



# February 2008 Newsletter

NORWELL HISTORICAL SOCIETY

P.O. Box 693

NORWELL, MASSACHUSETTS 02061

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## CONTACTING US

The Norwell Historical Society  
P.O. Box 693  
Norwell, MA 02061  
781-659-1888

## MUSEUMS & LIBRARY HOURS

The Jacobs Farmhouse is open by appointment only. Please call the Society for further information.

The Norwell Historical Society Library at the Norwell Middle School (328 Main Street--Route 123) is open from 1:30 p.m. to 3:30 p.m. Wednesday and Thursday each week.

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: 1.) to plan and arrange for the promotion of knowledge about the Town of Norwell, Massachusetts 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.

## BLACK HISTORY MONTH IN NORWELL: HEZEKIAH WILLIAMS AND *HIS* DREAM

It was not unusual in the mid-1800s for a citizen of South Scituate (now Norwell) traveling through the woods of the town to come upon a strange sight. Often that traveler (upon seeing the sight) smiled and knew that Black Bill had been there.

Who was Black Bill? His name was Hezekiah Williams, but he was affectionately called "Black Bill" by all who knew him. The town folks decided that he was most likely a runaway slave. But Hezekiah was a favorite around town and people were always glad to see him. He worked odd jobs—sometimes in the ship building trade on the North River and sometimes for the local farmers. When he had enough money for food, he was off to the woods—because just like Dr. Martin Luther King, he had a dream!

*What was the sight that made people smile as they walked through the woods? It was all part of Black Bill's dream: he was building ships! At times it was hard to tell if his "ships" were chicken coops or ships,*

but their strange design was familiar and his woodland fleet grew steadily. Perhaps he was seeking the right design... or maybe just having the dream was enough.

Hezekiah had a great and wonderful dream: to build a flotilla of ships to sail south and carry the slaves to freedom! He worked on this dream all his life—until his death at the Almshouse in Bridgewater. But the nobility of his dream should never die; it should be remembered and honored.

Somewhere in Norwell there should be a statue or plaque that reads:

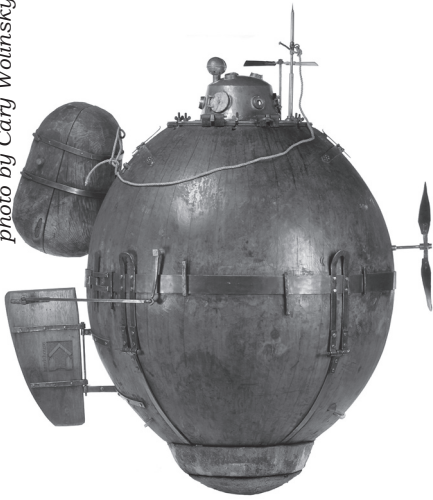
**Hezekiah Williams  
Dreamer, Shipbuilder,  
Freedom Fighter.**

*The source for this article is Briggs' History of Shipbuilding on the North River. See the last page of this newsletter for information on purchasing this and other historical books from the Norwell Historical Society.*

**PUT IT ON YOUR CALENDAR: JUNE 22, 2008**  
 **STRAWBERRY FESTIVAL**

# NORWELL'S OWN HANDSHOUSE STUDIO TO PRESENT AT THE CUSHING CENTER

photo by Cary Woinisky



The Bushnell Turtle was built by the archeologists and artisans at Handshouse Studio in Norwell.

On **Monday, March 31<sup>st</sup>**, Handshouse Studio of Norwell will make a presentation to members of the Norwell Historical Society and any interested residents.

Handshouse is located off Meadow Farms Way in Norwell, yet it reaches audiences throughout the world with its exhibitions, lectures, films, workshops and publications.

A non-profit educational organization, Handshouse is dedicated to the perpetuation of history, science, architecture and art through the reconstruction of large historical objects. Handshouse scholars, educators, historians, architects, engineers, anthropolo-

gists, archeologists, artists, craftsman, and builders reconstruct history—often right on the grounds of their Norwell studio!

On March 31<sup>st</sup> Rick and Laura Brown, the founders of Handshouse, will describe a number of their recent projects including the Bushnell Turtle (pictured left).

David Bushnell designed the Turtle during the American Revolutionary War as the first submarine. It was hoped that the submarine operator could somehow attach a bomb to the underside of British ships and blow them up in New York Harbor.

