



December 2018 Newsletter

NORWELL HISTORICAL SOCIETY

P.O. Box 693

NORWELL, MASSACHUSETTS 02061

WWW.NORWELLHISTORICALSOCIETY.ORG

DIRECTORS & OFFICERS

Wendy Bawabe, President
Sarah Jane Baker, Secretary
Marybeth Shea, Treasurer

Board of Directors

Laurie Detwiler
Chad Forman
Christian Jevne
Joan Vermette
Janet Watson, Archivist

CONTACTING US

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

MUSEUM & LIBRARY HOURS

The Jacobs Farmhouse is open by appointment only. Please contact the Society for further information or to schedule a tour.

The Norwell Historical Society Library at the Norwell Middle School (328 Main Street) is open on Wednesdays from 2:30 to 3:30 during the school year or by appointment.

The Norwell Historical Society Archives Center on the 3rd floor of the Sparrell School is open by appointment only.

The purpose of this Society shall be: a.) to plan and arrange for the promotion of knowledge about the Town of Norwell by discussion, research, meetings and publications; b.) to collect, solicit and preserve documents, manuscripts, charts, maps, records, photographs, relics, and items of local interest; c.) to arrange, index, catalog and file/maintain such material for use by the members of the Norwell Historical Society and other interested parties; d.) to work with and cooperate with other entities, groups, organizations, and individuals directly and indirectly.

CHRISTMAS MEMORIES

by Joan Vermette

If you have watched the movie "A Christmas Story," you have been privy to my childhood. I remember my mother shaking me into my snowsuit, just as the mother in the movie did to her little son. The scenes where the boy took a dare to put his tongue on a metal flag pole and got stuck to it made me laugh. I remember a boy in my neighborhood did the same thing—but to a metal lamp post! We tried to pull him free, but it hurt him too much. Having exhausted all other ideas on how to free him, we were deciding who would go tell his mother when Ralph, who owned and ran the grocery store across the street, saw us. Ralph came out carrying a bowl of warm water, stomped across to us, and muttered about "stupid kids who never learn." He poured the water down the pole above the poor child's tongue and the boy was instantly freed.

Ralph looked in his mouth, shook his head, and sent the boy back home to be treated. Then Ralph went back to his store, still muttering about stupid kids.

Ralph was a dear man. He was one of my childhood heroes. We knew he loved us and would always take care of us.

The movie "A Christmas Story" brought back my early Christmas memories. Christmas came to our house when my mother hung the little wreaths in the parlor windows. They were made of a shiny plastic material that reflected the light from the electric candles that were set in them. The lack of outlets in the

parlor resulted in a snake of extension cords winding around the base boards.

The little cardboard nativity went on the shelf above the parlor coal stove. The graphics of the scene were really lovely. Our stockings (our *real* stockings) were hung beneath that shelf. My little sister (who was extremely bright) realized what stockings were all about on her first Christmas. She took one look at her baby stocking hanging next to our much-larger stockings and protested the inequity of it all. I went and found the mate to my long brown cotton winter stocking and hung that for her instead. That was when she realized that maybe having an older sister wasn't so bad after all. Stockings being hung, we waited.

It was my father's job to bring home the tree. Since the '36 Chevy was hibernating in a rental garage around the corner, where it slept from late October until Spring, Dad had to carry the tree home. We never knew when it would arrive. When he finally came home with it over his shoulder, he was always happy with our wild greeting. I remember once hearing him tell my

mother that the tree cost 75 cents (and it came with a wooden stand!).

We stood the tree between the front parlor windows next to the floor model Philco radio (see photo at left).

(continued on page 3)



at the CHRISTMAS FARMHOUSE

Saturday, December 8th
1:00-4:00 pm

Come celebrate the holidays at the Jacobs Farmhouse! Both the Society Museum **AND** the rental side of the house will be open for tours! Buy an old-fashioned wreath from a Society artisan, complete the Farmhouse scavenger hunt, enjoy some mulled cider and victuals, and tour the Farmhouse while it's decorated for Christmas.

THE SHOE BUSINESS ON RIDGE HILL

by Jeff Keller

Society member Jeff Keller lives on High Street in the Charles Grose House (circa 1867). Jeff has done extensive research on the Grose family and the shoe industry in Norwell. Much of Jeff's research was done with the assistance of Grose family descendants Janet Shelton Blair (now deceased), her daughter Katie Blair of Texas, and former director of the Hingham Historical Society Suzanne Buchanan. Jeff also perused old issues of the Rockland Standard, which used to serve as the primary newspaper for the South Shore area.

