



# NORTH RIVER PACKET

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## Justice Nathan Cushing

*With the Town of Norwell's recent purchase of the Cushing/Whiting Fields on the corner of Lincoln and Main Streets, the Town now owns the land where Nathan Cushing's Homestead once stood.*

by Alan Prouty

In 1927, the Daughters of the American Revolution erected a monument at the corner of Main Street and Lincoln Street in Norwell to honor Justice Nathan Cushing. Few of the thousands of motorists who drive by the monument every day are aware of the role that Justice Nathan Cushing played in the history of their town and the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. This article provides a brief overview of Justice Cushing's contributions to our community and state before, during, and after the American Revolution.

“*In 1774, Nathan Cushing advised the people of Massachusetts to oppose British colonial rule... and to arm themselves.*”

Nathan Cushing (1742-1812) was one of 15 children of Joseph Cushing Jr. and Mary Cushing who lived on the family homestead of 50 acres at what was then known as Henchman's Corner [see inset at right]. Nathan

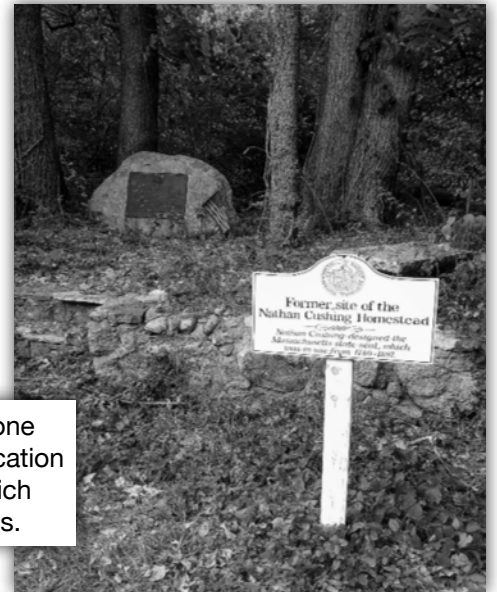
studied law at Harvard, graduating in 1763. As a young man he practiced law in Scituate (Norwell was part of Scituate until 1849) and became active in local politics and participated in the events leading to the American Revolution.

From Main Street, one can view the stone monument and the sign that notes the location of the former Cushing Homestead, which burned to the ground in the mid-1800s.

When the British Parliament enacted the “Intolerable Acts” in 1774 to control dissent, anti-British sentiment increased across Massachusetts. In Scituate, the Selectmen appointed Nathan Cushing to draft a resolution on the conditions in the town in opposition to British rule. The resolution submitted by Nathan Cushing and approved by the town meeting provided:

*“That we cordially join in sentiment with most of our brethren in this and other Colonies, that those acts of the British Parliament which have a tendency to control our internal commerce and manufactures, and more especially to extort our monies, are not only dis-consonant with good and lawful Government, but subversive of those rights and liberties which our fathers have handed down to us...”*

In September 1774, Nathan Cushing was chosen to be a delegate to the Plymouth County Congress to also consider the response of the county to



the “Intolerable Acts.” He was one of the signatories of the manifesto issued at that event which advised the people of Massachusetts to oppose British colonial rule. The manifesto called for the people of Plymouth County to arm *(continued on page 6)*

**Henchman's Corner** from notes by Mary Louise Foster Nash Power: “When the Mt. Blue road [today's Lincoln Street] was built in 1703-4, the corner created by the new road at its junction with the older road [Main Street] to ‘Snappit [Assinippi] was called “Henchman's Corner” for Joseph Henchman, whose house stood on the knoll in the large Cushing field on the north side of the main highway. Early settlers around it were: Henchman (1690) whose property was later purchased by Rev. Nath'l Ellis (1714), Dea. Joseph Cushing (1706), Philip Turner (ca. 1700), Richard Prouty (1680) [relative of the author], and Zachary Damon III (1748).”

# 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.*



Recently found in the West Barn of the Jacobs Farmhouse is an early 19<sup>th</sup> century coffin bier. It is a wooden frame on four legs with two long handles extending at either end. It was used for carrying a dead body, placed in a wooden coffin and covered with a black cloth called a pall, from the home of the deceased to the meetinghouse. There it served as a catafalque for the funeral service. The coffin was then carried on the bier by either two or four people to the grave in the burying ground.

