



NORTH RIVER PACKET

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Perambulating Norwell’s Boundaries

The discovery in the Society Archives of a very large 1899 map book titled Boundaries of the Town of Norwell inspired two volunteers to investigate the (once legally-required) tradition of “perambulation.”

When regular Archives volunteer Judy Grecco discovered a large (1' X 2') map book while helping to sort and organize the Society’s collection, she was intrigued not only because of its size.

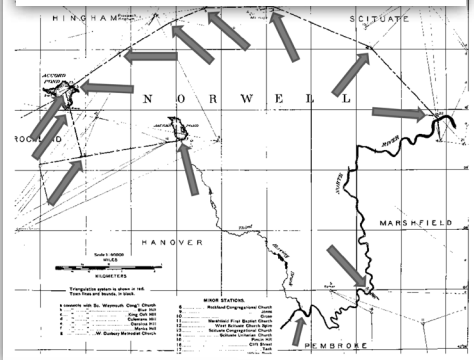
per·am·bu·late |pə-ˈram-byə-lāt| *v.*
1. to travel over or through especially on foot.
2. to make an official inspection of (a boundary) on foot.

Within the book, titled *Boundaries of the Town of Norwell* and written in 1899, were very specific instructions as to the location of each of the 12 boundary markers for our town.

The history of perambulation began in the 1600s with a state law that required local officials to walk the town lines every few years to mark and measure boundaries. It wasn’t until 1973 when the requirement of town officials to walk the boundaries every five years was finally repealed.

Many towns in the Commonwealth, however, continue to make a regular

The mapped-out boundary locations (including 2 for the moved marker— see photo at right).



“The boundary markers... shall be located, the marks thereon renewed, and the year located marked upon the face... once every five years, by at least two of the selectmen of the town...”

Massachusetts General Laws Part I, Title VII, Chapter 42, Section 2

tradition of “Perambulation”—looking at the practice as a historical custom worthy of continuing.

Judy Grecco envisioned resurrecting the tradition, but was unsure how to bring this historic event into the 21st century.

Enter Historical Society Board member Karl Swenson.

Karl is a private pilot, a photographer who uses both camera and airplane,


Karl Swenson noted Marker #4 has been moved and placed in the bushes near the original location.



a computer-savvy sleuth, and an adventurous person!

Creating a chart using the original 1899 latitude and longitude coordinates and today’s Mass GIS coordinates, he converted both numbers into modern GPS locations. Karl’s 43-page “Perambulation Resource Guide” notes each of the 12 locations as they were shown in 1899, photographs of the current sites, and gives specific directions to each of the stone markers.

The Historical Society will be using Judy’s find and Karl’s information to celebrate the history of [Perambulation on Saturday, November 18th](#) at the Grove Street entrance to Wompatuck State Park ([for more information see page 8 of this newsletter or the Society website “Events” page](#)).

The event will feature a brief presentation on perambulation followed by a 10-minute woodland walk to Marker #7 with Select Board member Andy Reardon and Highway Surveyor Glenn Ferguson. Perhaps interest among the Select Board will be sparked? If so, then the Society could make this event an annual tradition. 

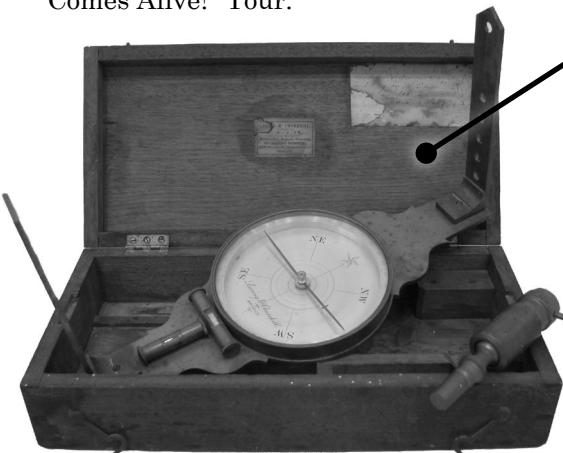
FROM THE ARCHIVES

Treasures known and treasures found in the Norwell Historical Society Archives and in the Jacobs Farmhouse Museum are featured here in each issue.

