



October 2012

# Newsletter

NORWELL HISTORICAL SOCIETY

P.O. Box 693

NORWELL, MASSACHUSETTS 02061

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

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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 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 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.

## HISTORIC HOUSE FOCUS: CAPT. CHARLES HENRY TURNER HOUSE

*The Norwell Historical Society will be hosting architectural historian Brian Pfeiffer at our Annual Meeting on October 25<sup>th</sup> (see page 3 for more details). His topic of discussion will be historic home renovations. The Society newsletter will occasionally feature a history of an antique Norwell home as a reminder of the bounty of historic homes in our town and their significance. This is the first of this series of articles.*

*By Samuel Olson*

Situated on the corner of Main and Winter Streets is one of Norwell's most admired antique homes. Now numbered 793 Main Street, it's located on land originally belonging to the "Old Parsonage," several hundred feet to the west. Recently, it was painted in a color appropriate to the time period in which it was built in 1814 by Captain Charles Henry Turner for his bride Deborah. Captain Turner lived only thirty-one years—dying in Cuba in 1821.



793 Main Street in February, 1954.

The ten-room house, added to and improved over the years, is a center chimney and center doorway, hip-roofed Federal colonial. The front entry is also distinguished by a two-story projecting bay with a pediment top. A three-bay ell with a gable roof extends

to the east. The original barn, where the garage now stands, was moved across the street and made into a house by owner Alden D. Wheeler in the 1920s. The present two-car garage has curved carriage house doors.

Inside, the house boasts five working fireplaces, some with original brick hearths. The large fireplace in the living room, originally the kitchen, is equipped with a workable crane. There are also many original plank floors and large exposed beams. The dining room decor is highlighted by two corner cupboards.

A later built spacious back porch leading to exquisite perennial gardens enclosed by hedges was improved upon in the 1930s by Mr. and Mrs. C.C. Baird. A favorite project of theirs was also a large goldfish pond.

Standing in the front yard behind a quintessential picket fence is an unusual tulip tree that blooms each spring with tulip-like yellow blooms.

In the 1830s the house was owned by William Tilden Phillips who worked in the Medford shipyards as a carpenter. It was in this house that Phillips was aided by Rev. Samuel J. May in his quest to become a minister. After his ordination Rev. Phillips was invited to serve a church in Norton, Mass. After this, his father, North River shipbuilder Luther Tilden and his wife, lived in the house.

One of the most noted later owners was Dr. Nathan Brownell, along with his wife and two daughters. The house was purchased by the Brownells in 1864,

*continued on page 2*

# ALONG THE NORTH RIVER

*Editor's Note: The following is the second 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 remainder of the article will appear in future editions of the Society newsletter.*

In 1787, the Revolution being over, there was considerable interest manifested in establishing trade relations with the Northwest territory, which was claimed at that time by both Great Britain and Spain. Charles Bulfinch, the noted architect, and a group of friends, including one of the Derbys of Salem and Captain Crowell Hatch of Cambridge, subscribed \$50,000 to finance a trading trip to this hitherto unknown territory.

Mr. Bulfinch and his associates bought for this enterprise two vessels, the *Lady Washington* and the *Columbia*. It was thought that the former was built on the North River, but there is no definite proof (although we of this region would naturally like to claim it.) However, there is no doubt that the *Columbia* was the tiny ship of two hundred tons, eighty-three feet in length built by James Briggs at Hobart's Landing in 1773. The *Columbia* was captained by John Kendrick of Wareham while Robert Gray had charge of the *Lady Washington*, the smaller of the two boats. Naturally, there was a great deal of interest felt in this enterprise, and some commemorative medals were cast, some of which are still in existence. It was the general plan to trade for furs with the Indians and then push on to China to exchange the fur for tea to bring back to Boston. Accordingly, the two vessels set sail with an assortment of hardware, beads and other articles calculated to please the dusky inhabitants of the Northwest. It took a long time, about a year to round Cape Horn and travel up the Pacific coast to what is now Oregon, and they had the usual trouble with scurvy. When they reached their destination, some of the men were killed by the Indians. They spent considerable time collecting furs, coming in contact with the vessels of both the Spanish and British fleet bent on similar activity.

