



Newsletter

Spring 2016

NORWELL HISTORICAL SOCIETY

P.O. Box 693

NORWELL, MASSACHUSETTS 02061

WWW.NORWELLHISTORICALSOCIETY.ORG

MAY DAY THROUGH THE YEARS

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The Norwell Historical Society
P.O. Box 693
Norwell, MA 02061
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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 2:00 to 3:00 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.

by Samuel Olson

May Day has been a traditional spring holiday in many cultures around the world. It is evident, too, that in former times it had become an annual rite of spring among the citizens of South Scituate/Norwell.

In the early twentieth century, the *Rockland Standard* would report on crowds of people of all ages gathering mayflowers in the woods and fields. The rocky and sandy soil was ideal for this plant, also known as the trailing arbutus (*epigaea repens*). It grows close to the ground with clusters of spicy-smelling pink and white flowers. It is the official state flower of the Commonwealth.

A *Standard* item of April 13, 1900 reported a serious forest fire at the rear of Albert Farrar's home on Washington Street, which burned over 150 acres. As bad as this was, the article also lamented that it had burned over the mayflower district and that there would be few mayflowers that year.

The boyhood journals of William Gould Vinal, who would become a world-renowned naturalist, tell how the children of Grove Street looked upon finding the first Mayflower in Valley Swamp as a certain sign that spring had arrived. Even young future naturalist Willie Gould then failed to appreciate that the gathering of mayflowers would eventually bring about their virtual extinction.

Another charming custom of the time was the hanging of May Baskets. They would be filled with flowers, candy and

other goodies. The basket would be left on the doorstep, the bell rung, and the giver would run away. If the recipient caught up with the donor, his reward would be a kiss!

A fond memory of my childhood would be my Mount Blue grandmother making dozens of these May Day Baskets out of crepe paper. Various folds, cuts, and clips made with nimble hands and filled with favorite candies would delight many.

Few people realize that our Pilgrim (Puritan Separatists) fathers frowned on this celebration. They saw May Day customs as rooted in Paganism and, even worse, in Papism (Catholicism).

(left)
a botanical
drawing
of the
mayflower



(right)
May baskets
from the
2015 Society
May Day
Tea hang on
the door of
the Jacobs
Farmhouse



A "thorn in their side" was a free spirit named Thomas Morton who had established a trading post at Merry Mount (meaning mountain by the sea) down the coast in present day Quincy. Governor Bradford sent the Plymouth militia under Myles Standish (often known as "Captain Shrimp") to destroy the outpost. The "saints" at Plymouth believed the rumors that Morton and his associates engaged in orgies with the native women, dancing around

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MAY DAY, CONT'D.

(continued from page 1)

an eighty-foot high May Pole. Morton ended up in chains and sent back to England and tried for his transgressions. Morton is also remembered as one of the "jury of the damned" in Benet's short story "The Devil and Daniel Webster."

With the pace of modern living, May Day is now seldom observed in western countries. In 1889, May 1st had been designated an international labor day by the International Socialist Congress to honor the martyrs associated with a strike at the McCormick Reaper Plant in Chicago on May 1, 1886. At a protest meeting a few days later in Chicago's Haymarket Square, a bomb had been thrown killing seven policemen. Eight anarchists were arrested, convicted by circumstantial evidence, and sentenced to be hanged. Ultimately, three of the sentences were commuted to life, one person committed suicide, and four were hanged.

At the time and for several generations more, peaceful labor agitators working for an eight-hour day and higher wages were honored on May 1st. In 1894, today's end-of-summer Labor Day was established in the United States as a federal holiday. But as time went on and it became evident that the aim of Communists was to destroy our society, May 1st became the day that Russian leaders stood atop Lenin's tomb and watched a parade of Soviet military might pass.

Now much of this negative image has passed and celebrating May Day is once again gaining fervor. A revival of May Day activities (including baskets!) is being carried out by the Norwell Historical Society as a means not only to "touch base" with our past but also as an effort to increase neighborliness and community spirit in our fast-paced world.

Drop in to the
Jacobs Farmhouse for the
**May Day
Tea**
AND
May Basket Making

Sunday **May 1st** 3:00-5:00

Jacobs Farmhouse Museum
4 Jacobs Lane, Norwell

\$5
Historical Society
members

\$20
non-members
(3-year membership included)

Drop in to make a May Day Basket
for your neighbor's door.

Drink a bit of tea from an antique cup.

Enjoy Spring at the Farmhouse.

THE JACOBS' FAMILY HISTORY

by Bill Slattery

Editor's Note: The following is the fifth installment of a history of the Jacobs Family written by Society Archivist Bill Slattery for the Town of Norwell's application for the Jacobs Homestead property to be listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The application is still pending. Parenthetical notes have been added to help with context.

There had only been two children, both sons, born of Barton and Frances [Jacobs, who lived in the Jacobs Farmhouse from the mid-1800s until the early 1900s]. The elder was Henry Barton Jacobs (1857-1939) and the younger, Frederick Boyden Jacobs (1863-1896). Of these, the first to die was the younger, and, his elder brother would be the last of this family [to live in the Farmhouse in Norwell].

While both of these sons, from records we have, were very intelligent and personable, the one more likely to be voted "Mr. Personality" was Frederick. According to [historian Anne Henderson], Fred "went to dancing school every Saturday night." His girl friend who went with him lived just to the east on the road. Her name was Grace and she was the daughter of his cousin Edwin Jacobs. She gave "nut candy" parties. There were many dances and balls held at a hall in Assinippi, and socials and other festivities at the local [Universalist] church as well. The time was likely 1883 when Fred was 19 (turning 20 in December) as that was the year of one of his diaries.