**cat'a'falque', (kăt'ə-fälk') n.**  
a decorated platform on which a coffin rests in state during a funeral.

Written on back of original photograph of Launching of the Helen M. Foster

**On Board**

1. In stern John Turner
2. E. A. Turner against flag staff
3. Willard Terry, Frank and Walter half way between
4. E. J. Fogg man amidships
5. Lizzie Torrey directly in front of 4
6. Mary Louisa Foster 4th right of 5
7. Tom Pinson large
8. Alnathan Cushing near stern, tall hat, short sleeves

**On Ground**

1. Charles Merritt 1st man at extreme left
2. Priscilla Steison
3. Melvin Steison
4. Geo. Ed Jackson 2nd from 2
5. Capt. Abel Vinal large man looking at world
6. Chas. Sylvester below the Torreys at right
7. Alfred Pinson with folded arms at right
8. Frank Brooks left of 7 with light coat
9. J.C. Nash and wife left of 8 sitting on rocks or lumber
10. 2 smaller girls beside them Mary Nash and Mary Sparrell
11. 2 larger girls Carrie and Sarah Briggs
12. 2 girls near fence Lucy Nash and Jennie Burrage
13. Mary Ann Turner (1) Martha Torrey (2) Helen M. Foster (3) Mercy Cortwell (Holding Henry) 4
- 14.



The Society owns numerous copies of the photograph (seen at right) taken on the day the Helen M. Foster was launched on the North River (the last large vessel to be launched from a North River shipyard). Recently, volunteers organizing the Society Archives discovered this listing of some of the people in that famous photo! Of note is Cap'n Bill Vinal's grandfather, Capt. Abel Vinal, who is listed as on the ground and as a "large man looking at world"!

## Just The Facts

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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 3<sup>rd</sup> 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.

### Mailing Address & Phone

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



*Wesley Holmes Osborne, Jr.,  
age 96,  
passed away on  
November 15, 2019*



*1992 Interview with Wes Osborne  
by David Donovan*

*History in Depth Project*

I was born in 1923 in Norwell on Assinippi Avenue in what they call The Line House, and they tell me I was born on the Norwell side [the house straddles the Hanover and Norwell lines]. I then lived at 296 Main Street—that's the large farmhouse just before you get to the schools.

The first school I went to was what they called the Ridge Hill School. There were two stories to it, one up and one down. The lower story had the First and Second Grade and the upper story had the Third and Fourth Grade, and there was one teacher for the two classes.

After that I went to school in what is now known as the Osborn School... But of course, the building [on that site] burned down [in 1935], so for two years I went to Hanover High School while they were building what is now the Sparrell School... which is where I went to school for High School.

[The school] burned at night. I was thirteen years old and it was a fantastic and scary fire. It lit the whole skies up. There was no water in Norwell and the only water available was a little pond...

Mr. Osborne was a graduate of Norwell High School (see his yearbook photo above) and member of the Norwell High School Athletic Hall of Fame. He served as the Norwell Tree Warden for many years, and was a member of the Norwell Historical Society. In 2017, he was given an Arbor Day Award by the Society for his many years of service to the Town of Norwell.

We uncovered the 1992 interview that Mr. Osborne gave for the Norwell Middle School "History in Depth" project, and a portion of it is transcribed here.



and so they pretty much had to sit there and watch it burn and it burned flat.

Well I guess I liked to play baseball better than anything else when I went to school.

Right after World War II, I went to [college] and studied forestry for a short time and about that time the Tree Warden passed away, and they needed a Tree Warden—that was 1949. So the Selectmen asked if I would become the Tree Warden and I agreed, and the job did grow into Tree Warden and Director of Lands and Natural Resources. I was kind of the informal Conservation Agent for much of that time, then I became the formal Agent in the 1980s.

I've been very involved with Black Pond. The Nature Conservancy owns it. I'm on the Stewardship Committee and in fact I kind of run it.