This is the final installment of Jeff's research on the Ridge Hill shoe business. In the previous installment, the Grose family of High Street and their shoe manufacturing businesses were discussed. You may view the Fall 2018 issue which contained that article at www.NorwellHistoricalSociety.org, under the "Publications Archive" tab.

The Electric Road

Then there was the Electric Road. Named for the street car trolley service that ran from Brockton to Nantasket Beach in Hull—the service opened in late June of 1896. Maintained and paid for by the town through which each part of the "Road" was located, the Norwell section began on High Street at the Hanover-Norwell line and continued to Queen Ann's Corner, where it was met by the Hingham Street railway. Operations were conducted by a board of directors. It was noted that, "...it was necessary to get men who would put capital into the road elected." There were initially major defections from the board. After a subsequent reformation, High Street Shoe Factory owner, Charles Webster Grose, was listed as clerk on the railway board. Shortly thereafter on August 14, 1896, he was elected president.

On September 4, 1896, the following notice appeared in the *Rockland Standard*:

"C.W. Grose has recently been elected a director of the Mohegan Gold Mining Company of Montana.

This company owns a valuable piece of property on which work has already been commenced and will be pushed rapidly with a large force of men. Mr. Grose will probably visit 'the mine' in the near future as well as the Pioneer property located in California."



C.W. Grose, son of Charles Grose who founded Grose Shoe, and businessman

The Ridge Hill Shoe Company

During all of the aforementioned mining and trolley activity, what was happening to the shoe manufacturing business on Ridge Hill? The answer is,

apparently, not much! In 1898 a new shoe company, the Ridge Hill Shoe Company, was formed in place of Charles Grose & Sons. In the new company, there were officers and a board of directors with Charles W. Grose listed as Secretary and Treasurer and as being on the board of directors. The Ridge Hill Shoe Company was incorporated in Portland, Maine. A manager from Rockland was hired to run the shoe manufacturing operation. Despite the reorganization, business was not the best.

On March 12, 1901, shortly after quitting time at around seven in the evening, a fire broke out in the boiler room of the Ridge Hill Shoe Company factory. Everything burned to the ground: factory building, equipment, records, a shipment of shoes scheduled to be shipped out, even the former home of Benjamin Young (an adjacent Cape) along with the barn next door. Local papers reported the heat was so great that it bent the rails of the electric road. The business was declared a total loss. Charles Webster Grose stated that he would disband the firm and not rebuild, thus ending his career in the shoe business.

Across the street, the homes of Charles Webster and his mother, Mary, were spared from the flames. Although the roof of Charles Webster's barn caught fire several times, the flames were extinguished. Had the wind shifted, the outcome could have been different.

Charles Webster Grose was not poor. He did not need to work and, therefore, he did not. The Electric Road survived until 1925, a victim of the emergence of the horseless buggy which became personified as

the Model T Ford, "...any color you want as long as it is black." It is believed that Charles Webster Grose never drove an automobile. He did have a chauffeur, however, to ferry him around as needed.

Charles Webster's mother, Mary Ann Grose, lived in her home next to her son's until her death on May 15, 1917. She was over 90 years old.

Four years after his mother's death, Charles Webster experienced one more major setback: his wife, Elsie Fay (Twombly), died on December 27, 1921 at the age of 73. A year



The Grose family monument in the High Street Cemetery in Hingham marks the resting place of many members of the Grose family.

(continued on the next page)

NORWELL HISTORICAL SOCIETY
MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

DATE _____ NAME _____

MAILING ADDRESS _____

TOWN _____ STATE _____ ZIP _____

TELEPHONE _____ E-MAIL _____

MEMBERSHIP

3-Year Membership (\$35) _____

Life Membership (\$350) _____

Please make checks payable to the *Norwell Historical Society* and mail to: NHS,
P.O. Box 693, Norwell, MA 02061

OR YOU CAN JOIN ON-LINE  www.norwellhistoricalsociety.org

AREAS OF INTEREST

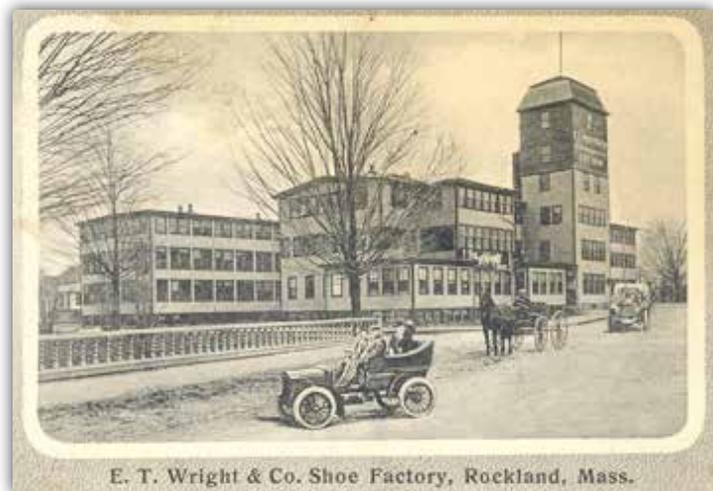
Newsletter _____ Research Library _____

Tour Guide _____ Program Planning _____

SHOE BUSINESS, CONT'D.

