



NORTH RIVER PACKET

For the latest online news and events, visit norwellhistoricalsociety.org

Canals of the North River

Scituate author and North River expert Lyle Nyberg recently published On a River: A History of North River, Massachusetts. This comprehensive and highly readable book explores not only the history of our beloved river, but the fascinating people who lived near, worked on, or tried to tame this vital waterway. The following is the author's article on the North River canal proposals based on the book.

by Lyle Nyberg

People often proposed canals at the North River in southeast Massachusetts. They dreamed of making faster and more efficient routes by improving the landscape, and some even got state or federal approvals. But rivalries among North River proposals sank them.

Below we trace those proposals, ranging from the late 1700s to the early 1900s. In the last half of the 1800s, transportation turned to railroads, ending the golden age of canals.

Canal building had a long history in America. For example, the earliest call for a Cape Cod canal came from Myles Standish in 1623. In 1697, the Massachusetts legislature appointed a committee to view a possible location for the canal and report on its public usefulness. It took until 1909 to start constructing the Cape Cod canal; it was completed in 1914.

By then, other canals had made their mark. The first navigable canal completed in the US (by 1795) was the South Hadley Canal on the Connecticut River in Massachusetts. The Erie Canal in New York was authorized in 1817 and completed in 1825, a huge success for American transportation and a financial success for its investors.

The North River also garnered early interest. A 1794 book recommended

connecting the North River and the Taunton River, saying:

"A canal to connect the waters of these two rivers, which communicate with Narragansett and Massachusetts Bays, would be of great utility, as it would save a long and dangerous navigation round Cape Cod."

Perhaps the earliest record of a proposed canal along the North River appeared on a 1795 map of Scituate by Charles Turner. Someone seems to have penciled in a canal from the Hanover line of the river straight southeast to meet the mouth. That would shorten navigation, bypassing more than 40 bends of the winding river.

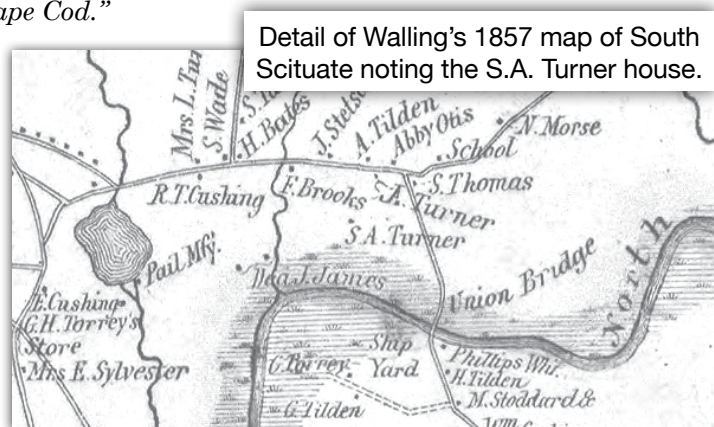
In 1802, Scituate authorized a dam in its harbor on condition that room be allowed for a possible canal connecting the harbor with the North River.

By the early 1800s, the river had developed shoals obstructing its lower course, and this limited work by the many shipbuilders along the river. Area citizens petitioned federal and state legislatures to authorize improvements. Either a canal to Scituate's harbor, or a cut between Third Cliff and Fourth Cliff

would avoid the shoals and shorten the passage.

Scituate resident Samuel Adams Turner spearheaded the petitions. Turner was a surveyor who lived in today's Norwell Center. His house was just south of Main Street (Rte. 123) on the present day Bridge Street, on the way to the bridge over the river to Marshfield.

The petitions resulted in an 1829 survey by the Army Corps of Engineers and a fine map (see page 4) accompanying a report to Congress. It favored the canal between the North River and Scituate's harbor.



Detail of Walling's 1857 map of South Scituate noting the S.A. Turner house.

Congress authorized funds for the river's improvements, but President Andrew Jackson vetoed them in 1832.

Turner kept pushing.

In 1834, bringing a different canal proposal to the table, Turner met with the congressman who represented North River towns from 1831 to 1848 — former President John Quincy Adams.

In his diaries, Adams described Turner as

"A fair spoken man, one year a member of the Senate of Massachusetts."

(continued on page 4)

FROM THE ARCHIVES

Treasures known and treasures found in the Norwell Historical Society Archives and in the Jacobs Farmhouse Museum are featured here in each issue.