I think some of the biggest changes I have seen in town over the years would be in the roads. The roads changed from gravel to macadam. The

trees—I've noticed this more than anyone else. I cut all the Dutch elm-diseased trees down. Hundreds of elm trees of substantial size lined Main Street, River Street, and Central Street, and losing them was a dramatic change for the town.

The number of houses that have been built—I can relate that to hunting because when I was your age, which was in the 1930s, you could hunt in Norwell and expect to see game. I've seen [Jacobs] Pond change from a good, clear fishing pond to a pond that is full of weeds.

Another dramatic change—when I was your age there were very, very few refrigerators. You had an ice man and you had an ice box. We've had a dramatic change from burning wood and coal to burning oil and gas. And of course there weren't very many airplanes in those days. If you saw an airplane go over then—in the 1930s—it was quite an event. And of course, you don't even look if one goes over now!

# William Gould Vinal: A Man Who Should Not Be Forgotten

*Through thousands of lectures, hundreds of publications in magazines, newspapers and books, and inspirational classroom teaching, Dr. William Gould Vinal (“Cap’n Bill”) is deservedly known as the Father of Nature Education.*

by Jon Bond

**Preface:** *I first met Mr. Vinal as a young boy when my father took me to his home on Grove Street. Over the years we would cross paths, but I didn’t interact with him until I was a young man serving on the Norwell Historical Commission. In more recent years, serving as a volunteer at the South Shore Natural Science Center, I became more aware of him and his many accomplishments. Poring through their collection of scrap books and records given to them by Cap’n Bill I learned more about him and discovered many of the pictures contained here. You can only imagine my excitement when I found the Vinal School dedication speech given by my father that gives a summary of this man’s life. I firmly believe that William Gould Vinal is one of Norwell’s most illustrious citizens and should never be forgotten.*

## **Dedication William Gould Vinal School**

**September 10, 1967**

**Address given by  
John C. Bond, Norwell  
School Committee member**

There is a Biblical verse found in the Gospel according to St. John to the effect that “a prophet has no honor in his own country.”

I am sure that this is not true in the case of Dr. William Gould Vinal, our guest of honor today.

I suppose there are people in this lovely town of ours who do not know Cap’n Bill, I trust that there are not many. I hope that after today and for as long as this school stands, yes even longer—that the name William Gould Vinal will have meaning to every resident of Norwell and to generations yet unborn.

What manner of man is this that we honor here today? What, someone may ask, did he do to entitle him to have a public school bear his name?

Well, in the first place, he had the foresight to be born in Norwell on November 29, 1881. Norwell was then know as South Scituate. He was the son of William Raymond Vinal and descends from a long line of sea



William Gould Vinal was born in what is now known as The Kent House, long before it was moved from Grove Street to Norwell Center (between the James and First Parish).

captains. His grandfather, Capt. Abel Augustus Vinal, was master of the *Helen M. Foster*, the last ship launched in our historic North River known as the river of 1,000 ships [Editor’s note: see page 2 photo]. Another ancestor was Ann Vinal, an historic name in Scituate and South Shore history.

Ann Vinal landed in Scituate as a widow with three children in 1636 and was the only woman member of the famous Conihasset Partners, a land holding cooperation. She was pronounced an enterprising widow and the best businessman of them all. Cap’n Bill’s mother was Mary Ellen Farrar, before she married his father, and was descended from John Farrow who arrived in Hingham in 1636. So

you see that our guest of honor’s roots run deep in the soil of the South Shore.

But it is not for his ancestors that we honor Cap’n Bill. It is for his own accomplishments as a teacher—there is no finer calling—and as a leader of youth and of men.

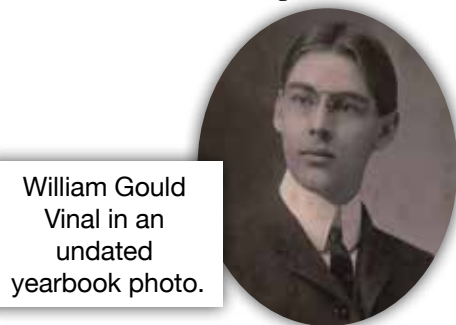
Perhaps the next best move made by Cap’n Bill was when he persuaded Lillie Hale Downing to become his bride, a joyous event that took place in Newtonville on September 2, 1908. It is said that behind every successful man there is a good woman. I’m sure that Cap’n Bill would be the first to acknowledge that much of his success is due to “Mother V” as many who know her affectionately call her.