The Turtle was reconstructed using original letters and written histories of the American Revolution period and investigating period technologies and materials that would have been used in the construction of the original Bushnell Turtle.

Please join the Browns and the Norwell Historical Society on **Monday, March 31<sup>st</sup> at 7:30 p.m.** at the Cushing Center for an evening of storytelling *and* science!



## Did You Know?

...the answer to the last issue's Trivia Corner Question? The question was: **Whence comes the water that feeds the North River?**

The answer is: From 3 brooks and over 40 ponds (according to William G. Vinal).

**VOLUNTEERS NEEDED** for the upcoming Historical Society Strawberry Festival on Sunday, June 22<sup>nd</sup>. As much as volunteers on the day of the Festival are needed, enthusiastic and energetic volunteers are *also* needed prior to the Festival to brainstorm ideas, organize events, and infuse a new spirit into the annual celebration! If you are interested in helping out, please contact Wendy Bawabe of the NHS at 781-659-1464.

TRIVIA  
QUESTION:

Norwell is a heavenly place to live, but Pergatory is also here. Where, in Norwell, is Purgatory?

ANSWER: in the next issue!

Trivia Corner

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 \_\_\_\_\_  
Research Library \_\_\_\_\_ Historical Research \_\_\_\_\_  
Photo Cataloging \_\_\_\_\_ Process Archival \_\_\_\_\_  
Material \_\_\_\_\_  
Other: \_\_\_\_\_



*Norwell was named for Henry Norwell, a wealthy Boston dry goods merchant who provided funds for the maintenance of the town roads. Other names voted on for Norwell were Deane, Hatherly, Cushing, and Standish. All of the non-selected names got 2 votes, Norwell got 215! This mock sign depicts what could have been!*

**HYSLOPS “RETIRE” FROM NHS LIBRARY DUTY**

If you’ve every been to the Norwell Historical Society Library at the Middle School on a Wednesday afternoon, you’ve met Tom and Alice Hyslop. Every Wednesday for countless years the Hyslops have staffed the Library—cataloging information, updating records, maintaining computer files and providing answers for all Library visitors.

Last month, Tom and Alice announced that the trek from their home in Plymouth to the Norwell Middle School was becoming too much, and that their Wednesday coverage of Library hours was coming to an end.

Thankfully, many Society volunteers have stepped forward to cover the Hyslops’ hours, but none of these volunteers can provide the infinite knowledge that Tom and Alice have of the history of Norwell.

Thank you Tom and Alice Hyslop for your years of dedication to the NHS Library!



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**PAID**

Norwell, MA  
Permit No. 10

## NORWELL HISTORICAL SOCIETY PUBLICATIONS AND MEMORABILIA

SHIPBUILDING ON THE NORTH RIVER \_\_\_\_\_ \$45

by L. Vernon Briggs

The definitive book on ships built on the North River and the shipyards that lined the shores. Written in 1889. Second reprinting in 1981.

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.

HISTORIC HOMESTEADS OF NORWELL \_\_\_\_\_ \$15

published by NHS, 1992

We are proud of our lovely town. 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.

HISTORIA \_\_\_\_\_ \$7.50

A gem of local history for the people of the Norwell/Scituate area. George C. Turner's six pamphlets, written in 1898-99 have been re-printed for our enjoyment. Read about Norwell 100 years ago from the man on the scene.

THE WAY WE WERE \_\_\_\_\_ \$18.88

by Jeanne Garside

This book is a series of articles written to preview Norwell's Centennial Celebration in 1888. Read what times were like when Norwell came of age. Illustrated with old photographs.

MORE THAN JUST A COOKBOOK \_\_\_\_\_ \$5

This book, expectably, is full of time-tested favorite recipes submitted by local people. Beyond the gastronomic delights, we have included historical sketches, interesting narratives and accounts of historic events. In his amply illustrated by local artists.

NORWELL PLATE \_\_\_\_\_ \$25

Limited edition plate with the town seal. Each plate is numbered, suitable for hot and cold use, and may be hung. Handcrafted in the USA.

HENDERSON MAP \_\_\_\_\_ \$3

Interesting hand-drawn map suitable for framing. It was drawn by Anne Henderson and first issued in 1967 by the NHS. A favorite depiction of the location of historic homes.

*All the above items are available at the NHS Library in the Middle School on Wednesdays and Thursdays from 1:00 p.m. until 4:00 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.*