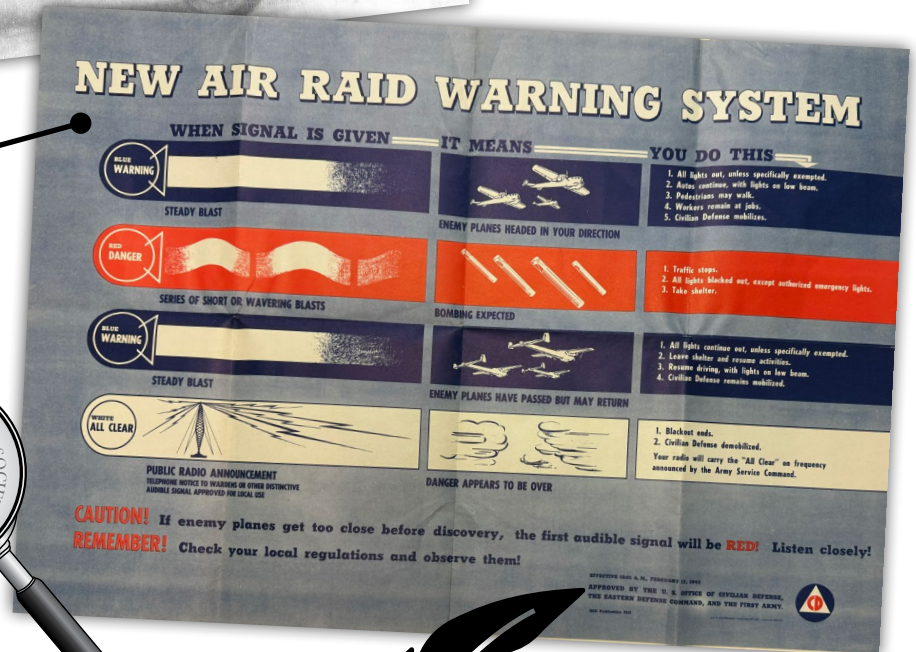


This (circa 1940) photo of the truck from Sparrell's Garage is in the Society Archives.

Note the (white) James Library in the back right, and the "new" South Scituate Savings Bank facade on the left (the building was renovated in the mid-1930s).

The Society recently visited the site of the old Sparrell's Garage (soon to be Sparrell's Roadside Kitchen). See photos on our [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#) pages.

A scrapbook of information on the WWII-era Norwell Women's Defense Corps (NWDC) was recently donated to the Society (see the QR code below or [click here to read the article in the Spring 2025 newsletter](#)). This poster was folded in the book and explains the meanings of the air raid sirens.



Read the article on the NWDC from the last newsletter or scan the QR code at left.



Officers

Wendy Bawabe, President
Christian Jevne, Secretary
Marybeth Shea, Treasurer

Board of Directors

Pamela Bower-Basso
Chad Forman
Dianne Forman
Rebecca Freed
Daniel Neumann
Stephen O'Neill
Alan Prouty
Karl Swenson
Janet Watson, Archivist

Just The Facts

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 3rd floor of the Sparrell School (322 Main Street) is open on Thursday mornings from 10:00 am until noon or by appointment.

Administrative Consultant
Rebecca Griffith

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
781-561-1161



DISCOVER MORE ONLINE!

Look for the magnifying glasses or the QR codes in this issue to discover more online.

What's in a Name:

QUEEN ANN'S CORNER

Is this section of Norwell/Hingham named after an English monarch?

No, Queen Ann's Corner is named after Anne Whiton (sometimes referred to as Whiting) who was born in 1711 and owned the tavern on the corner of Route 228 and Route 53 (today's Scarlet Oak Tavern).

Why was Ann Whiton referred to as "Queen Ann?"

Queen is actually an incorrect spelling of her title, which was slightly derogatory at the time. "QUEAN" is the correct spelling, and it defines one who either practices the oldest profession or is an unmarried female. The term goes back to the 12th century according to Merriam Webster dictionary. The term also shows how much of a stigma it was to be an unmarried woman in Ann's day.

Is her name spelled "Ann" or Anne?"