Dr. Vinal began his education here in Norwell’s District School 3 which stood at the corner of Grove and School Streets and was a member of the Norwell High School Class of 1899.

In 1903 he graduated from Bridgewater State Teachers’ College, then known as a Normal School.

Three years later, in 1906, he received his Bachelor of Science degree at Harvard and followed a year later with his Master of Arts Degree. In 1922,



William Gould Vinal in an undated yearbook photo.

*(continued on the next page)*

(continued from the previous page)

he was awarded a Ph.D. at Brown University.

He started his teaching career in 1907 at Marshall College, Huntington, West Virginia, where he was head of the biology department and football coach. In 1910 he went to Salem Massachusetts State Teachers College as a professor in geography and the following year began a 14 year period as head of the nature study department at Rhode Island College of Education.

In 1925, Dr. Vinal joined the staff of the New York State College of Forestry at Syracuse University, as professor of Nature Education. Two years later, in 1927, he founded the Nature Guide School at Western Reserve University School of Education which he directed until 1936. During that year he served as Itinerant Naturalist for the National Recreation Association visiting large cities all over the country.

In 1937, he arrived on the campus of the University of Massachusetts in Amherst to organize its Nature Recreation Dept., a post he held until his retirement as Professor Emeritus in 1951. These are but a few of the educational landmarks in the career of William Gould Vinal.



Cap'n Bill at Camp Chequesset.

There is one milepost which cannot be omitted. This was the establishment in 1914, along with Professor Alice Hamilton Belding of Vassar, of the establishment of Camp Chequesset, a nautical camp for girls at Wellfleet on Cape Cod which he operated for 14 summers. It was here that the title Cap'n Bill came into being, an affectionate term bestowed by the young campers that has been adopted by most of his intimates and is used until this very day. [Editor's Note: It was also at this time that Mrs. Vinal was referred to as Mother V.]

It was in the field of camping and nature study that Cap'n Bill made his biggest contribution through his leadership and extensive writing.

Here are some highlights: For seven years he gave camp leadership courses at Bear Mountain Inn in the Palisades Interstate Park on the Hudson River for the Teachers College of Columbia University (1921-1927).

In one year—1927—he and Mother V traveled more than 3,000 miles visiting 50 camps in New York state and New England while writing articles for *Nature Magazine*.

For 12 years he wrote an annual editorial on camping for *Cosmopolitan* magazine. His Cap'n Bill's columns appeared in *Camping* magazine. He



Cap'n Bill (at far right) as a Park Ranger.

has served as a Ranger Naturalist in our National Parks: Yosemite, 1924; Glacier, 1931; Lake Crater, 1933. In 1930, he served on President Hoover's White House Conference on Child Health and Protection. Following World War II, he made a survey of Youth Hostels in seven European countries for the American Youth Hostels.

Since his retirement from the academic halls, Cap'n Bill has devoted much time to writing the history of the region in which he was born and which he loves so much.

His publications include: "Salt Haying in the North River Valley;" "Old Scituate Churches in a Changing World;" "Is There Need for a State Park in North Plymouth County?"; and "The Rise and Fall of Ye District School in Plymouth Plantation". I can't tell you how thrilled I was when I saw this latter volume, bound in schoolhouse red, lying on a table for

easy access in the general reading room of Dartmouth College's noted Baker Memorial Library. Our prophet is famed far beyond his own country.

I am sure that I have omitted many milestones in this great man's career that should have been included, but time prevents. Perhaps I have said enough that you, who may not have had the privilege of knowing Cap'n Bill, will understand why the Norwell School Committee voted enthusiastically to name this school after him. This was one time when there was no question about the unanimous vote.

What I must include before closing, however, is a summary of Cap'n Bill's contribution to his own town of Norwell. He has been a leader in the conservation movement here in his own community. He has served as Chairman of the Recreation Committee and was a valued member of the School Committee, a post to which he was elected after being appointed to fill an unexpired term.

