

Discussion on the Mount Blue area of Norwell

Thank you so much to Charlie and Rosemary McKittrick for hosting us in your beautiful—and historic—home! We are gathering today at what the plaque outside says is the “Perez Turner House,” built circa 1752. On the invitation to this event, we noted the house as the “Jonathan & Perez Turner House, circa 1752,” and Jonathan was Perez’s father—so we wondered if perhaps Perez inherited the home from his dad. But in 1752, Jonathan was only ten years old so he’s probably not the original owner. But there is a deed from 1753 where Jonathan Turner (an older uncle with the same name, not Perez’s father...) sells property to an Isaac Turner that says “near a place called Halifax Hill [the former name of Otis Hill across the road] and on the northerly side of a highway called Stockbridge’s Way, with a house and barn upon the same.” That deed most likely refers to this home, but perhaps a smaller version of the current structure.

Dating houses is far from an exact science. Most of the time we refer to “circa” date when discussing when a house was built, because it’s a rare day when we have a definitive date for a house. We’re often guessing from dated deed records that refer to acreage only, and comparing those dates to deeds that refer to “acreage and the house thereon” and then looking at marriage dates to try to nail down something specific. It’s not an exact science, and this house is a perfect example!

I’ll talk a bit more about the history of this house and some other historic homes in this area later, but first I’d like to give everyone a brief history of this town we now call Norwell and a little history of Mount Blue, specifically.

For thousands of years, the land that makes up what is today Norwell was inhabited by indigenous people. These natives grew crops, foraged, hunted, and fished... mostly in the Assinippi and the North River areas. Around 1617, there was a major outbreak of disease from European settlers, and it decimated an estimated 90% of the native population in New England, including the Massachusett and the Wompanoag tribes that inhabited this specific area where we are. There are still descendants of these original inhabitants who live on the South Shore today. Now they are known as the Mattakeesett Tribe of the Massachusett Indian Nation, the Massachusett Tribe at Ponkapoag, and the Mashpee Wompanoag Tribe. If you go to the Historical Society website, you can find links to these tribes’ websites under “A Brief History of Norwell” and the “Learn More” tab.

In the 1640s, Europeans who were living around Scituate harbor came up the North River to settle in what is today Norwell's Church Hill area. Among the first were Robert and Honour Stetson, who purchased (and were later granted) land on the North River. The Stetsons were among the original "Men of Kent" who settled in Scituate Harbor after originally arriving in Plymouth from Kent, England. While most of the other Scituate residents stayed in the harbor area, the Stetsons decided to make their fortune "up river" in today's Norwell, and they are the first known European settlers in this area.

The Town of Scituate was officially incorporated in 1636—soon after the Stetsons came up the river. At that time the boundaries of Scituate included all of Norwell, parts of Hanover, and parts of Marshfield.

What we know today as the Town of Norwell broke off from Scituate in 1849 and established itself as South Scituate. There are many theories as to why we separated from Scituate, but the prevailing belief is that the interests of the "inlanders" varied greatly from those of the "coast dwellers"—the primary difference being how to manage the town's money.

About 40 years later, in 1888, the town was again renamed—after Boston businessman, South Scituate Savings Bank president, and Mount Blue summer resident Henry Norwell (*shown at right*). Mr. Norwell pledged \$2,500/year for 10 years to the town for road maintenance. When a vote was taken in 1888 on a new town name, "Norwell" won hands-down.

