



NORTH RIVER PACKET

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One Hundred Years Ago *in* Norwell

The post-pandemic 2021 Annual Town Meeting under a tent was like no other. Looking back at Norwell in 1921, we can look to the past for helpful perspective about the significant changes we face today.

written by Daniel Neumann

This past spring, the time for Norwell's Annual Town Meeting and town elections was again upon us—a time where residents reflect, debate, and decide upon the matters of most importance to our community.



The 2021 Annual Town Meeting took place outside under a tent—necessary after a pandemic year.

The records of prior Annual Town Meetings, as recorded in old Town Reports, provide information that paints a unique picture about what life was like in Norwell at the time. We at the Norwell Historical Society asked ourselves how these archived records may have described the town a century ago; so, dusting off the town's Annual Report for 1921, we parsed the articles of the town election, financial statements, and other records from town officials.

Much like today's official Town Meeting materials, many of the individual items are the mundane but necessary aspects of town life and government. However, taken as a whole, they form a collage that describes a town that existed in a fascinating bygone age, but also a town that bears several similarities to life as

we know it today. In many respects, the early 1920s was also a period of great transition when the look and feel of the town was changing at an accelerating rate. That era should be considered a key, pivotal point in our history.

First, a bit of context: in 1921, President Warren Harding signed a resolution with Congress officially ending our state of war with Germany, Austria, and Hungary (with actual combat having ended just three years prior in 1918). The feeling of war must have been fresh, made worse as the country was grappling with the tail end of a related economic depression—combined with the aftermath of the Spanish Flu pandemic, episodes of which lasted through the prior year.

Unbeknownst to the population at the time, conditions were coalescing for the commencement of the “Roaring Twenties,” a glittering new age of jazz and optimism (the energy of which was hardly tempered by the onset of Prohibition in 1920).

The age of radio was born and on August 5, 1921, the Pittsburgh Pirates beat the Philadelphia Phillies in The World Series—the first baseball game to be broadcast.

Closer to home, on 46 Brattle Street in Boston, the brothers Theodore and Milton Deutschmann started Radio Shack, catering to a new type of consumer—the ham radio operator.

Closer yet to home, Italian immigrants Saccho and Vanzetti were convicted of

murder and robbery at The Slater and Morrill Shoe Company in Braintree, Massachusetts. They received the death penalty, leading to a worldwide outcry with claims of anti-immigrant treatment. This event followed on the heels of the Tulsa race riot—considered by many to be the worst act of violence against Blacks in America. The global response to the death of George Floyd in 2020 eerily echoes these events of 1921, signifying a persistent and seemingly intractable issue throughout American history.

Amid this backdrop of change in the world, Norwell was still very much a rural farming town—much as it had been since its original European settlement in the seventeenth century.

“*...a fascinating bygone age, but also a town that bears several similarities to life as we know it today.*”

However, the modern world was approaching fast, as roads were being paved, automobile ownership was gaining traction, and parts of Norwell were becoming electrified. While the 1921 Annual Report does not explicitly describe the occupations of the townspeople, a List of Jurors provides a decent cross section, naming 25

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FROM THE ARCHIVES

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

This antique lightbulb was found in a drawer at the Jacobs Farmhouse Museum. Its provenance is unknown, but it is believed to be dated to about 1910. The bulb is currently on display at the new Norwell Public Library—in a curated exhibition (shown in the photo below) by the Society highlighting the life of Mercy Turner, wife of the Jacobs Farmhouse caretaker.

Mrs. Turner lived in the un-electrified Jacobs Farmhouse in the early 1900s. Dr. Henry Barton Jacobs, owner of the house, installed electricity in the barns, but not in the home.

To read more about Mrs. Turner's life, click on the QR code below.

Learn more about Mrs. Turner here:



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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.

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.

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

Who were the Scituate Acadians?

Most written histories of Scituate and Norwell include a chapter on the Acadians. Who were these people, why did they come to town, and why is their story important to tell?

written by Joan Vermette

From 1753 to 1763, thousands of Acadians were forcibly evicted from their land. Some of these emigrants came to live in the southern part of Scituate (today’s Norwell).