Here reports differ. Some say the two captains exchanged commands in Oregon, while others say that both vessels went to Canton, China, where Captain Gray took the *Columbia* and Captain Kendrick the *Lady Washington*. Of these two versions, it is Dr. [L. Vernon] Briggs' theory that the exchange took place on the Oregon coast. In any event, we know that the *Columbia* touched at Hawaii for there Attoo, a native prince, joined the expedition. At Canton, the furs were bartered for tea and Captain Gray continued with the *Columbia* on his way to Boston via the Cape of Good Hope, the first Yankee to carry the flag of the new

nation around the globe! Three years after leaving Boston, the *Columbia* returned from her long journey, and, quite naturally, there was great excitement upon her arrival. Salutes were fired by the town artillery, and Governor John Hancock gave a dinner to the owners and officers of the *Columbia*. The Hawaiian prince, Attoo, who had returned with Captain Gray, was the first of his nation to visit this country, and, he made quite a sensation, especially as he wore a gorgeous cloak and helmet of yellow and scarlet feathers, which, in Hawaii, only persons of prominence were allowed to possess. It is said that the cloak worn by Attoo is now [1938] on display at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. I have not seen it, but the next chance I have, I am going to hunt for it. That is one of the delightful things of being a history lover, there is always something new to look for in the old, if you know what I mean.

Captain Gray made a second trip to the Oregon coast with the *Columbia*, and, this time he discovered the river which bears the name of our North River ship, *Columbia*. Captain Gray named this mighty stream in honor of the staunch craft, built by James Briggs, which had carried him so far. At the entrance of the river stood a Sitka spruce, which was used as a landmark in taking bearings by all mariners entering the river from the time of Captain Gray until 1934 when it was blown down by a severe storm. The Oregon D.A.R. Chapter have [has] marked the spot with a tablet, and have also had a gavel made of wood, one of which was presented to the Norwell Historical Society by Mrs. Frank P. Nason of Scituate. Needless to say, it is highly valued for its connection with our North River valley. Unfortunately, for all concerned, neither of these trips to the Northwest were financially successful, but, on the other hand, they were pioneer trips which helped establish trade relations with that territory, and, from that standpoint, they were highly successful.

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## HOUSE FOCUS, cont.'d

*continued from page 1*

and the doctor practiced medicine there for twenty years. Indeed, then and into the early 20th century it was known as The Brownell House. His daughter Nellie married Joseph Hartt, whose grandfather had built *The Constitution*.

Other owners in the 20th century were the Arthur Thornhills, the Robert Sandersons, the Charles Morgans, the Ronald Girards, and the Richard Sparrows. All owners down to the present occupants, Karl and Linda Swenson, made their marks on the house with various improvements. During the time of many of these owners, the house became known as the "Christmas House," each window decorated with evergreen wreaths and a single lighted white candle.

# 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) \_\_\_\_\_

### 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

## 77<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL MEETING: THURSDAY, OCTOBER 25<sup>TH</sup>

The Phoenix Lodge in Hanover Four Corners will host the Norwell Historical Society's Annual Meeting on Thursday, October 25<sup>th</sup>. The evening includes:

- 6:00—Wine Reception and Specialty Contractor Exhibit (local contractors who specialize in historical renovations)
- 7:00—Roast Beef Dinner
- 8:00—Brief Meeting followed by our featured speaker Brian Pfeiffer, Architectural Historian

Mr. Pfeiffer will discuss the pros and cons of rehabbing old homes; when to "give up" and when to restore; and he will share personal stories and photographs from his work at Harvard, on Nantucket, and throughout Massachusetts. Local historical contractors will set up displays and be available for consultation during the Wine Reception.

For more information and to reserve your ticket, please see the "Events" tab at [www.norwellhistoricalsociety.org](http://www.norwellhistoricalsociety.org) or call 781-659-1888 and leave a message.