This oil painting often hangs at the James Library & Center for the Arts (when other artwork is not occupying the walls). Its label indicates it is a portrait of Sarah Hart Delano, but its provenance and how it came to be at the James is unknown. Known as “Madame Delano” during her lifetime, she will be portrayed at this year’s “First Parish Cemetery Comes Alive!” Tour.



A recent visit by members of the Bowker family (see article on page 3) had Society Board members checking “The Bowker Box” (an archival box in our Archives with Bowker family-related items in it). We were thrilled to be able to share our finds with the visitors, including this hand-stitched wallet owned by Dimmick Bowker (1769-1861). The wallet contained hand-written promissory notes and was an exciting find for all of us!



This surveyor’s compass is currently on display at the Norwell Public Library in the case outside of the Community Meeting Room. Part of the Society’s “The History of Norwell in 10 Objects” exhibition, it is usually on display at the Jacobs Farmhouse. Learn more about this item by attending the “10 Objects” presentation and Society Annual Meeting on Wednesday, October 4th at 5:30 pm at the NPL (sign up at right!).

[Sign up at the NPL website to attend the “History of Norwell in 10 Objects” presentation.](#)

Just The Facts

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Wendy Bawabe, President
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Chad Forman
Rebecca Freed
Daniel Neumann
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Alan Prouty
Karl Swenson
Janet Watson, Archivist

Museum & Research Library

The **Jacobs Farmhouse Museum** is open at scheduled events and by appointment only. Please contact the Society to schedule a tour.

The Norwell Historical Society **Research Library & Archives Center** on the 3rd floor of the Sparrell School (322 Main Street) is open on Thursday mornings from 10:00 am until noon or by appointment.

Administrative Consultant

Rachel Wollam

Mission Statement

The mission of the Norwell Historical Society is to discover, preserve, and celebrate Norwell history through stewardship, education, and awareness—engaging our community, both present and future, to be vested in its history.

Mailing Address & Phone

The Norwell Historical Society
P.O. Box 693
Norwell, MA 02061
781-561-1161



DISCOVER MORE ONLINE!

Look for the magnifying glasses in this issue—that means there is more to discover online and at the Society’s website NORWELLHISTORICALSOCIETY.ORG.

The Bowkers Come Home

The resources of the Historical Society were put to a test during a recent visit from out-of-towners with an Old Scituate/Norwell connection.

Putting together information from our Archives, from past First Parish Cemetery tours, and from friends of the Society, we were able to show the Bowker family around town in historic style!

by Wendy Bawabe, Society president

In May of 2022, the Historical Society was forwarded an email by the Town of Norwell Cemetery Department:

“I was wondering if you could advise me who is taking care of the original house that James Bowker lived in? I am compiling some information for my family members as to our ancestry so any stories or historical facts would be much appreciated. I hope to visit this beautiful area someday, but currently am located in Edmonton, Alberta [Canada].”

Little did we realize this initial contact from Fred Bowker would lead to much correspondence and an eventual visit from our neighbors to the north—all in the name of Bowker family history.

I replied to Fred’s initial email with an exclamation: “You are practically Old Scituate/Norwell royalty!”

Having portrayed Hannah Bowker (wife of James Bowker) at the 2022 First Parish Cemetery Comes Alive! Tour, I felt uniquely qualified to at least provide *some* information to the northern Bowker clan. Fred Bowker is a direct descendant of James Bowker, the first Bowker family member to arrive in Old Scituate in 1680.

After much email correspondence, Fred planned a visit to Norwell with his son, fittingly named “James,” for August of 2023.