In 1964, when he was the recipient of the William T. Hornaday Memorial Gold Medal of the Natural Science for Youth Foundation, Cap'n Bill was called "the nation's foremost exponent of Nature Recreation."

In 1959, when he was presented at the Golden Jubilee Court of Honor of



Cap'n Bill and Mother V at the 1967 dedication of the William Gould Vinal Elementary School.

(continued on page 7)

# Nathan Cushing, cont'd

*(continued from page 1)*

themselves and to become accustomed with military discipline.

As sentiment against British rule reached a critical level in communities across Massachusetts, the British Governor dissolved the Governor's Council in October 1774. The state leadership responded by implementing a series of Provincial Congresses which brought together representatives from all counties in Massachusetts. Nathan Cushing, Gideon Vinal, Barnabas Little, and William Turner were the delegates from Scituate in these events. The Provincial Congresses established the system to govern the province, collect taxes, buy supplies, and raise a militia before and during the Revolution.

In 1776, the Provincial Congress of Massachusetts appointed Nathan Cushing to be a Judge of the Admiralty Court in Boston. The Admiralty court was a critical institution during the Revolution when the Continental Congress and the Provincial Congress of Massachusetts and the other colonies issued more than 2,500 "Letters of Marque" to the owners of fishing and cargo ships to outfit their vessels as "Privateers" to capture British-flagged ships. Many of the captured vessels were landed in the ports of Massachusetts where they were subject to condemnation and sale under the existing laws governing such prizes. The proceeds were divided among the privateer's sponsors, shipowners, captains and crew, and to the issuer of the "Letter of Marque." This became a significant source of revenue to support the revolutionary forces. In reviewing the legality of the capture of British vessels by Privateers, Nathan Cushing is reported by historian Samuel Deane to have "with great firmness condemned the captured British vessels, which brought him into notoriety as a patriot."

In 1779, Nathan Cushing was selected to be a Counsellor of the Common-

wealth of Massachusetts. The Constitution of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts was drafted by John Adams and approved by the Council in October 1780. This document declared that: "All men are born free and equal, and have certain natural, essential, and unalienable rights; among which may be reckoned the right of enjoying and defending their lives and liberties; that of acquiring, possessing, and protecting property..."

In December of 1780, Nathan Cushing was appointed to be a committee of one to prepare a seal for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. The design he recommended was adopted by the Governor (John Hancock) and the Provincial Congress on December 13, 1780. The motto had been adopted in 1775 by the Provincial Congress and the common English translation is,



The Massachusetts state seal designed by Nathan Cushing was used by the Commonwealth from 1780 until 1885.

"By the sword we seek peace, but peace only under liberty."

In 1788, Nathan Cushing served as a delegate to the Massachusetts Ratifying Convention which met in Boston to consider the adoption of the Federal Constitution. By a vote of 187 to 168 the Federal Constitution was ratified. Nathan Cushing's vote was one of the 187 votes in support

of ratification of the United States Constitution.

In 1789, Nathan Cushing followed his older and more famous cousin, William Cushing ("Chief Justice Cushing," after which part of Route 3A has been named) to become a Justice of the State Supreme Court. Samuel Deane's account of Nathan Cushing's

“ He was a gentleman... distinguished more for solid judgment and discretion than for eloquence.”

career and his achievements on the Massachusetts Supreme Court were that: "He was a gentleman of noble form, commanding countenance and courteous manners, distinguished more for solid judgment and discretion than for eloquence."

From 1802 to 1807, Nathan Cushing again became a Counsellor of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. In his final years, Justice Nathan Cushing lived at the Cushing homestead at Henchman's Corner. He died there on November 4, 1812 and was buried in the First Parish cemetery at Norwell Center. His wife, Abigail Tilden Cushing, passed away in 1810. He was survived by three children: Abigail, Christopher, and Frances.

The Cushing Memorial Center was built in 1936 as the new Norwell Town Hall. \$100,000 was given by Florence Cushing to build the structure in honor of her father, Hayward Pierce Cushing, and her uncle, Nathan Cushing.