(continued from previous page)

and a half later he married Ina E. Archie Trask in Los Angeles, California. They lived together in the "French roofed dwelling house" on High Street (built by his parents in honor of Charles Webster's first wedding) until his death on April 3, 1930.



Charles Webster's sister, Mary Frances (Grose) Wright, and her husband, Elwin, prospered with the Rockland shoe manufacturing firm of E.T. Wright and Company. Mary died at home in Rockland on June 19, 1929. The firm continued to make shoes through to the early 1990's when it moved to Chippewa Falls, Wisconsin and was purchased by the Mason Companies. The latter has since discontinued all lines of E.T. Wright shoes around 2009 (even through their catalogue sales were effective) due to the lack of interest in high-end footwear.

The Grose family and E.T. Wright are interred in the High Street Cemetery in Hingham.

CHRISTMAS, CONT'D.

(continued from page 1)

Decorating the tree was done after we went to bed. The decorations were the strings of lights with large bulbs, glass balls, bells, tin icicles (silver on one side, colored on the other), and the gold tinsel garlands. The tree was topped with a steeple-like tube with a star in the middle. We thought it was perfect.

When we were old enough, we went to the midnight service on Christmas Eve. It was lovely. Walking home early Christmas morning was an adventure for my siblings and me.

Mom had left the feast in the warming oven of the kitchen oil stove. The kettle went on and the French meat pies came out of the oven. If you haven't had a meat pie early Christmas morning, you have missed something.

Our late night meant that opening presents and emptying our stockings came later in the day. Our stockings always held the same thing every year, but we were always happy. They were filled with hard Christmas candy, ribbon candy, a polished red apple, a large orange, and a toe full of walnuts.

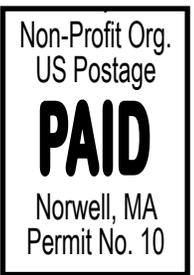
I remember the smell of cinnamon buns and coffee, and my father singing carols in French... much to our delight.

Perhaps my memories are a little too Norman Rockwell, covered with a nostalgic mist. Maybe I am ignoring the holidays when one or all of us were sick, or when we were disappointed by not getting our heart's desire. But just between us, I like it better that way because it is more true than not.

May this holiday bring you all the things you wish for and remind you of your own misty memories.



NORWELL HISTORICAL SOCIETY
P.O. Box 693
NORWELL, MASSACHUSETTS 02061
WWW.NORWELLHISTORICALSOCIETY.ORG



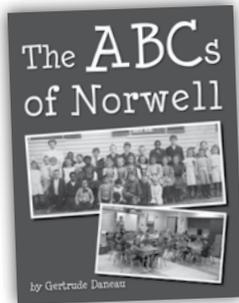
RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED



at the **CHRISTMAS FARMHOUSE**
Saturday, December 8th
1:00-4:00 pm

HISTORICAL SOCIETY ITEMS FOR SALE

 (perfect for holiday gift-giving!) 



The ABCs of Norwell (shown at left)
by Gertrude Daneau

\$10

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 famous personalities and historical features.

A Narrative of South Scituate-Norwell (shown at right)
by Samuel H. Olson

\$20

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 immensely readable. Looking for a single book to summarize Norwell's more recent history? This is the one.

Historic Homesteads of Norwell

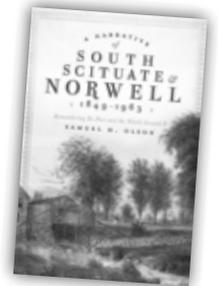
\$15

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.

Shipbuilding on the North River
by L. Vernon Briggs

\$45

This large book is the definitive listing of ships built on the North River and the shipyards that lined its shores. Written in 1889 and re-printed in 1988, this book also contains stories of colorful South Shore characters and harrowing sea tales.



All the above items are available at the Society Library in the Middle School on Wednesdays during the school year (2:30-3:30 p.m), or you may call Wendy Bawabe at 781-659-1464, or you may use this form and mail a check (made payable to NHS + add \$5 for shipping) to: Norwell Historical Society, P.O. Box 693, Norwell, MA 02061.