Historical Society Archivist Janet Watson and I planned their visit to begin in the Archives, where we would open the “Bowker Box,” an archival storage box filled with items related to the family. Inside the box we found a hand-sewn leather wallet of Dimick Bowker (see page 2) and a hand-written copy of the original will and testament of Dimick Bowker (who

After the Archives, we visited the original James Bowker house (known today as the Kent House) in Norwell Center. Currently occupied by Historical Society member Bernie Perry and owned by First Parish of Norwell, the house has many original features including corner fireplaces. This interesting architectural element was believed to have originated from the fact that James Bowker was Swedish, and corner fireplaces radiated heat better and were, therefore, more common in Scandinavian countries. But after researching his relative, Fred Bowker has concluded that James was actually born in England, but lived with family in Sweden while he was younger. It is believed that this Swedish influence is what drew James to construct the more effective hearths.

Following the house tour, we visited First Parish Cemetery to see the grave of James Bowker and other family members. Having portrayed Hannah Bowker, I added some commentary about her life with 12 children!

A drive down Bowker Street and a visit to the Bowker Cemetery finished the tour. What an honor to play host to this historic family, and what a pleasure to know our Historical Society has such treasures to share and knowledge to impart. 🍃



Julia Bowker's photo album in the Society Archives has labeled pictures of members of the Bowker family.

was a grandson of the original James Bowker). Also at the Archives was the photo album of Julia Bowker (shown above), which contained numerous family photos previously-unknown to our visitors.

James Bowker, son of Fred Bowker, visited his relative's home—the James Bowker House between the James Library and First Parish of Norwell.



Witchcraft in Old Scituate?

Rev. Samuel Deane wrote History of Scituate, Massachusetts in 1830 (when today's Norwell was still a section of Old Scituate). Deane was minister of Second Parish Church (today's First Parish) from 1810-1834. This history, often considered a better research tool than storybook, does feature a fascinating tale apropos to this time of year.

Excerpt from Samuel Deane's [History of Scituate](#), published in 1831:

The first indictment for witchcraft in New England, was at Hartford, Connecticut, in 1647, when the first execution also took place for that offence, "against God and the King." The only indictments in Plymouth Colony for witchcraft were against two persons of Scituate, which we have extracted from the Colony records.

*A.D. 1660, "William Holmes' wife was accused for being a witch. Dinah Sylvester accuser and witness sworne, said she saw a beare about a stone's throw from the path * * **

** * * (blank in the records) * * **

But being examined and asked what manner of taylor the beare had, she said she could not tell, for his head was towards her."

The accused was discharged. It is natural to conjecture, in looking at the manner in which this trial is entered on the original records, that the testimony was too ridiculous to be recorded in full. The bear was doubtless alleged by the witness to have been William Holmes's wife in that shape.

The good sense of the Governor and assistants triumphed over superstition in a fortunate time, to check accusations of this kind.

In looking at the records of the next Court, we were happy to observe that

"Dinah Sylvester was summoned before the Court, and sentenced to be whipt, or to make publicke acknowledgment (paying the costs of prosecution) for false accusation against William Holmes' wife."

She chose the latter, and her acknowledgment of "maliciously accusing the woman," was entered on the public records in 1661.

The other indictment was against Mary Ingham, March 1676, as follows:

"Mary Ingham, thou art indicted by the name of Mary Ingham, the wife of Thomas Ingham of Scituate, for thou, not having the feare of God before thine eyes, hast, by the helpe of the Devil, in a way of witchcraft or sorcery, maliciously inocured much hurt, mischief and paine, unto the body of Mehitabel Woodworth, daughter of Walter Woodworth of Scituate, and to some others, particularly causing her to falle into violent fits, and causing her great paine unto several partes of her body at several tymes, so that the said Mehitabel hath been almost bereaved of her senses; and hath greatly languished to her much suffering thereby, and procuring of greate grieffe sorrow and charge to her parents: all which thou hast procured and done, against the law of God, and to his greate dishonor, and contrary to our Sovereign Lord the King, his crown and dignity."