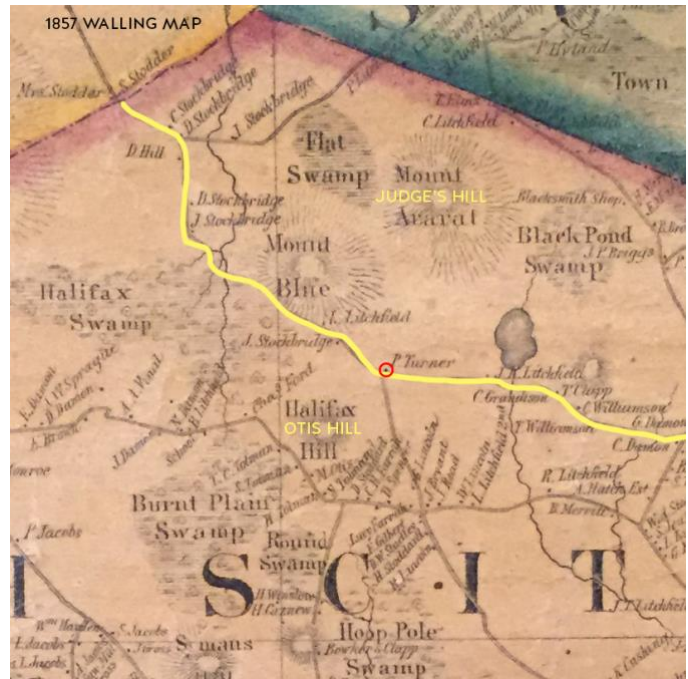


Now on to the history of Mount Blue, in particular. I'm going to quote from [Sam Olson's book *A Narrative of South Scituate & Norwell, 1849-1963*](#)—we have copies of this great book for sale tonight for \$20!

"Well into the [1900s], inhabitants of South Scituate/Norwell were likely to identify with certain village areas within the town. Among them would be Ridge Hill, Accord, Assinippi, the "Hill" (Norwell Center), Church Hill, Sherman's Corner, and Mount Blue. Often, the social center of these enclaves was a country store, which also served as the village post office. Here, folks bought groceries, hardware, and sundry items needed for everyday living. They also gathered here to 'chew the rag,' and otherwise ease the often lonely and isolated nature of rural life."

Mount Blue was a village in and of itself within South Scituate/Norwell. It is the northernmost section of town, and it is "hemmed in" (as Sam Olson described it!) by Burnt Plain and Hoop

Pole Swamps on the south, Valley Swamp (previously called Flat Swamp) on the west, and Black Pond Swamp on the east. With Ford's Store and post office and Lincoln's Store (both at Bryant's Corner), the area had a post office and two stores within its boundaries. As an aside, if you don't know what Bryant's Corner is—it is the intersection of Lincoln, Norwell Avenue, and Grove Street. The intersection where almost all of us here tonight have probably come close to dying when Scituate drivers speed past on their way to and from the highway!



The Mount Blue area was originally settled by members of the Stockbridge family. Samuel Stockbridge (born in 1679) married Lydia Barrell in 1703 and they settled here. The cemetery

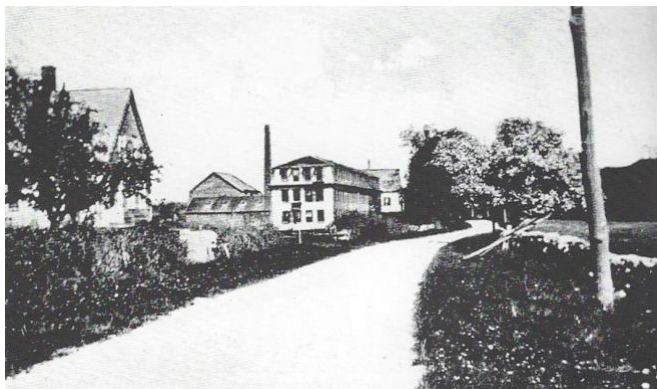


at the end of School Street on Mount Blue is called the Stockbridge Cemetery—in it are buried members of the Stoddard family (who are on the east side) and the Stockbridge family (who are buried on the west side). I know it sounds very “Hatfield & McCoy,” but I assure you it isn’t. Other families buried there are the Litchfields, the Turners, and the Williamsons—all of whom were descendants of the Stockbridges. The earliest stone dates back to 1758, and there’s an interesting memorial stone (*seen at left*) dedicated to Meshach Litchfield and his son, Ben, who were lost at sea on August 16, 1846. Also, part of the cemetery is elevated and bounded by stonewalls—this mounded area covers

two underground tombs and is the final resting place for six Revolutionary War soldiers who were members of the Stockbridge family.