*Answer from page 4: This photograph was recently found in the Society Archives! Gathering salt marsh hay on the North River marshes was a common occurrence. Salt marsh hay was used to feed livestock, and the oxen wore special shoes so they wouldn't sink into the muddy marshes. Several of the ox shoes are on display at the Jacobs Farmhouse.*

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### INTERESTED IN VOLUNTEERING?

\_\_\_\_\_ Researching at the Archives \_\_\_\_\_ Other:

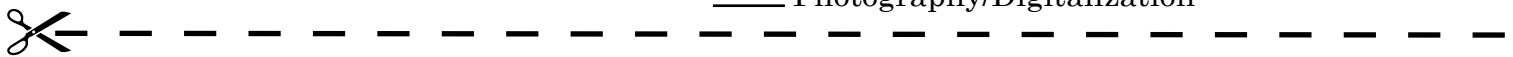
\_\_\_\_\_ Organizing at the Archives

\_\_\_\_\_ Farmhouse Tour Guide

\_\_\_\_\_ Farmhouse Maintenance

\_\_\_\_\_ Event Planning

\_\_\_\_\_ Photography/Digitalization



## Cap'n Vinal, cont'd

*(continued from page 5)*

Narragansett Council Boy Scouts of America, he received this tribute:

“We salute you for your understanding of boys and girls, for your skill in compelling them to seek and discover, for your ability to turn theory into meaning. You have shared your wealth in showing how you have treasured sunsets, storms, songs of birds, the lore of forest, field and flowers and, above all, the countless and enduring friendships of those whose lives you have touched. All of us are richer for having known you.”

And finally when he received the Doctor of Education Degree at Rhode Island College, this tribute was paid, and I can think of no better way to end:

“You have encouraged countless young people to live with senses alert to the wonders and beauty of the world; and they, like you, have reaped a reward of wisdom and happiness. You are called an Ideal Teacher, whose surpassing geniuses in helping students realize their best in thought, speech and action. They have gone away from the session with you refreshed

and secure, knowing that in some perhaps indefinable way, they have been changed, and for the better. Goals still distant for many of us have been simple realities for you. You have demonstrated that excellence is better than shoddiness; that knowledge is better than ignorance; that simplicity is better than can't; that wit is better than solemnity.”

For all these reasons, Cap'n Bill, are the people of Norwell proud to have this new edifice known as The William Gould Vinal School. And I so declare it.



### THROWBACK PHOTO OF THE MONTH

An over-filled hay wagon pulled by an oxen—not an uncommon scene in the late 1800s in Norwell. But what makes this location unique? And what kind of hay was specifically harvested at this location?

*(answer at the bottom of page 6)*



NORWELL HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
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The photo above is from the collection of Mary Osborn Knapp and is dated 1940 (Mary's father, Perry Osborn, was Highway Surveyor and in charge of clearing the roads). This scene, while not involving sleds and horses, is reminiscent of the 1890s scene described below. To see more Osborn snow photos, scroll down to the **Historic Photo Gallery** on the **Historical Society website**.

From "The Hanover Branch: Norwell Supplement,"  
May 23, 1941

### **Snow Always a Problem**

By A. Gertrude Eldredge

Another event of the winters a half century ago (1890's) was the arrival of the horse-drawn snow plow. "Everyone to the window" to see the big sled, drawn by four to six horses, with a plank rigged obliquely across the front to smooth the whiteness down. On the sled were a dozen men with shovels. Snow expense was then, as now, an item for the tax-payer. Blessings on the boy who was ambitious enough to shovel himself into a new suit of clothes.



**AVAILABLE  
FOR YOU  
TO HAVE!**

The NORWELL HISTORICAL SOCIETY ARCHIVES CLEAN UP PROJECT has uncovered numerous duplicate copies of Town of Norwell Annual Reports and some extra Norwell High School yearbooks (The Society keeps multiple copies of each, but 3 or 4 extra copies is unnecessary).

Interested in a copy of an Annual Report?

Want a copy of a yearbook from  
the following years:

1938, 1940, 1941, 1949, 1958, 1957, 1956, 1960,  
1965, 1967, 1971, 1976, & 1982?

Please email the Society at  
[info@norwellhistoricalsociety.org](mailto:info@norwellhistoricalsociety.org)  
and let us know (...supplies are limited).