She was tried by a jury of twelve men—"Verdict, not guilty." It was natural at that superstitious day, that a person affected with nervous insanity, should look round for someone on whom to charge those sufferings. Ingham's wife was aged, and probably lived in retirement, conversing little with this world, and hence was suspected to hold converse with invisible beings.

Thus, however, ended indictments for witchcraft in this Colony: happy would it have been, had good sense elsewhere as soon triumphed over superstition. There is, however, some apology for the governments of Connecticut and Massachusetts, [namely] that witchcraft was believed in and punished in England at the time that moral disease broke forth in this country. Even the great [Sir](#)

[Matthew Hale](#) had prescribed rules for detecting witches. [Ed. note: As late as 1664, Hale used the argument that the existence of laws against witches is proof that witches exist. Deane's reference to Hale as "great" would be questioned today.]

The belief in the reality of witchcraft has long since been abandoned, and few persons, within the last half century, have spoken of witchcraft or ghosts or haunted houses, except as a superstition which was unworthy of their own times.

“Dr. Barnes was invited to try his skill in the investigation, but unfortunately the ghost would not knock while the Doctor was there.”

The last haunted house here was that of Lathrop Litchfield, in the part of the Town called the Beach woods, nearly forty years since [circa 1791].

A knocking was heard in a closet and repeated almost daily for many months. And though several gentlemen of a good share of philosophy endeavored to investigate the cause, it could never be satisfactorily explained. It ought however to be stated, that no gentleman of the above description was found to allow that there was any supernatural cause.

Dr. Barnes was invited to try his skill in the investigation, but unfortunately the ghost would not knock while the Doctor was there. [Dr. Barnes was Dr. David Barnes who was minister of the Second Parish church from 1754-1811.]

Helping Students Learn About the South Shore's Indigenous History

The Historical Society's 2023 Summer Intern brought with her a passion for indigenous history. This, combined with her computer savvy, produced an online resource for all South Shore residents looking for information on the native community—especially students.

by Julia Neumann

For as long as I can remember, I have been fascinated by indigenous history. I loved going to Plimoth Patuxet and talking with the indigenous educators at the Wampanoag homesite, and every year in elementary school I would look forward to November because I knew that we would talk about the First Thanksgiving and subsequently briefly mention indigenous people—anytime where I could learn more about this facet of history was one that I cherished.

Although I had this intense fascination with indigenous history, there were not many options for me to explore this passion of mine. So, when I started my internship with the Norwell Historical Society this summer, I knew that I wanted to bring this part of history closer to the forefront of the Norwell Public School system's curriculum.

After graduating from Norwell High School in 2021, I went to pursue my degree in Maine at Bates College. At Bates, I am a double major in History and English with a minor in French. My coursework and amazing professors at Bates rekindled my passion for indigenous history—a passion that never fully disappeared but was simply left to the wayside because of a lack of resources available to me.

Coming back home to Norwell this summer, I knew that I wanted to delve deeper into the indigenous history of our area and provide resources and knowledge to other students and teachers, or simply those interested in learning more.

Originally, I designed this website to be a space where students could go to find a few books or teachers

could find essay prompts regarding local indigenous history, but as I continued my research and uncovered more about this region's indigenous history, I knew that the resources that I found could be impactful not only in the classroom, but also as a new way to study history. I created this website as a way for anyone who is



“ I created this website as a way for anyone who is interested in local indigenous history to have a place where they can come to find materials and knowledge to uncover for themselves... ”



interested in local indigenous history to have a place where they can come to find materials and knowledge to uncover for themselves this facet of history that has been hidden for so long. Because not only is our region's indigenous history one that is extremely interesting and meaningful, but whether you are of indigenous descent or not, simply by living in Norwell, the indigenous history of our area becomes your history.

I compiled these resources through my own research, help from local curators, as well as working with head indigenous educator Tim Turner at [Plimoth Patuxet](#), and the lovely people from the Norwell Historical Society.

Through all of the blocks in the road, and difficulties that I encountered during this process, I have loved every second of working on this research project and I am so excited to share these amazing resources with anyone else who may be interested!