There’s actually a Stockbridge family house on the market right now—the David Stockbridge house at [492 Mount Blue Street](#) (on the right-hand side heading toward Mount Hope after the dangerous curve in the road—the house is sideways to the road). That house may have been built by James Stockbridge circa 1776, but further research needs to be done. We do know that the house was owned by James’ grandson, David Stockbridge, for many years.

There are two historic houses on Mount Blue Street down the road from that Stockbridge House that I'm going to touch on quickly. The first is **324 Mount Blue**—the William H. Richardson house (*shown at right*), built circa 1871 (at the time of his marriage to Flora Litchfield). In the 1880 census, William noted he “works in a boot factory.” That probably was the Litchfield Shoe Factory located at what is today 35 Norwell Avenue. Since he doesn't refer to himself as a cordwainer (a shoemaker) in the census, he may have help to run the factory since he married into the Litchfield family. I've got



a photo of the factory (*shown at left*)—picture that 3-story building on Norwell Avenue today! The Shoe Factory ran from about 1870 until 1901 when the business was discontinued, and the shop torn down. At its height of success, it employed over 100 men! In the photo you can see the two Greek Revival farmhouses to the right and left of the factory—both still stand

today at 45 Norwell Avenue (which was recently renovated and sold) and 27 Norwell Avenue (the home of our Society Archivist Janet Watson!). The Richardson House at 324 Mount Blue was built in the Greek Revival Farmhouse style, which was very popular in the late 1800s. I'll talk about that architectural style more when I refer to the many farmhouses on Lincoln Street.

The other antique in on Mount Blue that I particularly love is **325 Mount Blue**—the William Hyland House (*shown at right*) built circa 1752 at the time of William's marriage to Mary Hooper. In the 1742 and 1744 deeds for the land, William is referred to as a “labourer.” In 1838, William Hyland, Jr. (who had married Lydia Stockbridge—of course!) sold the house to his brother-in-law,



James Stockbridge with the allowance that they could continue to live there until their deaths. Unfortunately, Lydia died that year but William lived for another 15 years in the home. That's an old photo of that house—probably taken in the late 1800s—that was taken from what is today the woods. The house looks almost the same today!



Henry Ford's Store (*shown at left*), which was shown on the cover of the invitation here tonight, was originally known as Joshua Bryant's Tavern and had a large swinging sign with a black horse announcing "Entertainment for Man and Beast." Located today at **3 Norwell Avenue**, the Tavern was the sight of early pauper auctions in town. [As](#)

[historian Pattie Hainer wrote](#): "By 1799, the Town of Scituate felt there were too many poor residents and, as was the sad practice in these times, the selectmen started auctioning off the poor to the highest bidders. The auctions were usually conducted after town meeting at a local tavern, and the town paid for whatever drinks selectmen wanted to imbibe while doing their duty." Pauper auctions were commonplace in town until the Almshouse was built in today's Norwell Center in 1820. After that time, the town's poor resided in one central location where they could work and live. As a side note, I will be playing of the "inmates" (that's what they called them!) at the Almshouse at this year's First Parish Comes Alive! Cemetery Tour on October 21st. If you come to that event, you can learn more about that former method of helping the poor folks in town.

Across Bryant's Corner from the Tavern is **211 Lincoln Street**—the Jonathan Bryant house, circa 1706—the small Cape with the darker paint scheme. In fact, the entire intersection had Bryant family homes—in 1831 it was noted that the four Bryant brothers all lived in a corner of the intersection (hence the name!). Today, three of the four houses are still standing. The house at 211 Lincoln is often referred to as the Peter Sears house—named for its most famous resident, a soldier in the American Revolution. Peter Sears enlisted on May 7, 1775—soon after the Battle of Lexington and Concord.