Quoting Henderson's monograph on Fred, based on his now lost diaries:

"In the winter there were skating parties on the pond and sleigh rides in Fred's sleigh. In springtime, the young people went to Valley Swamp for Mayflowers and Mountain Laurel. There were rides to the Third Cliff, Peggoty Beach, and the Glades. Fred repaired Hattie's boat and put it in the pond. During the summer, all enjoyed it. Besides various trips with the girls, Fred wrote that he took his mother rowing."

"Fred was a very attentive, attractive escort for this group of girls, adding much to their enjoyment. Grace seemed to be his special favorite...." He apparently had a sense of humor as he wrote that with a couple girls "dressed as boys, I as a girl," they had "made calls around the village."

Fred regularly awoke at 5:30 am and studied until 7:00 am and studied again from 8:00 to 9:30 pm. At high school in Rockland he wrote many essays, and had examinations in "Caesar, French, Greek, and spelling." He later attended Exeter Academy in about 1884 as a preparatory school for a year before his entry to Harvard University in 1885. He graduated from Harvard, Phi Beta Kappa, in 1889, and as class secretary from its law school in 1892.

(continued on next page)



NORWELL HISTORICAL SOCIETY
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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

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www.norwellhistoricalsociety.org

AREAS OF INTEREST

Newsletter _____ Research Library _____

Tour Guide _____ Program Planning _____



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JACOBS' HISTORY, CONT'D.

(continued from previous page)

Fred's diary showed he was willing to work physically. Quoting Henderson,

"During the long summer vacation, Fred was busy about the farm, planting seeds, specially for his mother's flower garden, picking strawberries at 4:30 in the morning and at another time 5 quarts of blueberries. He seemed very close to his mother often writing of doing things about the house for her such as moving out the stove in the spring and putting it back in the fall, taking up the sitting room carpet one morning before going to school and putting it back at night. In haying time, he helped his father and Uncle Ben with the work at the various fields which he called by name: the Jones field, Meadow, Old Orchard, Damon pasture, and Turner lot. There were the long days work when they went with the oxen for the marsh grass at Stoney Brook, Wills Island, and Bare Island."

In the same year he graduated from law school, Fred was elected to the Norwell School Committee. After much persuasion, his greatest achievement was to unite Hanover, Hanson, and Norwell under a single superintendent of schools to form a united school district. By February 1894, Fred had opened a law office in Boston, but by August he was stricken by tuberculosis, a disease that would soon end his



This stone step leads into the Carriage House at the Jacobs Farm.

Note Frederick Jacobs initials carved there—perhaps to impress his girlfriend, Grace?

promising life. He sought treatment in Atlanta, Georgia and Saranac Lake, New York, but to no avail. Henderson wrote of the touching concern of the Assinippi village for Fred's welfare: "Mrs. Jacobs would be stopped on her way to the Universalist Church or the post office by neighbors inquiring of Fred."

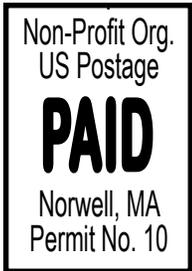
She would suffer the loss of her husband Barton on December 19, 1895, followed by her youngest son Fred on September 2, 1896. Fred, probably sensing the futility of the recovery attempt, had returned to the Jacobs Homestead from Saranac Lake before he succumbed to the disease.

(to be continued in the next issue)

Answer from page 4: Today, the photographer would be standing in the Merchant's Row parking lot overlooking Assinippi Cemetery. The pond is Jacobs Pond.



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RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED



**NORWELL HISTORICAL SOCIETY
 PUBLICATIONS (AN ABBREVIATED LIST...)**

THE ABCs OF NORWELL _____ \$10

by Gertrude Daneau
 This coloring book is 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.

HISTORIC HOMESTEADS OF NORWELL _____ \$15

Learn more about our stately houses and the people who lived in them. This book, well-illustrated with drawings, discusses architectural features and includes genealogical information on over 45 antique houses in Norwell.

A NARRATIVE OF SOUTH SCITUATE-NORWELL _____ \$20

by Samuel H. Olson
 This book chronicles the life and times of our town from 1845-1963 through a collection of articles previously published in *The Norwell Mariner*. A wonderful read!

NORWELL 1903 MAP REPRODUCTION _____ \$25

This 16" X 20" reproduction of the 1903 Plymouth County Atlas map of Norwell is a high quality digital copy of the original hand-colored version. Suitable for framing.

*All the above items are available at the NHS Library in the Middle School on Wednesdays during the school year (2-3:00 p.m.) or you may e-mail the Society via our website, or you may request a publication using this form and enclosing a check (made payable to NHS).
 Mail to: NHS, P.O. Box 693, Norwell, MA 02061.*

THROWBACK
 PHOTO OF THE MONTH



Where was this photograph taken?

This photo of the Memorial Day celebration at a local cemetery was taken at the turn of the century. The house on the left side (behind the people) still exists today, but the mills on the right side burned down on July 4, 1920. The orchard visible in the background behind the Pond no longer exists, but the barn and farmhouse behind the mills are still standing and preserved almost exactly as depicted here.

From where today was this photo taken? What is the Pond in the background?

(Location/ Answer at the bottom of page 3)