I began my research this summer with the hopes of uncovering some fascinating story or indigenous ancestral line that existed in Norwell's history. While I did not accomplish this original goal, I believe that I am attempting to accomplish something much greater—to inform and expose Norwell Public School students to this facet of history, their history, and perhaps in the process of doing so, inspire people to explore this understudied part of history and discover more about this previously overlooked group of people. 🍂

Civil War Soldier Frederic James

This year's "First Parish Cemetery Comes Alive!" Cemetery Tour will feature actor Jim Gordon portraying Frederic James, a Civil War veteran. Jim has brought Civil War soldiers' stories to life in the past two tours, and the following is his script for this year—written by Society Archivist Janet Watson.

by Janet Watson

Hello, allow me to introduce myself. My name is Frederic Augustus James, and it was my dream to be back on Massachusetts soil again after I spent a year in Confederate prisons, but it wasn't to be until now.

I was born in 1832 into the James family—maybe you recognize the name from the [James Library](#) which my uncle founded?

My family were shipbuilders. My grandfather and father built ships at the Block House Shipyard just down the street from this cemetery.

I grew up on Main Street where my father William was a shipbuilder and also had a large farm. It was a happy childhood with my six brothers and sisters.

I married Ellen Foster, whose family were also shipbuilders, and we had two beautiful girls: Mary (I called her Molly) and Ellen. We lived in East Boston where I was a ship joiner. I loved my wife and family, and we were very happy. But then the War came and I felt that I needed to serve my country. Because of my background, I was naturally drawn to the Navy, so I enlisted in August of 1862. I was assigned to the *U.S.S. Housatonic* which was blockading Charleston, South Carolina harbor.

I missed my family so much. Letters from home were very important and kept my spirits up, and I regularly wrote to my wife and daughters.

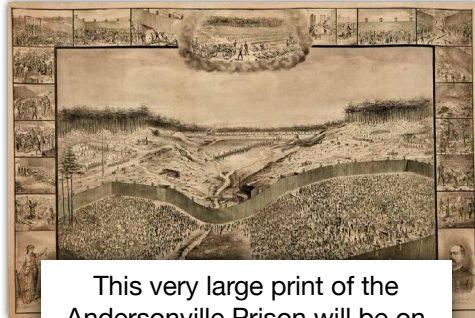
My wife kept the letters... let me read a little of what I wrote to Molly from the *Housatonic* in February of 1863:

"Let me see, what shall I write to you about? I suppose that you will want to know if we see any birds or butterflies now. Well the other day, when it was very warm & pleasant a pretty little bird came to see us, &

staid with us some time. It was not quite so large as a robin & had a bright yellow spot on its back & all the rest of its feathers were brown.

Well some time next summer I guess that I shall come to see you. I wonder if I shall know either of my little girls then... ."

In September of 1863, I was on a storming mission to the beaches of Charleston, and I was captured. That began my long journey through three Confederate prison camps, the final one being Andersonville—the most infamous and notorious prison of all.



This very large print of the Andersonville Prison will be on display at the James Library during the First Parish Cemetery Comes Alive! Tour on Saturday, October 21st. It shows the prison as it appeared August 1, 1864 when it contained 35,000 prisoners of war. It was drawn from memory by Private Thomas O'Dea from Maine, and was first published in 1879.

How would I cope? I decided that the best way was to try to keep a normal routine, read whenever I could, write to my family, rely on my faith, and never complain. It helped that I was reunited with two shipmates from the *Housatonic*: Victor Bartlett and R.L. Tinker. I began keeping a diary in February of 1864. Let me read you a few entries to let you know what my life was like then. I can tell you about what happened to me by reading from my diary:

Sunday Feb 28th The weather is mild and pleasant. Read my Bible and Tinker and Bartlett sang several hymns with me. Washed the floors, washed our clothes and swept the floors with a broom we bought.

Thursday March 10th We had a splendid rain and we captured the clean rain water for drinking and bathing.