England wanted to annex all of North America, including Acadia. The English arrived with thousands of trained soldiers and made war on the people of New France.

A·ca'di·ans /ə'kɑ-dē/əns/ *n.* Descendants of the French who lived in Acadia (what is today Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, parts of Quebec, and present-day Maine to the Kennebec River).

A little history is needed to explain what French-speaking Acadians from what now are called the Maritime Provinces were doing in Norwell.

The Acadians were the original settlers of the New France area, and they were easily overcome by the English forces as they were farmers and fishermen, not soldiers.

Many took an oath to honor the British king under an agreement that they would not fight their fellow Frenchmen—this earned them the name “The Neutrals.”

The Acadians were expelled from New France for several reasons. The first was believed to be revenge from their supposed role in the 1704 Raid on Deerfield (Massachusetts) during the Queen Anne’s War between France

and England. It is widely believed, however, that the Acadians had no part in that raid.

Another possible reason for the Acadian eviction was that the English wanted their rich lands for English settlers, and they also wanted all Catholics removed from English territories.

“ *The first Acadians arrived in Scituate in 1756. Most families were separated...* ”

During the Great Expulsion (which began in 1755) everything the Acadians had was taken away. Most left Acadia with only the clothes they were wearing.

The general belief is that the Acadians all went to Louisiana—they did not. Acadians were spread out all over the existing American colonies, and ships also took some as far south as the Falkland Islands (off the coast of Argentina). Many were sent back to France and as far away as Africa.

Thousands died during the forced deportation. When the troop ship the *Duke William* sank in December of

1758, over 360 Acadians drowned. Acadian leader Noël Doiron and his family drowned with his neighbors, his wife Marie, his five children and their spouses, and his 30 grandchildren. This is just one of the many tragedies that occurred during the Great Expulsion. (For more information on the *Duke William* sinking, see the inset below.)

The first Acadians arrived in Scituate in 1756. Most families were separated, but some made it through together. Coming in the first wave were over ten members of the Trahan family and the Pierre Beaudry family.

In a second wave of arrivals to Scituate were members of the Michel family, the LeBlanc family, the Breau family, and Pierre Pellerin.

The Acadians were put up for bid at auction—similar to the method adopted for the town’s poor at the

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Learn more about the sinking of the *Duke William* here:



Scituate Acadians, cont'd.

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time. According to the writings of Jedediah Dwelley, "They were put out to the lowest bidder for their support, and this bidder received the result of their labor."

Seventeen of the Scituate Acadians went to Joseph Clapp of Black Pond Hill (today's Mount Blue area), and ten went to Dr. Joseph Jacobs (who, with his brother, built the Jacobs Mills at Assinippi). Some of them were ill and were treated by Dr. Jacobs and

Dr. James Otis. All expenses for their upkeep were paid by the Town of Scituate, who in turn was compensated by the colonial government.

Some of Joseph Clapp's Acadian indentured servants were purported to have lived in the shack at the end of Cuffee's Lane—later to be occupied by the Grandison family of Mount Blue.

The people of Massachusetts were noted for being the kindest to them—in other states they were treated as prisoners of war, and some colonies refused to accept them at all.

There were several petitions presented to the courts by the Acadian refugees because of unfair treatment. One was presented by the Trahan brothers who said that they had been denied provisions for 15 days and that 20 men had come to the farm with cords, tied them up, and took their aged parents away to an unknown location. The court, in every case discovered in research, decided in the Acadians'

favor—demanding they be treated in a humane way and all mistreatment be avoided in the future. When their time of indentured servitude was up, they were free to go.

In 2005, Queen Elizabeth and Prince Philip visited Canada on the 250th anniversary of the Great Expulsion and apologized for what had been done to the Acadians. The Queen declared July 28th as an annual day of commemoration, and the day is called the "Great Upheaval" on Canadian calendars.

In Boston, a ceremony was held to honor the Acadians who arrived there, and the Acadian Flag was raised over the city.

Of note: Norwell resident and author of this article, Joan Vermette, attended the 2005 Boston ceremony along with her son and daughter, who sang and played Acadian songs at the event.



