



Winter 2016

# Newsletter

NORWELL HISTORICAL SOCIETY

P.O. Box 693

NORWELL, MASSACHUSETTS 02061

[WWW.NORWELLHISTORICALSOCIETY.ORG](http://WWW.NORWELLHISTORICALSOCIETY.ORG)

## THE FIVE AND DIME

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Norwell, MA 02061  
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[www.norwellhistoricalsociety.org](http://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 3<sup>rd</sup> 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

*"Million Dollar Baby"*

by Harry Warren with Mort Dixon (1931)

*It was a lucky April shower  
It was a most convenient door  
I found a million dollar baby  
In a five and ten-cent store.  
The rain continued for an hour  
I hung around for three or four  
Around a million dollar baby  
In a five and ten cent store.*

*She was selling china  
And when she made those eyes,  
I kept buying china  
until the crowd got wise.*

For well over a century, five and dime stores were an integral component of the American mercantile system. Not only did they provide myriad items that made life less arduous and more enjoyable for the average citizen, but they also introduced new concepts in retailing that were ultimately adopted by purveyors of higher priced merchandise.

Norwell, because of its small population and lack of a defined retail center, never had a five and dime. But beginning in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and much of the following century, Norwell residents could take the trolley or, if fortunate enough, drive a motor car to Rockland Hill for major shopping.

In 1936, ground was broken at the corner of Union and School Streets in Rockland for two substantial five and dimes: J.J. Newberry's and F.W. Woolworth's. They anchored Rockland's main shopping center for the next twenty years.

Woolworth's (see photo at right) was the more popular of the duo because of its constantly changing array of goods. One entered through a wide entry bordered by plate glass windows

which were washed virtually every day. Floors were equally spotless and gleaming. It was a typical Woolworth's layout: as you entered there was a large soda fountain on the right serving ice cream products and reasonably priced lunches, and as you left the store on the right was the candy counter where one could satisfy a "sweet tooth" whether one favored non-pareils or divinity fudge.

Throughout the main floor were counters, or rather large bins, specializing in everything from cosmetics, toys, and stationery to dishes, glassware, and hardware items. Each station had a cash register and a clerk who was responsible for keeping her specialty stocked. Here, a customer could select the wanted item himself and hand it to the clerk who would bag it and accept cash payment.



(photo courtesy of the Old Abington Historical Society and the Dyer Library)

This personalized way of buying was formulated by Frank W. Woolworth who opened his first store in Utica, New York in 1869, and a year later a much larger one in Scranton, Pennsylvania. At its height, there were 3,000 Woolworth stores around the globe.

Following is a quick survey of merely a fraction of the merchandise that could be found in the Rockland store. Near the front were seasonable items: snow

(continued on page 2)

# THE FIVE AND DIME, CONT'D.

*(continued from page 1)*

shovels in January; Valentines in February; spring items such as bats, balls, jump ropes and marbles in March; Easter items, even live chicks and bunnies; items such as flags and plants for Decoration Day; beach balls, sand pails, postal cards in July; then pencils and notebooks for back-to-school; Halloween Jack O'Lanterns and masks made of egg crate material and tin noise makers in October; twine and turkey nails in November; Christmas cards and decorations came near the year's end.

Throughout the year the stationery counter was always busy. So too were dishware, glassware and kitchen utensils. Possibly Woolworth's all time best seller was Harlequinware, similar to the popular Fiesta china of the time.

Toward the rear of the store, a clerk with good calculating skills was necessary to measure window shades, screening, and oil cloth used to cover kitchen tables.

Many Depression-era kids remember the shoe repair kits—in retrospect, hardly satisfactory. The glue provided never held the rubber sole in place resulting in kids flapping!

To say that the items listed here merely “scratch the surface” is an understatement. I would imagine every home in Norwell contained items from Woolworth's, either purchased by the homeowner himself or acquired from previous generations.

F.W. Woolworth died in 1919 bequeathing most of his fortune (that would be assessed in the billions today) to his granddaughter Barbara Hutton, known as the “poor little rich girl” because of her unhappy personal life. She squandered much of her fortune on seven

husbands who included impoverished minor European royalty, South American playboys, and her third husband, film actor Cary Grant. Although pundits called this marriage the union between “Cash and Carry,” only Grant did *not* exploit her financially.

Her lifestyle angered many because Woolworth girls were woefully underpaid. In 1944, most wages had gone up because of wartime demand. Woolworth's paid its girls \$18 for a forty-hour week. Yet, this was a time when only a fraction of girls received a post-high school education and working in the dime store was a clean and respectable job for the interim between school and marriage.

Woolworth's began its decline in mid-century with the advent of shopping malls and “Big Box” stores. Also, its directors made many bad decisions, putting too much emphasis on subsidiaries such as Woolco and Foot Locker, thus abandoning its major buying base. The last Woolworth's in the United States closed in 1997.

Rockland's store had a premature death: both Woolworth's and the adjacent Newberry's were gutted by fire in February, 1957. The site presently is the location of the main headquarters of Rockland Federal Credit Union.

Woolworth's and its imitators are nostalgic relics, holding a huge place for many hearts in the amazing panorama of American life in the last century and a half.