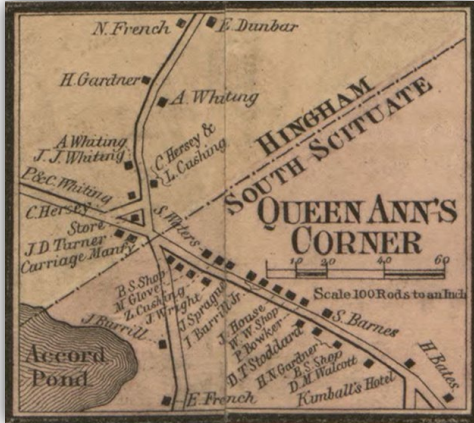
Oh, the problems with spelling in the 18th century! Illiteracy (or lack of consistent spelling) was common even among Town Clerks and Registers. Names were often spelled phonetically, and records refer to Ann Whiton (or Whiting!) as "Anne," "Anna," and "Ann." Oh my!

Why was Queen Ann so important that a section of town was named after her?

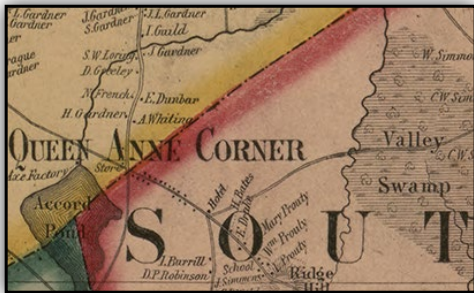
Ann Whiton was clearly a successful woman at a time when women were not supposed to be successful. She had her own tavern and did not need a husband to make it succeed. She never married, and did have a few daughters out of wedlock. (Of note: she was not the only one, as over 30 percent of births occurred less than nine months after marriage at the end of the 1700s!).

The reason she never married is possibly due to her success rather than any other reason. The tavern she ran offered lodging and meals, cared for horses, and produced most of the food right there on the property for her traveling customers. If Ann had married, all ownership of her tavern and property would have passed to her husband without her having any say in the matter. As a married woman she would have become by law a *feme covert*, which meant all that she owned (including the clothes on her back) belonged to her husband. This was a situation Ann cleverly avoided by remaining unmarried, and by law she was able to make her own contracts and to own property.

Much of the information in this section is gleaned from a 2011 article by Fred Channell for the Hingham Journal.



The 1857 Walling map of South Scituate has a Queen Ann's Corner inset (shown above), but also lists Queen Anne Corner on the full South Scituate map. Spelling questions regarding Anne/Ann's name still exist today!

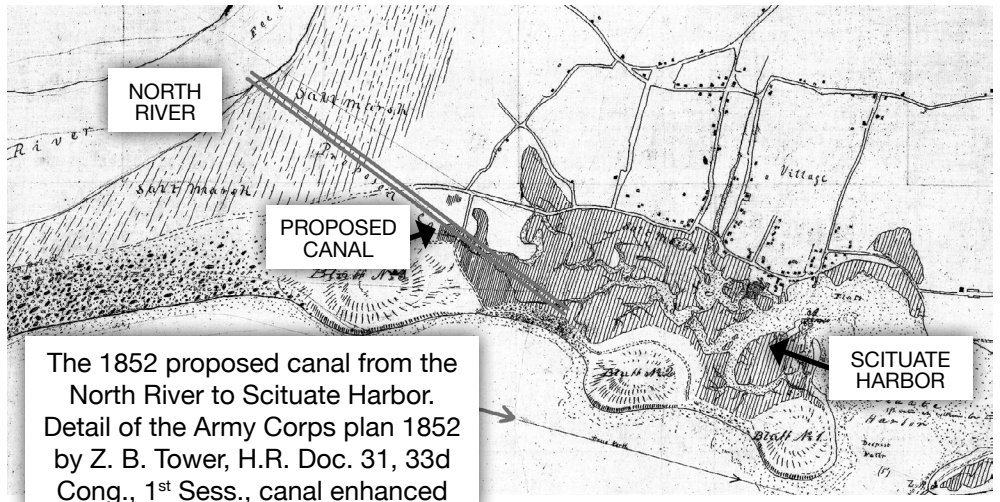


The Norwell Historical Society is Big Y's non-profit partner for **JULY**. The Society will receive \$1 for every \$2.50 reusable Community Bag sold this month!

Canals of the North River, cont'd.

(continued from page 1)

In 1839, Samuel Turner hosted Adams in Scituate. They toured the spot where residents wanted Congress to fund improvement of the harbor and met with a few residents. Adams tried to visit Turner's neighbor Rev. Samuel J. May (the famous abolitionist who was minister at the church in today's Norwell Center), but May was away to Plymouth. On the tour, Turner pointed out the site where they wanted a canal, and gave Adams a copy of a map marked with that site. It was probably the 1831 map of Scituate, which was created by Turner himself and A. Robbins. The site was probably the same as on the 1829 plan noted on the survey by the Army Corps of Engineers.