The Acadians indentured by the Clapps were believed to have lived off of Cuffee's Lane.

THROWBACK PHOTO OF THE MONTH



This photo at left was recently discovered in the Historical Society Archives. It depicts the house owned by George and David Torrey, Scituate (now Norwell) shipbuilders.

When George dissolved their shipbuilding partnership and moved to Buffalo, New York, David moved into this house (on the right in the photo) and became a store keeper and trader (in addition to his shipbuilding occupation).

David moved the middle building in the photo to this site from Duxbury—where it was originally a Universalist Church. On the second story, there was a hall where the young people of the mid-1800s held dances. Historian Joseph Merritt said the hall was "famous for miles around." Merritt also noted that the store was also a trunk factory and regularly employed 15-25 men.

Prior to finding this photo, the Historical Society had no images of the hall/store/factory, which was eventually torn down in the 1920s.

Today, the house and barn (building at left) are still standing and well-maintained.

Where are they located? *(Answer on page 7)*

One Hundred Years Ago, cont'd.

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individuals and their trades. With the exception of one “merchant,” the vast majority were categorized as “farmer,” “carpenter,” “laborer,” “shoemaker,” or “blacksmith.”

The five shoeworkers were certainly witnessing the decline of their industry in greater New England, as manufacturing centers shifted to other parts of the country, and as local factories struggled to adapt to changing styles after World War I. Flappers were sporting shorter skirts that highlighted fancy new footwear designs, a radical departure from the more utilitarian shoes New England had been churning out for generations.

Edward W. Gardner, the juror listed as a blacksmith, must also have been concerned about his trade as the automobile was quickly becoming more visible in town, reducing demand for horseshoes and the ironwork that went into the manufacture of carriage wheels.



The Gardner Blacksmith Shop on Washington Street (at the site of Alfredo Aiello's today).

On the other hand, Henry D. Smith, a juror listed as auto repairer on River Street, was participating in the early stage of a significant and enduring business opportunity. The first mass-produced car, the Model T Ford, began rolling off the assembly line in 1908, and 13 years later it was becoming a common sight in town (soon to be ubiquitous). Harry Gardner, William Turner, and William Isley are recorded as having paid \$5 each for a license to sell “second-hand autos” in Norwell in 1921.

The Town Report provides an exhaustive accounting of Town expenditures for work on roads—revealing that the majority of labor was done manually, or with the help of horses. Of the 632 individual road jobs completed in 1921, only 29 (or about 5%) were performed with the aid of a truck! Ironically though, much of this manual work was performed for the coming of the automobile, where men paved with “tarvia,” a newly developed brand of road surfacing made with coal tar.

Tarvia was invented in 1903 by The Barrett Company in response to high demand arising from the Model T. In 1921, the largest portion of the town's expenditures (about 37%) was for road work, and much of that expense was paid to The Barrett Company. The days of the dirt road were coming to an end. Later in the year, the Federal Aid Highway Act was passed, providing federal funds for the development of a national highway system. The country was becoming more connected, and so was Norwell.

Among the articles presented for voting in the 1921 Town Meeting, road work constituted a large portion of the list, as did the installation of electrified lighting in various buildings and on several roads.

Electrification of the country began in the early 20th century and increased at a rapid clip. By 1925, half of all homes had electric power—and by 1930 the number rose to 70%.

Urban areas were prioritized for electrification at first (given the concentrated customer base), with the development of more rural areas like Norwell coming later. Article 27 of the 1921 Town Meeting warrant asked “will the Town vote to raise and appropriate a sum of money sufficient to install electric lights in the Town Hall.” The article was approved, and \$170 was dedicated for the project.

Likewise, Article 16 was approved for the installation of electric lights at the junction of River Street in Norwell and Broadway in Hanover, and at Assinippi.

Finally, Article 37 asked if the Town will maintain three electric lights on Summer Street. In total, \$500 was spent on lights in 1921. While that dollar amount pales in comparison to the significant sums spent on roads, the impact on daily life must have been just as exciting.

After roads and infrastructure, spending on schools represented the second largest expense category in the town budget. The population of the town was growing rapidly, with both the School Committee and the School Superintendent exclaiming (in no uncertain terms) that major changes *had* to be made in order to accommodate the influx of new students.



