



February 2013

# Newsletter

NORWELL HISTORICAL SOCIETY

P.O. Box 693

NORWELL, MASSACHUSETTS 02061

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

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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 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 from 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.

## THE EMANCIPATION PROCLAMATION AND THE FREEMANS OF SOUTH SCITUATE/NORWELL

By Pattie Hainer

When Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation 150 years ago on Jan. 1, 1863, hundreds of thousands of slaves were freed. It was a New Year's Day like no other. Had Asher Freeman of South Scituate (now Norwell) been alive, he would have celebrated along with all of the others who fought mightily for that day.

Freeman was one of five thousand slaves who won their own freedom by fighting in the American Revolution. A slave of Nathan Cushing, he served for three years, marching 220 miles to Vermont where he became a member of the Green Mountain Boys and fought alongside Simeon Grandison, another slave from South Scituate.

At first George Washington did not welcome slaves into the fighting ranks but he reconsidered after the troops were decimated by death and disease, and defeat loomed on the horizon. Lincoln faced a similar situation. He was reluctant to free slaves but issued the Emancipation Proclamation when the move enlisted crucial support for the Union cause.

By then all slaves in South Scituate had been freed and the population of African-Americans had grown. Fourteen free men of color went off to fight in the Civil War, as many as had served in the Revolutionary War from all of Scituate. Six of the fourteen soldiers served with Robert Gould Shaw's all black 54<sup>th</sup> regiment, celebrated in Augustus Saint-Gauden's sculpture in the Boston Common and in the movie "Glory." Two of these soldiers were great-grandsons of Asher Freeman.

Warren Freeman, 22 years old, and William Freeman, 19 years old, were brothers who enlisted on the same day, Dec. 10, 1863, twenty-one days before the Emancipation Proclamation was issued. They were also discharged on the same day in 1865, three months after the end of the war.

Warren, a shoemaker, died of consumption three years after his discharge and was buried in the First Parish Church cemetery. William went on to marry and have four children. He died in Whitman when he was 42 years old from Moarasmus, a kind of malnutrition that was attributed to his war service.

Asher Freeman had a third great-grandson who served in the war, Lemuel Freeman, a 33 year old shoemaker who died after being shot at the Siege of Petersburg in Virginia, a battle at which more African-Americans fought than any other during the war. Lemuel is also buried in First Parish Cemetery.



*A scene at the Siege of Petersburg.*

"He died to make his own race free," wrote Joseph Foster Merritt about Lemuel Freeman in his history of the town.

*continued on page 3*

# ALONG THE NORTH RIVER

*Editor's Note: The following is the fourth 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. To read the article in its entirety, you may go to the Society website (www.norwellhistoricalsociety.org) and click on the "newsletter archive" link.*

On Dr. Bailey's place (likely Wanton Shipyard Lane), at one time, lived the Friend [Quaker], Edward Wanton, who began building boats about 1660. He had been an officer in the King's Guard in Boston, but was so impressed by the sincerity of the Friends, as the Quakers prefer to be called, that he resigned from the service and became a convert to that faith. Since persons of that sect were more tolerated in Scituate than in other parts of the colony, he and his family settled here, where he busied himself with building ships and teaching. So many became converted to this faith that, at one time, the Friends had a meeting house where Stephen Webster's greenhouse stands on the Greenbush road. Later, there is said to have been another meeting house on Wanton land, which was later moved to Pembroke. That is something no one seems very certain about, and, there are many different versions.

One is that the Friends met in the Wanton dwelling house, and, that there was no special building for their use. Another is that there was actually a meeting house which was moved up river on gundalows; another that it was taken up river on the ice by oxen, and, others feel certain it never was moved in-tact, but material from it may have been used in the construction of the present building standing in North



*The Pembroke Friends Meetinghouse sits today on the corner of Washington Street and Schoosett Street.*

Pembroke. That is something that may yet be settled, but at the present time, you may take your choice.

One thing is certain—the Wantons, father and sons, did build ships on the Bailey place, and, near their dwelling was a burying ground. Most of the markers for the graves were just field stones in accordance with the custom of their sect, but, later, other persons were

buried there, whose graves had the conventional slate stones. One of these marked "Mary Webb, 1706" was in place about ten years ago.

Two of Edward Wanton's sons, William and John (despite the teachings of their faith) indulged in privateering off Newport [probably Queen Anne's War, 1702 to 1713]. They were both striking-looking men judging from their portraits which hang in the Rhode Island Senate Chamber. While the Friends' teaching does not approve of fighting, Edward Wanton is said to have told his sons that while he would regret to hear that they had taken part in any military engagements, he would regret more if they proved to be cowards.