It turned out that earlier in 1839 Marshfield residents had sent a different canal petition to Senator Daniel Webster, bypassing the House and, therefore, Congressman John Quincy Adams.

Two years later, in 1841, Marshfield residents hosted a visit by Adams about *their* proposed improvements to the North River. The conflicting proposals of different towns would doom federal aid.

Shipbuilders and others then turned to the Massachusetts legislature. From 1842 to 1844, Marshfield residents pushed a plan to cut through the narrow beach between Third Cliff and Fourth Cliff (today's New Inlet noted on the map at left) which would shorten the travel down the North River to the ocean by three miles. The legislature did not take action.

NEW INLET Located between Third and Fourth Cliff in today's Scituate, New Inlet today connects the North River to Cape Cod Bay and the Atlantic Ocean.

But New Inlet is no longer "new," as it was created in 1898 by the Portland Gale. Prior to that storm, boats on the North River would have to navigate down what is now the South River to exit to the ocean—to a spot that is today Rexhame and no longer an outlet to the sea.

In 1852, the idea of a canal between the North River and Scituate Harbor came

back to life. Tilden Ames of Marshfield lobbied the federal government for navigational improvements to the North River. He contacted his friend Daniel Webster, who was now Secretary of State, and Webster put in a good word. Congress authorized \$1,000 for a survey, which the US Army Corps of Engineers conducted. It resulted in a plan showing the route of a canal between the river and the harbor.

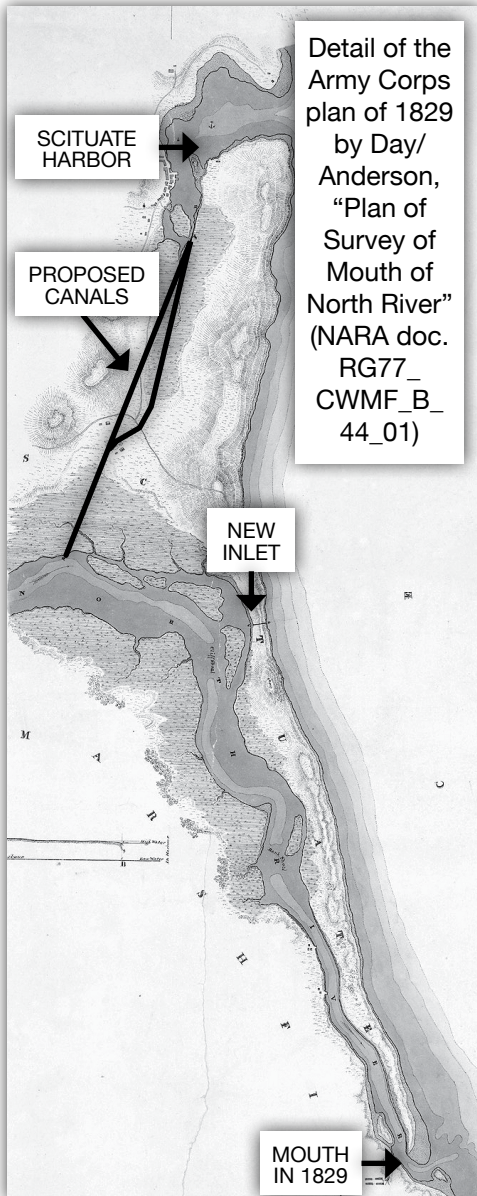
The 1852 plan (shown above) was similar to the 1829 plan (shown at left) with one big difference: this canal would be 130 feet wide near the water line, not 36 feet. Compare that with the nearby Old Kent Street, about 25 feet wide. The amount of excavated material would be 500,000 cubic yards, not 88,375.

Secretary of War Jefferson Davis forwarded the Corps' report to Congress. It favored the proposed canal rather than a cut between Third Cliff and Fourth Cliff. It said:

"There is but one method by which the navigation of this river can be restored, viz: by connecting it by a canal with the harbor of Scituate."

But there were local objections, and nothing came of this recommendation.

In 1915, a possible canal was mentioned again. The state had funded some dredging of the North River and, in 1915, two dredging projects came before the Board of Harbor and Land Commissioners. One would have



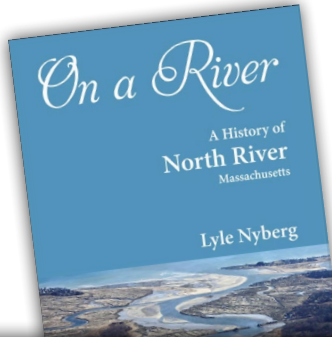
Canals of the North River, cont'd.