At the 1921 Annual Meeting, the Superintendent proposed building a new Norwell High School. Shown above, the school was built the following year on the site of the current Town Hall. Unfortunately, that building burned in 1935 from faulty wiring. Displaced Norwell students attended afternoon sessions in Hanover until the new school (Sparrell School today) was completed in 1937.

Total enrollment in Norwell schools had increased about 21% from the prior year, forcing some classrooms to host as many as three simultaneous lessons. Citing “the supreme educational need,” School Superintendent Stephen Bean agreed with the School Committee on the issue of crowding, but took it one step further, calling the five antiquated school buildings “monstrosities,” and proposing a complete reorganization—at the center of which was the proposal for a new, central high school (built the following year, and shown in the photo above). Bean's analysis of the

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One Hundred Years Ago, cont'd.

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distribution of students by age showed that it was a foregone conclusion that the cohort of younger pupils was soon destined to overrun the town's capacity to educate them once they reached the high school level, a problem that would be made only worse if the population continued to expand as quickly. There was no indication of opposition to the construction of the new school in the 1921 annual report, and the town quickly moved to approve the measure in the following year, with \$40,000 appropriated for the project.

Through an act of the state legislature, in 1921 all schools in Massachusetts were required to employ a nurse. In Norwell, the school nurse *also* functioned as a healthcare provider for the entire town. Amy Sylvester, who founded the Norwell Visiting Nurse Association (NVNA) in 1920, wrote in her report to the town that Marian Sauer, the school nurse supported by Norwell, was a very busy person in 1921. Sauer logged 750 nursing visits, saw 145 patients, and even made 25 night-calls! The NVNA, which was initially funded by Sylvester with the sale of pies at The Marshfield Fair, remains in existence today.



Amy Sylvester, founder of the Norwell VNA and Hospice. Photo circa 1930.

The Town's report of the diseases "dangerous to the public health" in 1921 included cases of diphtheria, measles, mumps, pulmonary tuberculosis, and chicken pox—all of which soon became relics of the past thanks to the development of vaccines in the decades that followed.

There was not one mention of the Spanish Flu in the Town's Annual Report, but the greater Boston area had certainly seen devastating effects in the prior three years, with hotspots as close as Quincy. Interestingly, on the 100th anniversary of the Spanish Flu in 2018, the NVNA warned about the seriousness of another flu-like outbreak, urging residents to wash their hands and take other precautions—foreshadowing our current experience with COVID-19.

Read more about the history of the Norwell Visiting Nurse Association & Hospice using this QR code:



While Amy Sylvester and Marian Sauer were treating human diseases, it was Fred Curtis who was battling

the spread of another outbreak, gone "viral." Curtis was the town's Tree Warden and (more interestingly) Norwell's Moth Superintendent. Yes, Norwell had a Moth Superintendent, and his spending budget of about \$3,000 was not inconsequential at the time.

Curtis' charge was to control the scourge of the gypsy moth, which had infested much of the eastern seaboard, devouring almost any type of vegetation. These insects, which emerge from their eggs as scary, furry looking caterpillars, are native to Europe. (For more information on why the gypsy moth was brought to America, see the inset box below at left.)

Curtis and his crew would have been actively engaged in any one of three common control techniques at the time: the labor-intensive hand painting of egg clusters with creosote, "tanglefooting" them at the caterpillar phase with sticky bands of paper wrapped around trees, or spraying trees with a solution of lead and water (which does not sound environmentally friendly today!). The gypsy moth problem was ultimately brought under control, but there were several major outbreaks in subsequent years.

How will Norwell be viewed one hundred years from now?

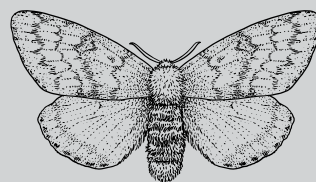
Will there be a need for another Fred Curtis, Moth Superintendent?

Will flying drone-taxis render our "tarvia"-paved roads quaint boulevards for walking?

