



March 2010 Newsletter

NORWELL HISTORICAL SOCIETY

P.O. Box 693

NORWELL, MASSACHUSETTS 02061

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The Norwell Historical Society
P.O. Box 693
Norwell, MA 02061
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MUSEUM & LIBRARY HOURS

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

The Norwell Historical Society Library at the Norwell Middle School (328 Main Street--Route 123) is open on Wednesdays and Thursdays: from 1:30 to 3:30 during the school year, and 10:00 to noon during the summer.

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.

MY PASTOR, MY FRIEND, MY MENTOR

by Samuel Olson

On September 12, 1886, which would have been his 89th birthday, a former South Scituate man named Reverend Tilden, presided over the unveiling of a plaque in memory of Reverend Samuel Joseph May (1797-1871) in the May Memorial Church in Syracuse, New York.

William Philips Tilden was a young man of 25 when Rev. May answered the call to serve the South Scituate parish following the tenure of two long-serving predecessors. (Note: although the official separation from the parent town didn't come until later, this section was referred to as South Scituate.) May's time here was brief, 1836-1842, and often fraught with contention. Many folks felt that their minister should confine his sermons to the gospels and not to be concerned with worldly matters such as abolition, temperance, educational reform, care of the feeble-minded and the insane, and virtually all the afflictions borne by the unfortunate among us. Brother-in-law Brownson Alcott referred to him as the "Lord's chore boy." Indeed, the American Unitarian Association cautioned Mr. May about the concerns of many parishoners. He answered the charge with firm words:

Unitarian principles are fundamental to all individual improvement and to all social reform. If you wish me personally to omit in my preaching any of the precepts of Christ, I cannot act as their agent.

Tilden recalled how Mr. May eventually won over many of his local critics who came to believe that "the aroma of his brief ministry still lingers, keeping the very air fragrant with his blessed memory."

Rev. Tilden came from one of the oldest North River shipbuilding families, working out of the Block House Yard for several generations. Young William received only a common school education in his native town, going to work in the family yard at an early age swinging the broad axe and skillfully working the cross saw. But the young man was so inspired by Mr. May's teaching that he gradually came to think he might be able to serve in some level of ministry. Doubt quickly crept in. He didn't have a preparatory education at Exeter (which seemed to be necessary for admission to the Theology School at Cambridge). Mr. May then assured him that there were other paths to the ministry that did not require a Harvard degree. He told Tilden that **he**, in effect, would serve as his preparatory school.

Tilden fondly recalled the day when at work in the shipyard at Medford, he looked up and saw his "portly pastor coming, looking over his glasses first one side and then the other as was his wont... He told me he had found a way I could enter the ministry." A few years later, before leaving South Scituate, Mr. May preached at Tilden's ordination ceremony.

In 1842, May's close friend Horace Mann asked him to assume the principalship of the state Normal School at Lexington. He took with him as his assistant Tilden's sister Caroline, a recent graduate of the Normal School at Bridgewater. May later said that Caroline's ability as a teacher may have been equaled, but never exceeded.

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GERTRUDE ELDREDGE REMINDS US OF NORWELL-PAST

Recently Bill Slattery, Archivist for the Norwell Historical Society, transcribed a short memoir that holds many interesting anecdotes of Norwell's past. The following portions of his transcription are from *The Hanover Branch and Norwell Advertiser* of May 23, 1941.

The article begins as follows: ASSINIPPI WOMAN SKETCHES TOWN'S PAST: Described with Fidelity To Historical Record--Advance Is Noted. by A. Gertrude Eldredge.

Given the current health care debate in Congress, the following by Ms. Eldredge is of interest:

Change of Health Methods: The saving of life must be considered one of the most important things in any town. The establishment of a town and school nurse has helped health conditions greatly.

In the early days of the High school, several pupils were afflicted with tuberculosis. In a few years, the Class of '91 lost four of its members from this scourge. Many people thought that the double-desk system of the crowded school contributed to the spread of the disease, while others blamed the outbreak... of measles which occurred in the Winter of 1890-91.

Another topic of interest that should be shared with the many Norwell students who are dutifully

driven to school each morning is the following:

Walking to School: We walked miles to school, some walking five miles each way. Many made the trip on foot to Hanover Academy [once at Hanover Four Corners] before the High school came into our lives. The games we played: Fox and Hound (?) for the boys, popular because it gave an excuse missing the 1 o'clock bell, Puss in Boots for the girls, and for co-educational groups and evening parties: "Drop the Handkerchief, Blind Man's Bluff, On the Green Carpet, Guess the Color, Clap-in--Clap Out." ...Our entertainments were still home-made. Maybe they were better enjoyed than those which come easier, nowadays.

Look in future issues of this newsletter for more memories of Gertrude Eldredge!