(continued from page 4)

cost more than \$15 million in today's dollars.

The Board recommended against both projects. They concluded that neither added much value unless as a possible adjunct if a separate proposal were approved for a canal from Taunton to Brockton, and perhaps proceeding on to the North River to Massachusetts Bay and Boston. That did not happen.

That 1915 proposal was the last of several unsuccessful dreams of building canals at the North River. Roads and rails had taken their place.✍



Lyle Nyberg's latest book is *On a River: A History of North River, Massachusetts*. It's available for purchase on [Amazon](#) or at [Buttonwood Books in Cohasset](#).



In Lyle Nyberg's book *On the River: A History of North River, Massachusetts*, the diary of John Quincy Adams is further quoted. On October 9, 1839, Adams wrote the following about his trip to Scituate:

"I had promised Mr Samuel Adams Turner of Scituate that I would go and take a farmer's dinner with him this day, and examine the spot where they are desirous of obtaining an appropriation from Congress for the improvement of their harbor ... I then went with Mr Turner in his Chaise about 4 miles farther to the harbour which is low and small— There I met Mr Cumings Jenkins the Inspector of the Port... We stopped perhaps a quarter of an hour at Mr Jenkins's house and partook of a luncheon with a temperate glass of cold water— We then rode back to Mr Turner's, Mr Jenkins and Captain Jones being of the dinner party— On the way Mr Turner pointed out to me the course where they were desirous of having a Canal opened, to keep the channel of the river sufficiently deep— But there is another project petitioned for by certain inhabitants of Marshfield, which these Gentlemen, particularly Mr Turner thought would be rather injurious than beneficial to Scituate. Mr Turner gave me a map upon which he marked the line where they wished the canal to run."

New Exhibition!

Summer Afternoons on the Lawn
in Cohasset: 1900s–1920s



April 1, 2025 - August 29, 2025

Step back in time with the Cohasset Historical Society's latest exhibit, *Summer Afternoons on the Lawn in Cohasset: 1900s–1920s*. This stunning display showcases the elegance of summer social fashions, featuring the Society's Costume and Textile Collection. At its heart are the iconic white "lingerie dresses," crafted from airy fabrics like cotton lawn and linen, adorned with delicate embroidery, lace, and ribbons. Journey through the shifting styles of the Edwardian era to the Roaring Twenties—from the modest, corseted Gibson Girl look to the liberating flapper silhouette. Explore how these fashions reflected changing times, blending beauty, practicality, and innovation to capture the essence of leisurely outdoor living in Cohasset.

ADMISSION:

Members: Free!
Non-Members: \$5

HOURS:

Monday-Friday: 9:30 AM - 1:00 PM



COHASSETHISTORICALSOCIETY.ORG

This Picture is Worth 1,000 Words

The Scituate Historical Society donated a number of photos to Norwell in 2019, one of which deserves a very close look.

Sometimes a photograph is truly worth a thousand words (or 317 here!), especially in the case of the image shown below of Main Street (looking west toward Hanover) in the early 1900s. There is so much to analyze:

- ❶ This house is today's 610 Main Street, built by Israel Nash and owned by an "R. Talbott" in 1903. Today its distinctive front porch is a staple on scenic Main Street.
- ❷ The Anson Robbins House at 593 Main Street was owned by his son, George Robbins, in 1903. The house looks very similar today and was recently on the Homes of Norwell House Tour.

❸ 607 Main Street was a fairly new home at the time of this photo. Built in the 1870s by Thomas Lawrence, it now has a second floor dormer. In 1903, the Soule family, descendants of the original owner, lived there.