The upcoming weeks in March brought bad news. On March 19th, I received a letter from my wife under the date of February 21st bringing the sad news of the death of our darling little Mary, and my friend Victor Bartlett became ill. In my diary I wrote:

"The Lord gave and the Lord hath taketh away. Blessed be the name of the Lord. He hath taken her dear and loving spirit to its heavenly home, a treasure laid up in heaven where the family circle will be reunited, no more to part forever. Bartlett who had the measles seems to be losing ground today and he was sent to the hospital."

Friday March 25th I visited Bartlett and found him much worse. The Doctor came and told me he would not live longer than tomorrow morning. At 2 o'clock Tinker and I got word he was dying. We went to the hospital and found him engaged in prayer until he quit breathing. We had a headboard inscribed, "A.A. Bartlett the *U.S. Steamer Housatonic*, Died March 25, 1864, age 22." We continue to hear that we may be exchanged and continue to hope and pray that lives may be spared and the happy day of release may soon come.

April [no date] Today I received a box from my wife for which we are very thankful because our rations are only 2 ounces of pork, a loaf of corn bread and a pint of rice soup. I got some butter, crab apple preserve, and a can of oysters.

May 28th We were informed about noon that we were to start for Andersonville this evening by box car. We arrived Wednesday, June 1st.

(continued on page 7)

DATE _____ NAME _____

MAILING ADDRESS _____

TOWN _____ STATE _____ ZIP _____

EMAIL _____

3-Year Membership (\$35) _____

Life Membership (\$350) _____

Donation (any amount) _____

INTERESTED IN VOLUNTEERING?

_____ Researching at the Archives _____ Other:

_____ Organizing at the Archives

_____ Farmhouse Tour Guide

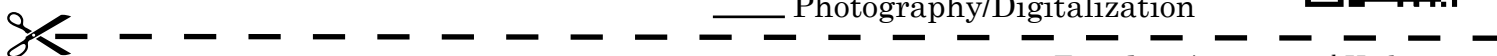
_____ Farmhouse Maintenance

_____ Event Planning

_____ Photography/Digitalization



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NHS, P.O. Box 693, Norwell, MA 02061



Frederic James, cont'd.

(continued from page 6)

We marched to the camp and were enrolled in companies of 270 men each.

June 1, 1864 We began our career at Camp Sumter, Andersonville Georgia. The hut or Chebang as our fellows call it is roofed with four blankets and logs for walls at the side. The lot contains 18 acres and is fenced in with a solid stockade of pine logs about 12 feet high. Twenty feet from the stockade is what is called the “dead line” and anyone who ventures there is liable to be shot. We have had rain every day but the rain washes and purifies our camp. Many of our men are so filthy and careless in their habits that the showers are necessary for the prevention of the plague.

Sunday, July 24th Had boiled rice for breakfast and bean soup for supper. Washed out my undershirt and blue pants. Last night was a cold one and I caught somewhat of a cold which brings me under the weather for the first time since I have been a prisoner.

Tuesday, July 26th Last night was warmer and I kept a wet cloth on my head. Tinker sent me four medicinal powders. I neither ate or drank today.


August 5th Felt pretty well today but have not much strength.

Friday, August 19th Pleasant but rather hot. We have been fortunate enough to have some flying clouds and gentle breezes to relieve us. My second year is finished today.

Tuesday, August 23rd Had a wet cloth on my head and so slept more comfortable than I'd have done for some nights past.

This was the last time I was strong enough to make an entry in my journal because I was not recovering and my illness was getting worse. I died September 15, 1864.

My letters and diary were kept and eventually made their way to the Massachusetts Historical Society, which is why I can read from them directly to you today.

In those papers, historians find accounts of the horrors of Andersonville Prison, but also the bravery of the men who were confined there. My family and I were never reunited on earth, but I maintained faith that we would be together again in heaven. 

MILDRED HASTINGS (1890-1993) She moved with her family into their summer house, “The Hollow,” in 1922 on the North River. Raising pigs, cows, and horses on her property, she was an avid wildflower gardener and a founding member of The North River Gardeners.