He probably felt like another member of his faith, who was captain of a vessel being overhauled by a privateer. He was not inclined to offer resistance, but his mate begged to be allowed to take a shot at his pursuer; suggesting that, since it was against the captain's scruples to go below. Accordingly, the captain went below, but a few minutes later, his enthusiasm got the better of his religious beliefs, and, he cautiously poked his head above the companionway, and remarked, "Mate, if thee means to do any execution with that swivel gun, I would advise thee to lower the muzzle a little."

In like manner, Edward Wanton probably took a keen interest in this activity of his sons, and he had a right to be proud of them. One exploit was the capture of a French privateer of considerable size. They rode out to it in the fog, as it lay at anchor, and firmly inserted wedges between the rudder head and the sternpost so that the vessel could not be steered. Later, they attacked with their own vessel, doubtless built on the North River, and overpowered the Frenchmen.

The Wantons went to London after this exploit, and were received at court by Queen Anne, who presented each with a silver punch bowl and salver, and also granted them an addition to their coat of arms.

William Wanton married Ruth Bryant, a daughter of John Bryant, who lived near the site of Albert Norris' mill. There was considerable objection to the match as the Friends did not like him to marry out of the faith, nor the Congregationalists eager to have him marry into theirs. However, William was a resourceful sort of young man in love ... for, eventually, he solved the problem by addressing Ruth in the presence of her family, thus: "Let us break away from this unreasonable bondage. I will give up my religion and thee will give up thine. We will join the Church of England and go to the devil together." They followed the first part, if not the second of William's suggestion. Ruth did not do so badly after all, for her husband was twice elected governor of [the colony of] Rhode Island, and one of their sons was governor of that [colony for] six years.

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

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

### AREAS OF INTEREST

Newsletter \_\_\_\_\_ Public Relations \_\_\_\_\_

Hospitality \_\_\_\_\_ Program Planning \_\_\_\_\_

Library Volunteer \_\_\_\_\_ Historical Research \_\_\_\_\_

Photo Cataloging \_\_\_\_\_ Process Archival \_\_\_\_\_  
Material \_\_\_\_\_

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

## EMANCIPATION, CONT'D.

*continued from page 1*

These two wars proved to be important chapters in the country's history of race relations. While both emancipated slaves, they did not free black Americans from discrimination and poverty. After emancipation, freed slaves had to scramble to set up households with scant resources. In South Scituate, many continued to live with their former owners as servants and a



*Augustus Saint-Gauden's sculpture in the Boston Common that honors the 54<sup>th</sup> Regiment.*

community of freed slaves lived in shacks off Wildcat Lane. Others ended up so poor that they were auctioned off as paupers. The grandparents of William and Warren Freeman lived for a time in the town's almshouse as did Lemuel Freeman's mother.

And so, as we remember this anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation, Norwell can celebrate this one remarkable family who sent soldiers to fight in two wars to gain their own freedom and that of others. Asher Freeman

was not freed by the Emancipation Proclamation but he issued his own personal proclamation by adopting the surname Freeman when he was liberated, the only slave in South Scituate to do so.

Changes are being proposed to the Norwell Historical Society by-laws, and it is important that all members read through the changes and be prepared to vote at our April meeting/presentation (see below). Please read the new wording at the link on our website or call the Society at 781-659-1888 and we will mail you a copy of the proposed changes. Thank you.

**VISIT OUR WEBSITE!**

### Commonwealth Museum & Archives

## PRESENTATION

Wednesday, April 10<sup>th</sup>

at 7:00 pm, 3<sup>rd</sup> floor of Sparrell School

Dr. Stephen Kenney, Director of the Commonwealth Museum—the Museum of Massachusetts History, will make a presentation to both the Norwell and Hanover Historical Societies on April 10th.

Dr. Kenney will introduce us to this important Boston museum and discuss some of the various exhibits now on display, including one on Acadians and another on Massachusetts blacks in the Civil War.



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P.O. Box 693

NORWELL, MASSACHUSETTS 02061

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## Of Note...

In 2010, Norwell Town Meeting voted to use Community Preservation Act funding to scan, preserve, frame and display a number of historic documents and items owned by the Norwell Historical Society. As part of that project, a number of framed photographs of scenes of Norwell past are now on display at the Town Hall. Each photo is captioned to help educate townspeople as to its current location and its importance in Norwell history. Be sure to look for these pieces in the main hallway of the Town Hall second floor.

Thank you to the Community Preservation Committee and to the citizens of Norwell for supporting this project!

**NORWELL YEARBOOKS NEEDED** for the Society Library collection. Please consider donating a yearbook from the following years: pre-1927, 1935, 1936, 1937, 1941, 1942, 1946, 1947, 1950, 1951, 1952, 1953, 1954, 1968, 1978, 1981, 1983, 1988, 1989, or post-1990. Yearbooks are a popular research tool at the Library.

## 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 Wed. & Thur. (1:30-3:30 p.m.) or you may call Gert Daneau at 781-659-2226, 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.*