Predicting the future is impossible, so perhaps we should content ourselves with a look to the past for helpful perspective about the significant changes we face today. As Heraclitus said, "the only constant in life is change." The Norwell townspeople of 1921 would probably agree.



THE GYPSY MOTH?



The gypsy moth was introduced to America in 1868 by Leopold Trouvelot, an experimenter in Medford, Massachusetts, for the purpose of cross breeding the moths with silk worms to produce a "super silk bug" that could survive in the New England climate. Some of the more adventurous critters escaped, and the itinerate gypsies quickly fanned out across the country, reaping mass defoliation. By 1921, gypsy moths had become a major problem, especially for a rural, agricultural town like Norwell.

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Recipe

This recipe is from *The Yankee Cookbook*, an anthology of recipes from the files of *Yankee Magazine* published in 1939. Imogene Wolcott was the editor of the book, which was given to Society president Wendy Bawabe as a gift years ago. Blueberry season is upon us, and we often have a plethora of berries to use up—this easy recipe is the perfect way.

BLUEBERRY SLUMP

- 2 cups blueberries, washed
- ½ cup sugar
- 1 cup water
- 1 cup flour, sifted
- 2 tsp. baking powder
- ¼ tsp. salt
- ½ cup milk (about)

Stew blueberries, sugar, and water in a wide saucepan on the stovetop. Mix and sift flour, baking powder, and salt; add milk, stirring quickly to make a dumpling dough that will drop from the end of a spoon. Drop by spoonfuls into the boiling sauce.

Cook over low heat for 10 minutes with the cover off and 10 minutes with the cover on.

Serve with plain or whipped cream. Serves 4.

Wolcott notes that on Cape Cod, they call this pudding Blueberry Grunt.

What's in a Name?

KING'S LANDING

This small dirt road leads from Main Street to the North River and is home to King's Landing Marina. Residents of the neighborhood heard a rumor that it was named after King Philip, the native warrior who may have used the area as a river crossing point. A resident asked the Historical Society for confirmation, and the following information was discovered in the writings of historian Mary Power.

Where did the name "King's Landing" come from?

According to Mary Power, historic Scituate "...had a natural highway in the North River, which gave to her groups of settlers along its course several 'ports of entry' at the various landings which still bear their ancient [owners'] names—Hobart's Landing, King's Landing, Job's Landing." Power notes King's Landing was a regular stopping place for the packets that carried merchandise from Boston to places along the North River.

When did the King family come to Scituate/Norwell?

Rev. Samuel Deane (in his *History of Scituate* book) notes that the King family first came to Scituate in 1634/5 with Elder Thomas King, who built his house in the Neal Gate Lane area.

How did the King family come to live at King's Landing?

Thomas King was a wealthy man who owned much land along the North River. In his 1711 will, the family home at Stoney Cove Brook (today's King's Landing) was given to Thomas' youngest son, George, who dwelt there with his family until 1754—the last of the King family to live in the area.

Answer from page 4: The house and barn are located at 104 River Street today—looking much as they do in the old photo!



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HISTORICAL SOCIETY ITEMS FOR SALE



The ABCs of Norwell (*shown at left*) **\$10**
 by Gertrude Daneau

A coloring book 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 historic people and sites.

Historic Homesteads of Norwell **\$15**

Always wanted to know the history behind the antique homes in town? This book delves into the background of many of Norwell's historic houses and the people who lived in them.

A Narrative of South Scituate & Norwell (*shown at left*) **\$20**
 by Samuel H. Olson

This book chronicles the life and times of our town from 1845-1963 with a collection of articles previously published in The Norwell Mariner. Each chapter is its own story, so this book is very readable. Looking for a single book to summarize Norwell's more recent history? This is the one.

History of South Scituate-Norwell **\$25**
 by Joseph Foster Merritt

This history of the town, originally written in 1938, was republished in 1988 by the Society. A unique narrative with illustrations, it is an invaluable account of Norwell prior to WWII.

Norwell town seal pin **\$5**

Looking for the perfect teacher gift for the coming school year? Since all faculty wear lanyards, the brass and enamel town seal pin (1-inch wide) is a great gift for your child's teacher.

Looking for more items?
 Use this QR code to visit our website.



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