfolk, VA and Charlestown. He built Admiral Farragut's flag ship, the *Hartford*.


The four [Delano] daughters, Sarah, Mary, Lucy and Prudence did not marry. One lived in Boston a good deal with some of her relatives, but the other three stayed in the great house on the hill with its beautiful view down the North River valley [today's Delano



*The launching of the Helen M. Foster--the last ship to be built on the North River.*

Mansion at 370 River Street]. About 1894, the last daughter, Miss Prudence, died, and then the entire furnishings of the house were sold at auction. This was quite an event as the house contained beautiful furniture as well as bolts of silks, carved combs and many other fascinating articles from the Orient. Some of the choicest furniture went to

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**CHRISTMAS  
FARMHOUSE**

at  
the  
**Sunday, December 15<sup>th</sup>  
2:00-4:00 pm**

The Norwell Historical Society will host its annual "Christmas at the Farmhouse" event at the Jacobs Homestead on the corner of Jacobs Lane and Main Street. Everyone is invited to come and tour the house (decorated for the holidays!) and enjoy some hot cider and victuals. No RSVP is necessary—just drop in for a tour and a treat.

# ALONG THE NORTH RIVER, CONT'D

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Harvard University, but the rest was scattered to the four winds.

The next family to build [ships] at the Wanton yard were the Fosters. Elisha and his sons, Seth, Samuel and Elisha, Jr., as well as Walter, although he is more identified with the Chittenden yard. One whaler which the Fosters built was the *Globe* for C. Mitchell & Company of Nantucket, but this ship had a sinister history. Some of her crew mutinied while in the South Seas and killed her Captain and some of the officers with fiendish cruelty. Their success was of short duration, and after a few weeks, the principal ring leaders were killed and the vessel sailed to Valparaiso, Chile, where she was put in the custody of the American consul. Later, she was furnished with another crew and sailed back to Nantucket.

In 1825, the Fosters built the *Smyrna*, the first ship to carry the flag of the United States into the Black Sea. The *Smyrna* was owned by Ezra Weston of Duxbury, and, as he himself was a ship builder of note, it speaks well of the Fosters as builders that he had them construct a vessel for him. The Captain was Seth Sprague of Marshfield, whose grandson, the present [in 1938] tax collector, bears the same name.

The voyage of the *Smyrna* to Odessa on the Black Sea took place in 1830, covering a period of seven months. The passage through the Bosphorus Straits was quite difficult due to the easterly wind and adverse current running at the rate of six miles an hour. The *Smyrna* went through, and three weeks later, on her way back, met some vessels, which had started at the same time and had made little or no progress. The return trip, the *Smyrna* made, with a cargo of fruit from the port of Smyrna to Boston, in forty-two days, which was considered record time.

Seth and Samuel Foster built, the next year, the whaler, *Lagoda*, which they had intended to name **Ladoga** after the lake of that name in Russia. But, in some way, the consonants were misplaced, and, as the name was an attractive one, no correction was made. At first, the *Lagoda* was used in the merchant trade, but in 1841, Jonathan Bourne bought her to be used as a whaler, sailing from the port of New Bedford.

It is not surprising that the *Lagoda* was Jonathan Bourne's favorite ship because she earned for him over \$600,000. One voyage alone netted \$200,000. He sold her in 1886, and, four years later, she was condemned in Yokohama as unseaworthy after 64 years of service.

The memory of this ship is perpetuated in the Bourne wing of the Dartmouth Historical Society at New Bedford, which houses a model of the *Lagoda* exactly half-size and fully equipped for whaling except for actual food supplies. This was a gift to the Society from Miss Emily Bourne as a memorial to her father, Jonathan Bourne, and his favorite ship, the *Lagoda*,

built on our North River. It is well worth a visit for it is possible to go on board and make a careful inspection, going below to the cabin.

The captain's berth is of mahogany and so mounted that no matter how the *Lagoda* rolled, the berth itself would be level, while a compass overhead showed whether the man at the wheel was keeping on course. In the after-cabin, which according to custom was the captain's drawing room, is a built-in mahogany sofa upholstered with haircloth, which is typical of all the old whaling ships. The original *Lagoda* was 371 tons and 107 feet in length, while the model is fifty-four feet in length. The *Lagoda* is mentioned in *Two Years Before the Mast* [published in 1840] by Richard Henry Dana.

Among the men who probably worked on the *Lagoda* was Anson Robbins, the great-grandfather of Mr. Herbert E. Robbins, who used to do the cabinetwork. The original sofa and swinging berth were doubtless his share in the construction.

There is living today [1938] in Bermuda, an old man whose two cousins sailed on the *Lagoda* when she made her record catch of oil.

The next yard down river is at Chittenden, where the Second Herring Brook joins the river near the home of William E. Mills. Job Randall is thought to be the first to build at this yard, although it takes its name from a family which used it later. Job Randall lived in the Liddell house [104 River Street] or else one that stood on that location. If only the early settlers had been more definite in recording erection dates of their houses, how grateful we would be to them.

Later, the Torreys, who lived in the Liddell house, also built at the Chittenden yard. One branch of this family lived in a fine old house at the Partridge Nest, which is on the right hand side of Circuit Street, just before you drive into Clarke Atwater's camp. Unfortunately, the house burned some years ago. One boy born in this house was George Otis Torrey, who at the age of twelve, sailed to the East Indies. He followed the sea for six years, making many long voyages, and then worked in the yard as a ship carpenter. Later, he served in the Union Army as a Corporal. During the last of his life, he lived in the house now occupied by the Neftels as the Grenadier Tea Room [a rooming house and establishment in Norwell on River St.].