Surrounding the Bryant/Sears house are Greek Revival Farmhouses—one on each side at **201 Lincoln** and **229 Lincoln**. Others of the same style run up and down Lincoln Street. This architectural style was very popular in South Scituate/Norwell and the style was spread by carpenter's guides and pattern books. This classic style features a gabled front and a wing to the side. Both practical and attractive, you can see this farmhouse style throughout town—and in the late 1800s it differentiated itself from the "old-fashioned" Cape and Colonial homes.

Speaking of house trends, The Norwell House at **166 Norwell Avenue** is the perfect example of wanting the latest home style. The house was most likely built around 1797, but further research needs should be done. It was built by James Torrey (a shipbuilder) on the 62 acres

he purchased from William Turner. James and his wife, Eunice, raised their children in the home and their granddaughter eventually sold the house to Benjamin Merritt. In 1818, the Merritt's daughter, Hannah, married Henry Norwell. Mr. Norwell bought out the interests of Hannah's siblings and proceeded to enlarge the home for summer use. Rooms were opened up and extended, a huge stable was added, stone entrance markers were built, and the property became a grand estate. Hannah Merritt Norwell died in 1887, and in 1888 Henry Norwell not only had the town named after him, but he added a fashionable Mansard-style roof



Estate of the late Henry Norwell, Norwell, Mass.

(shown at left) to the home. Together with his new wife and their three children, Henry lived in both Boston (where his Shepard & Norwell Department Store was located) and Norwell in the summers. He died in 1903, his second wife Ellen died in 1910. The house was sold out of the Norwell family, and back into it when his grandson Mark Norwell bought the home in the

1990s. Those Norwells sold a few years back, and today the house is owned and being lovingly restored by Rich and Lisa Kivel.

I'd like to touch on two more Mount Blue houses before I discuss the McKittrick's home, where we are tonight.

The first is **122 Mount Blue Street**—the Dwelley Clapp house which was built around 1760. It was a beautiful Cape with a lovely barn out back. Was... because the house no longer stands. After centuries in the Clapp and the Litchfield family, the house was demolished in 2007. While it was terrible that the house was taken down, I'm mentioning it because before the barn could be razed, the current owners (Sid and Nancy Flory) decided to use the barn as a basis for their wonderful new home. So despite the tragedy of the demolition, the Flory family has saved a piece of Mount Blue history in their new home.

The other Mount Blue house I wanted to mention is **139 Mount Blue**—across from the Flory's home. Called the "Simeon Grandison House," we believe it was built circa 1805 by the son of Cuffee Grandison, who was enslaved by Joseph Clapp (who lived in the Dwelley Clapp house across the street that was demolished). To hear the whole story of Cuffee, his wife Flora, and their son Simeon, you can go to the Historical Society website and [watch a video](#) we produced on the family. Cuffee's Lane and Cuffee Hill reservation are both named after Simeon's father.

Simeon's son, Charles, inherited the home after his parents died. When Charles died in 1878, the Rev. William Fish wrote the following about him:

“Attended the funeral of Mr. Charles Grandison (colored) aged 73 years—and a remarkable man for one of his position—industrious, honest, upright in his relations—a man universally respected. He was a reverent and religious man also and continued a member of the parish, a paying member to the end, though not able to attend church—a reproof to many white members who leave the parish to avoid paying the small tax assessed upon them.”

Again, I encourage you to [watch the video](#) about the remarkable Grandison family on our website.

Finally, I'd like to talk about the beautiful home in which we are gathered today—[260 Mount Blue Street](#). Again, the plaque on the house says Perez Turner House, circa 1752.

We know Perez Turner (and his son, Perez Turner II) did own this house and in the past (when houses were referred to by their most renowned owner), this has always been called “The Perez Turner House.” But, like I said earlier, Perez was born in 1772—20 years after the plaque date. Although the deeds are complex and many, we know the Turner family owned this land and most likely built the earliest iteration of this home prior to 1753.