*Much of the information for this article came from a lady who began working weekends for Woolworth's as a high school junior in 1942. Her pay: twenty-six cents an hour!*

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## THE JACOBS' FAMILY HISTORY

*by Bill Slattery*

*Editor's Note: The following is the fourth 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.*

[The Jacobs' family Grist and Saw Mills used to be located near the entrance to the Woodworth baseball fields—across from Jacobs Pond.] From about 1875 on, Barton Jacobs [Ichabod Jacobs' youngest son] would buy most of the remaining “mill shares” from [his brother] Benjamin, who had many debts. The [Jacobs] farm and the mills thrived under Barton Richmond Jacobs.

[The following story is recollected from] a diary entry by Harwood Smith (age 16) of Hanover, who with his brother, Percy (age 14), ice-fished on Jacobs Pond. On the clear and cold Saturday of December 17, 1887,

Barton came out to give a friendly warning that his mill would be operating for a couple of hours that afternoon. Specifically, he told the Smith boys “not to be alarmed at what would seem to be a general cracking up of the ice, which he said might occur due to drawing down the pond with his water wheel.” He went on to explain the origin of the mill and his family's connection to it. Harwood characterized Barton as “pleasant” and “talkative.” Barton stated that of about 35 to 40 families in this Assinippi area, fully half were Jacobs at that time. The Smith boys, who were successful catching twenty pickerel by setting traps and lines, gave Barton two of them. In fact, on their way home, they stopped at the general store in Assinippi to weigh a pickerel that a trap had caught that “topped five and three-quarter pounds.” This was a local record. It also saved them a scolding from their worried parents when they got back late for their supper. Like everyone to whom the boys showed

*(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

OR YOU CAN JOIN ON-LINE 

[www.norwellhistoricalsociety.org](http://www.norwellhistoricalsociety.org)

**AREAS OF INTEREST**

Newsletter \_\_\_\_\_ Research Library \_\_\_\_\_

Tour Guide \_\_\_\_\_ Program Planning \_\_\_\_\_



Give the gift of  
MEMBERSHIP

VIA MAIL: Fill out the enclosed member form for the membership gift recipient.

ON-LINE: Go to [www.norwellhistoricalsociety.org](http://www.norwellhistoricalsociety.org), choose the "Become a Member" tab and donate, then use the "Contact Us" tab to note the gift recipient name and address.

**JACOBS' HISTORY, CONT'D.**

*(continued from previous page)*

the fish on their way home, they were astonished at its size.

But by the time of Barton's death in 1895, it is likely that neither the farm nor the mill was quite the same. The grist mill had ceased operation by then; the saw mill continued to function, but probably did its last work soon after 1900.



*View from the Assinippi Cemetery of the Jacobs Saw Mill, looking toward the Jacobs Farmhouse (out of picture on the left), photo ca. 1900.*

According to Perez Simmons, referring to the sawmill, (though he was only age six at the time) the mill was very busy after the November 1898 Blizzard [the *Portland Gale* that created the new mouth of the North River]; the storm had uprooted many white pines. He thought the pond looked "wine-colored," and were it not for the pond, a boy's life would have been dull. It

provided skating, sail skating, ice-fishing, hockey and watching the harvesting of ice during the winter and swimming and fishing in summer. The sawdust from the mill was used to pack the ice. Perez said that as a boy he remembered "an abandoned up-and-down sawmill, a circular sawmill with edger, and a long-unused gristmill."

Perez remembered, "the noise of the sawmill was music to my ears. The different notes and uneven cadences of the circular log saw and the edger rang out above the rush of the water, rumble of wheels, swish of belts, and banging of the carriage. Under the older part of the sawmill there was a cavernous place where one could walk on narrow planks among the driving machinery. Strangely exciting odors were enjoyed there, like the smell of wet wood, of dust in the grist mill, of decaying bark, of fresh sawdust, of pine logs and tarred string used for tying bundles of edgings. The liking a boy has for these odors has something instinctive about it." Unfortunately, the mill succumbed to children celebrating the 4<sup>th</sup> of July in 1920, when it burned down, a year before widow Frances died at the Farmhouse. She had witnessed the sad deterioration and end of a long tradition.

*(to be continued in the next issue)*

*Answer from page 4: On the corner of Grove Street and School Street (hence, the name of the road!)*



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**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

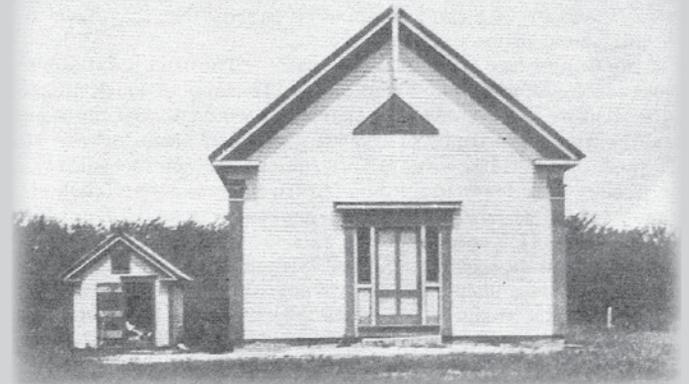
This book chronicles the life and times of our town from 1845-1963 through a collection of articles previously published in *The Norwell Mariner*. A wonderful read!

**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 in Norwell?

This photo of District School #3 was taken in the late 1800s. The building was erected circa 1854 in the Mount Blue area, and was closed in 1901 when Norwell consolidated the schools. It no longer stands on this site as it was moved to Hingham and made a private residence. Where exactly in the Mount Blue area was the school located?

*(Location/ Answer at the bottom of page 3)*