"...Calling All Antique Butts!"
APPRAISAL DAY
 Saturday, April 24th
 10:00 am - 3:00 pm
 Norwell Middle School Cafeteria
 Cost: \$10/item or 3 items for \$25
 (all proceeds will benefit the Friends of the Norwell Public Library)

NORWELL HISTORICAL SOCIETY MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

DATE _____ NAME _____

STREET ADDRESS _____

MAILING ADDRESS _____

TOWN _____ STATE _____ ZIP _____

TELEPHONE _____ E-MAIL _____

MEMBERSHIP

Individual (\$15)____ Business (\$40)____

Family (\$25)____ Life (\$200)____

Benefactor (\$500)____

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

AREAS OF INTEREST

Newsletter _____ Public Relations _____

Hospitality _____ Program Planning _____

Library Volunteer _____ Historical Research _____

Photo Cataloging _____ Process Archival _____
Material

Other: _____

MY PASTOR, CONT'D

(continued from page 1)

In 1847, May became the pastor of the large Unitarian church in Syracuse, where he remained for 23 years. Here, he was a greatly beloved leader. At the time of his retirement, several of his parishioners said, "We would rather have Mr. May sit in the pulpit and only smile upon us than hear the most eloquent sermons from any other preacher." At his funeral service three years later, President White of Cornell said, "Here lies before us the best man, the most truly Christian I have every known--the purest, the sweetest, the fullest of faith, hope and charity, the most like his Master."

As Rev. Tilden concluded the dedication ceremony that September afternoon in 1886, he felt the most eloquent praise he could confer upon this kind and simple man was composed of five words: **"He was a good man."**

Among sources used for this article were Briggs' History of Shipbuilding on the North River and the official brochure of the 1886 dedication ceremony (both available for viewing at the NHS Library).

HISTORY AT THE JAMES: APRIL 11TH AT 3:00

If you enjoyed Sam Olson's article on Rev. Tilden and Rev. Samuel May, then you will love to learn more about Rev.'s May's niece, Louisa May Alcott.

The James Library will host Jan Turquist, Executive Director of Orchard House (the Alcott family home in Concord) in the role of Miss Alcott.

This program is \$10 per person and tickets are available at the door. Sponsored by the James Library's Estelle Mosher Memorial Fund with support from the Norwell Cultural Council, the program is intended for adults and children 10+.

For more information on attending, you may visit the James Library website (Literary Programs) at www.james-library.org, or call the Library at 781-659-7100.



Jan Turquist will play Louise May Alcott on April 11th at the James Library.

Did You Know?

...the answer to the last issue's Trivia Corner Question? The question was: **The "Church Hillers" are renowned in Norwell for their neighborliness and philanthropy. When was this group formed and why?**

The answer is: According to Jeanne Garside's *The Way We Were*, today's "Church Hillers" began in 1901 as the "Church Hill Improvement Association." The purpose of the group was to beautify the Church Hill area--especially the many grassy triangles which dot the neighborhood. Scores of trees were planted and many social events were sponsored for the enrichment of the Church Hill people.

Today the Church Hillers still plan area socials, but they also donate to local charities and offer an annual college scholarship to a Norwell High School senior.



TRIVIA
QUES-

TION: What is
"switchel?"

ANSWER: in the next
issue! (...but note the
picture hint above!)

Trivia Corner



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**Is it time to renew your
Historical Society membership?**
Please check the expiration date on your address label.

NORWELL HISTORICAL SOCIETY PUBLICATIONS AND MEMORABILIA

SHIPBUILDING ON THE NORTH RIVER _____ \$45
by L. Vernon Briggs

The definitive book on ships built on the North River and the shipyards that lined the shores. Written in 1889. Second reprinting in 1981.

HISTORY OF SOUTH SCITUATE-NORWELL _____ \$25
by Joseph Foster Merritt

A recently re-published history of the town to 1938. A unique narrative considered to be an invaluable account of Norwell prior to WWII.

HISTORIC HOMESTEADS OF NORWELL _____ \$15
published by NHS, 1992

We are proud of our lovely town. 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.

HENDERSON MAP _____

Interesting hand-drawn map suitable for framing. It was drawn by Anne Henderson and first issued in 1967 by the NHS. A favorite depiction of the location of historic homes.

\$3

NEW
ITEM!

THE WAY WE WERE _____ \$20
by Jeanne Garside

This book is a series of articles written to preview Norwell's Centennial Celebration in 1888. Read what times were like when Norwell came of age. Illustrated with old photographs.

MORE THAN JUST A COOKBOOK _____ \$5

This book, expectably, is full of time-tested favorite recipes submitted by local people. Beyond the gastronomic delights, we have included historical sketches, interesting narratives and accounts of historic events. It is amply illustrated by local artists.

HISTORIA _____ \$7.50

A gem of local history for the people of the Norwell/Scituate area. George C. Turner's six pamphlets, written in 1898-99 have been re-printed for our enjoyment. Read about Norwell 100 years ago from the man on the scene.

NORWELL TILES _____ \$10

These 6" X 6" white tiles depict various scenes: Kent House, Cushing Center, Jacobs Farm house, and "From MA with Love!". *Limited number.*

All the above items are available at the NHS Library in the Middle School on Wed. & Thur. (1:30 p.m. - 3:30 p.m., see summer hours on front), or you may call Gert Daneau at 781-659-2226, 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.