The Turner family was descended from Humphrey Turner, who arrived in Plymouth in 1628. He was a tanner and moved to Scituate in 1633 and built a house on Kent Street. Perez Turner is the great great great grandson of Humphrey Turner.

Perez's father, Jonathan Turner, married Sarah Stockbridge (again, the Stockbridges!) in 1770. Perez married Hannah Cushing in 1797. Perez may have re-built the original house prior to his marriage because we found a 1799 deed (2 years after the wedding) where Perez buys property from his father that has a “house standing thereon in which said Perez now dwells.” That deed also refers to Perez as a “housewright,” which also speaks to Perez either building or re-building this house or (at least) adding on to it.

Perez Turner served in the volunteer militia in the War of 1812, and he was a partner with his Stockbridge cousins in a sawmill which used to stand at the end of Mount Blue near the intersection with Mount Hope.

After Perez Turner died his son, Perez II, lived in this home. In the 1860 census, he is identified as a farmer and in the 1870 census as a shoemaker. In 1892, the property was sold to a Henry Tombs from Boston who had a plumbing business. It also served as a summer home to Tombs' son-in-law and daughter, Alan and Henrietta Virtue. The Virtues were mentioned in a [recent Society newsletter](#) article where Margaret Crowell recalled her 1943 campaign for Town Treasurer. In it, she refers to her opponent—Alan Virtue. She said:

“the Virtues belonged to the ‘Mink Coat Set,’ throw gay parties, and generally step about. I enjoy hearing about their doings, but to some of the modest folks [in town] they make a poor impression.”

Hmm. Politics was snarky even back in 1943!”

After Mr. Virtue's death in 1975, the property was subdivided and the barn next door became its own home at **256 Mount Blue**. In fact, the McKitricks have an old article from *The Norwell Mariner* that mentions the provenance of that barn—recalling the barn-raising 100 years ago.



Here is a photo of the home (*below*) taken in 1973—with a full front porch on it. Homes are added on to and changed over the years. If you go into the basement (which I don't think Charlie and Rosemary want us to do tonight—so you'll have to trust me!), the base of the center chimney is huge—speaking to the fact that there was probably a third fireplace associated with the chimney at one time. There is

also a floor-to-ceiling rubble dividing wall in the basement—which also indicates the home being added on to. The fact that the chimney is actually not an exact center chimney, but instead on the front roofline, also speaks to the possibility that additions occurred. But the house is clearly built in the 1700s and added on to and improved upon over the years. Which parts are original, which parts were added on by Perez the housewright... we don't know and having an antique building expert in might answer some of these questions. But right now, we know it's beautiful and it's old!

The Mount Blue area is full of history-minded folks: the McKitricks, former Society president Bob Norris who lives across the street, former Historical Commission Chair Nancy McBride who lives just up Mount Blue, Historical Society Archivist Janet Watson lives near Bryant Corner on Norwell Avenue, and me—I happen to live across the street too! But perhaps the

most famous historian who lived in this area was Cap'n Bill Vinal—a historian yes, but also a scientist, a teacher, and an environmentalist who helped to found the [South Shore Natural Science Center](#) and after whom the [Vinal School](#) is named. Cap'n Bill wrote extensively about this section of town where he grew up. And I'm going to conclude tonight with an excerpt from him written in 1948:

“It was almost proverbial among Mount Blue folk that if a man owned a salt meadow, hauled out plenty of cordwood from his maple swamp, kept a horse and a cow, bought his groceries at Bryant’s Corner, and once a year rode to Boston via Dyer’s mail coach and the Old Colony, he would surely go to heaven. Just plain ordinary folks with plenty of good common sense and big hearts who live near enough to hear the ocean’s roar when there’s a northeaster and whose calloused hands were soiled by the dust of the garden and the shoemaker’s bench.”

Thank you so much for coming tonight! Please enjoy the photos that are being passed around and I encourage everyone to check out the [Historical Society’s website](#), take a free newsletter or a [driving tour brochure](#), and (most of all) [become a member](#) to support the work that the Norwell Historical Society does.