JOHN BRIGGS (1827-1888) Son of shipbuilders at the Briggs Shipyard, John Ruggles Briggs was a carpenter, builder, and architect whose family built the *Columbia*, the first American ship to circumnavigate the globe.

FRUITFUL SYLVESTER (1765-1839) Born enslaved, he worked at the Chittenden Shipyard and farms around

ALSO ON THIS YEAR'S TOUR:

South Scituate. Freed sometime between 1783-1790, Fruitful was able to save enough money to buy 3 acres on Circuit Street and build a family home.

WILLIAM GOULD VINAL (1881-1976) Known as “Cap'n Bill,” he became known as “The Father of Nature Recreation.” Vinal was a vibrant and prolific writer, fierce protector of the North River, and one of the founders of the South Shore Natural Science Center.

SARAH HART DELANO (1778-1861) Born into a Boston shipbuilding family, “Madame Delano” married William

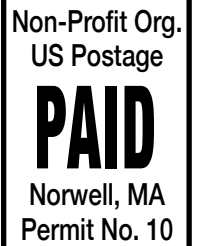
Delano of the Wanton Shipyard. After her husband's death, she kept a store for income in her home—the “wedding cake house” on River Street.

HUMPHREY TURNER (ca.1593-1673) Arriving in Plymouth in 1632, he was a tanner and leather maker by trade, served as a constable and deputy to the General Court, and was a founding member of the First Church in Scituate.

MARY FORD (1809-1886) Born in town, married in town, and living in town, Mary was guaranteed a home for life in Scituate/South Scituate—even if that home was the Almshouse in Norwell Center, where she eventually died.



NORWELL HISTORICAL SOCIETY
P.O. Box 693
Norwell, Massachusetts 02061
www.norwellhistoricalsociety.org



RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

Fall 2023

Upcoming Events

For an up-to-date listing of events, please see the Society website [“Events”](#) page or use the QR code at right.



Annual Meeting & “The History of Norwell in 10 Objects” Presentation

5:30–7:00 pm at the Norwell Public Library, 64 South Street

Wed., October 4th

Join us for a celebration of the new Norwell Public Library exhibit “The History of Norwell in 10 Objects.” Historian Stephen O’Neill will discuss each object—from indigenous artifacts to a Gilded Age jacket—and explain why they were specifically chosen to illustrate change over time. Stephen is a Norwell Historical Society Board member and Executive Director of the Hanover Historical Society. Prior to Stephen’s talk, the Society will conduct its 88th Annual Meeting—briefly reviewing the projects, events, and finances of the past year. [Register online at the NPL website](#) or go to the Society’s Events page (QR code at right) to find the registration link.

First Parish Cemetery Comes Alive! Tour

noon to 3:00 pm at the First Parish Cemetery in Norwell Center

Sat., October 21st

Join the Norwell Historical Society for its 4th annual re-enactment tour at First Parish Cemetery. Actors will portray a variety of historic individuals who are buried in the graveyard—telling their personal stories to small groups. [Sign up](#) using the QR code above to visit the Events page on the Society website. A suggested donation of \$15/adult is being requested of all who are able.

The Archives Uncovered: Hidden Treasures of The Norwell Historical Society!

6:00 to 7:00 pm at the Norwell Public Library, 64 South Street

Mon., November 13th

Interested in the history of Norwell? Are you looking to conduct your own research and need help finding where to start? Society Archivist Janet Watson will offer insight into recent research that has brought new local history to light and provide an overview of the local resources available to help you on your own research journey.

Perambulation with Select Board Member Andy Reardon & Highway Surveyor Glenn Ferguson

noon at the Grove Street entrance to Wompatuck State Park

Sat., November 18th

Meet in the Grove St. parking lot of Wompatuck State Park to hear a brief presentation on Perambulation and to view the *Boundaries of the Town of Norwell* book. We will then take a 10-minute woodland walk to find the #7 granite boundary marker. All are welcome!