## The Ol' Riddler

Last Issue's Question: Now summer was in full swing, and the Strawberry Festival was upon us. Ol' Farmer Litchfield was bringing a load of strawberries down to the Festival. His horse, Chestnut, was feeling the heat and could only run 12 miles an hour with an empty wagon. For every bushel of berries, her speed was reduced by 0.5 miles per hour. Aunt Tat was expecting a banner crowd and thinks he better bring 14 bushels. The Jacobs Farmhouse, perennial host of the event, is 11 miles away. If the festival starts at 3 o' clock, exactly what time should Farmer Litchfield start cracking the whip on Ol' Chestnut?

Answer: Farmer Litchfield will have to leave at 12:48 to arrive at 3 o'clock.



This Issue's Question: Mr. Turner, Property Manager at the Jacobs Farmhouse, thought he was pretty clever by rigging up his 3 barn lights so he could turn them on and off from the Farmhouse kitchen. He had one switch for each light, but he never knew which switch was for which barn light, and you cannot see the lights from the switches.

It was a cold winter night, and Mr. Turner wanted to make ONE trip out to the barn, and

he wanted to figure out once and for all which switch was for which light.

What could Mr. Turner do to the switches so that he could walk out to the barn and be able to tell which switch was for which light (for all 3 lights) in one trip?

Answer: In the next issue!

The first and fourth readers who submit the correct answer will win five dollars! Send your answers to the Ol' Riddler at [contact@norwellhistoricalsociety.org](mailto:contact@norwellhistoricalsociety.org). Be sure to put "Ol' Riddler" in the subject line.



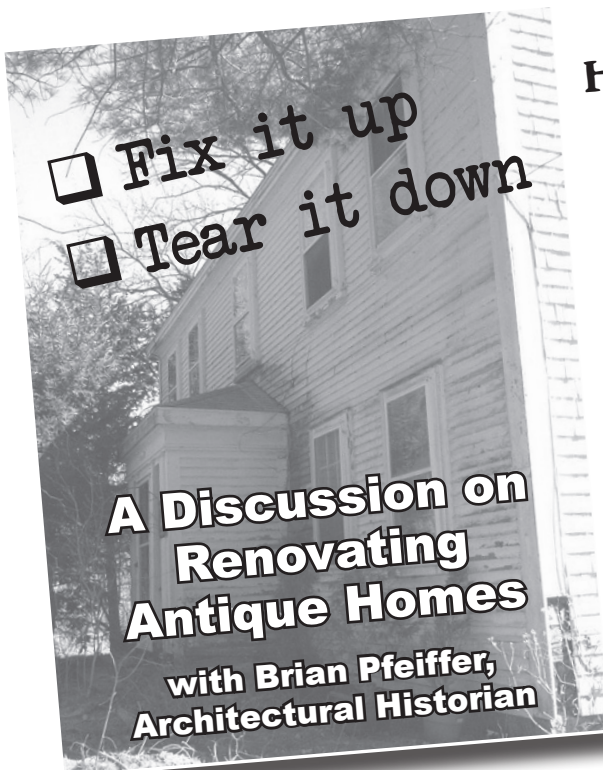


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- Fix it up
- Tear it down

## A Discussion on Renovating Antique Homes

with Brian Pfeiffer,  
Architectural Historian

### Norwell Historical Society 77<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting & Dinner

Thursday, October 25<sup>th</sup>  
6:00 Wine Reception &  
Specialty Contractor Exhibits  
7:00 Roast Beef Dinner  
8:00 Brian Pfeiffer, Speaker

Phoenix Lodge  
Hanover Four Corners

\$15/person

RSVP  
[www.norwellhistoricalsociety.org](http://www.norwellhistoricalsociety.org)  
("Upcoming Events" tab)  
or call 781-659-1888  
and leave a message

## Of Note...



The Sergeant Samuel Stetson House has been moved! It now resides on the cul-de-sac at the end of Stetson Shrine Road--awaiting a new home on the Stetson Kindred property, on Town of Norwell property at the nearby Stetson Meadows Cemetery, or elsewhere (if an interested buyer/mover comes forward).

The Norwell Historical Commission oversaw the move, which was done by Sylvester Building Movers on Cape Cod.