A peach tree used to grow between the house and the road, which George O., as everyone called him, guarded zealously, but despite his care, he had no peaches for himself. The school children, in particular, used to hop off the horse-drawn school barge and help themselves to the fruit. George O. used to shout at them, which added to the fun, for the children knew he was too lame to catch them. One day, a little colored boy was the offender, whereup[on], Mr. Torrey hobbled to the door and yelled, "You, I fought and bled

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NORWELL HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

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

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

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

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

**MEMBERSHIP**

Individual (\$15) \_\_\_\_\_ Business (\$40) \_\_\_\_\_  
 Family (\$25) \_\_\_\_\_ Life (\$200) \_\_\_\_\_  
 Benefactor (\$500) \_\_\_\_\_

**AREAS OF INTEREST**

Newsletter \_\_\_\_\_ Public Relations \_\_\_\_\_  
 Hospitality \_\_\_\_\_ Program Planning \_\_\_\_\_  
 Library Volunteer \_\_\_\_\_ Historical Research \_\_\_\_\_  
 Photo Cataloging \_\_\_\_\_ Process Archival \_\_\_\_\_  
 Material \_\_\_\_\_  
 Other: \_\_\_\_\_

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

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**ALONG THE NORTH RIVER, CONT'D**  
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for you." The little boy gravely removed his cap, bowed low and said, "Thank you, Mr. Torrey." Then, seizing a peach, he nimbly ran after the school barge.

One of the men who worked at the Chittenden yard was a negro known as Uncle Peter Litchfield. He used to drive a single ox cart, and, when training a young [ox], would hitch him ahead of the older, tandem fashion. People used to enjoy asking Uncle Peter how his new ox worked to hear him reply, "Pretty well for a flying jib."

At the Chittenden yard, the last vessel built on the North River was launched in 1871, the Helen M. Foster. She was built by Joseph Merritt, the father

of Joseph F. Merritt, the president of the [Norwell Historical in 1938] society, and, he named her for his wife. The launching was a great event, and, fortunately, there are pictures of it taken by James Williams, who used to live in the Ringe house on [238] River Street, next to the Grenadier.

Joseph Merritt also used to do the ironwork on ships, and, the latter part of his life, he had a blacksmith shop in the building which John Sparrell now uses for a garage. Probably a number of you, like myself, have found that doorway quite narrow for a car. It was intended for horses and oxen rather than the modern conveyances, and, I am glad it remains unchanged, even to the wrought iron latch.

River Street was really a street of shipbuilders, for Elnathan Cushing, who lived in the Blackhall house, worked at the Foster yard. The Torreys, in the Liddell house, Walter Foster in the Deane's house, and Warren Sylvester, opposite all, were ship carpenters. Warren Sylvester's sons, Charles and Harvey also worked in the yards. Charles Foster, a brother of Walter, lived in our house, and is thought to have worked occasionally in the yards. Next door lived Elijah Cudworth, who built at the Chittenden yard. At the Grenadier was George Otis Torrey, and opposite, in Miss Locke's house, was Laban Souther, both of whom were ship carpenters. At the foot of the hill, where the Cox house now stands, was an old house, the home of Elisha Foster. While his son, Elisha, built the Keefe place. Samuel Foster, another son, lived in the Skelding place since he married Sarah Delano, the sister of William Delano, who built the Gutterson house. Seth Foster, still another son of Elisha, lived in the Bullard house, and his daughter, Jane, married Benjamin F. Delano, one of William's sons. In fact, nearly every house can claim one or more shipbuilder.

**TRIVIA**

**QUESTION:**  
 2013 is the 152<sup>nd</sup> anniversary of the start of the Civil War. How many South Scituate (Norwell) veterans are memorialized on the Civil War Monument on the Common?

**ANSWER:** According to Chapter 7 in Sam Olson's *A Narrative of South Scituate & Norwell: 1849-1963, Remembering Its Past and the World Around It*, there are twenty-four soldiers and sailors listed on the monument.

Trivia Corner



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Norwell, MA  
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*at the* **CHRISTMAS  
FARMHOUSE**

**Sunday, December 15<sup>th</sup>  
2:00-4:00 pm**

**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.

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*.

HISTORY OF SOUTH SCITUATE-NORWELL \_\_\_\_\_ \$25  
by Joseph Foster Merritt

A recently re-published history of the town to 1938. A unique narrative considered to be an invaluable account of Norwell prior to WWII.

*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 call Wendy Bawabe at 781-659-1464, 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.*



Lynn DeGhetto passed away at her beautiful 18<sup>th</sup> century home on River Street on November 7<sup>th</sup>, 2013. Lynn was a longtime member of the Norwell Historical Society and most recently on the Board of Directors. She will be greatly missed by many.

*Of Note...*

The Town of Norwell, through its Community Preservation Fund, voted at 2013 Town Meeting to restore two paintings at the Jacobs Farmhouse and re-wallpaper the "Tin Ceiling Room."



The project is now complete--please come to the Christmas at the Farmhouse event on December 15<sup>th</sup> to view the Rev. Ballou painting (above, before restoration) and the Jacobs Mills painting, and to see the newly-wallpapered parlor.