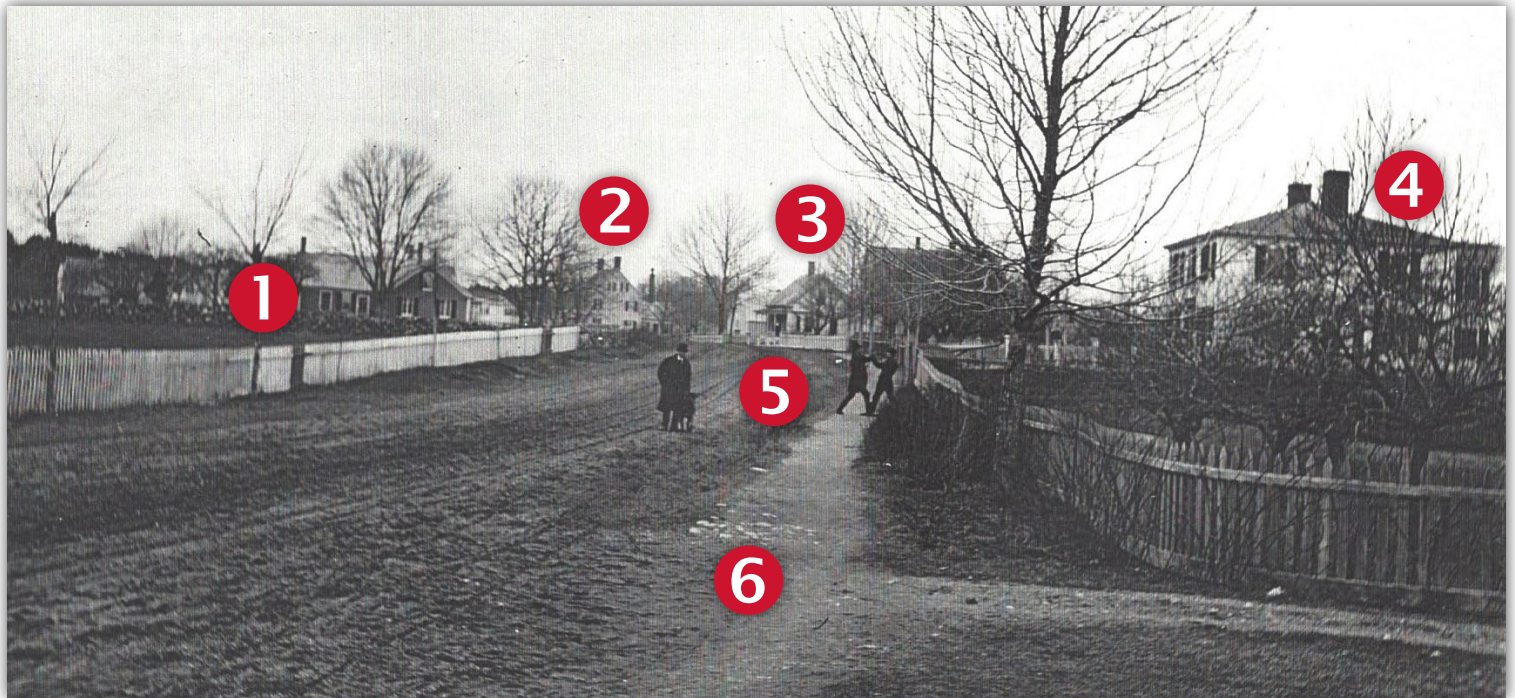
❹ The Rev. Samuel Deane built the home at 625 Main Street circa 1810. Its yellow facade and water tower make it easily recognizable today. In 1903 the house was owned by a Dr. Cushing.

❺ Photographs in the early 1900s were neither commonplace nor spontaneous. All of the people in this picture were aware of the photographer's presence and

most likely posing for the camera. The man walking his dog is unremarkable, but the two young boys in fisticuffs are a favorite feature. Clearly hamming it up for the photographer!

❻ When sidewalks were proposed for Main Street, one of the (incorrect) arguments against them was they had never existed in our historic small town. While they may not have been paved (neither was the road!), this photo shows clear evidence that walking wore a path next to the road, a circa 1900s version of today's sidewalk.

While the Society often features a "Throwback Photo" in our newsletter, this image seemed too nuanced to be displayed requisitely small and without details. 🍀



This sign was recently donated to the Society by Sarah, Peter, and Stuart Richards. The sign was found in the woods by their parents, Stan and Judy Richards, who lived at 128 Jacobs Lane from the 1950s until the 1990s. While on a walk, the Richards found the sign and "figured a town crew dumped it in the woods when the Town switched to metal street signs."

Note that the "Lane" was once "Avenue!"



 **JOIN or RENEW online**  NORWELLHISTORICALSOCIETY.ORG or fill out this form:

DATE _____ NAME _____

MAILING ADDRESS _____

TOWN _____ STATE _____ ZIP _____

EMAIL _____

3-Year Membership (\$35) _____

Life Membership (\$350) _____

Donation (any amount) _____

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

INTERESTED IN VOLUNTEERING?

_____ Researching at the Archives _____ Other:

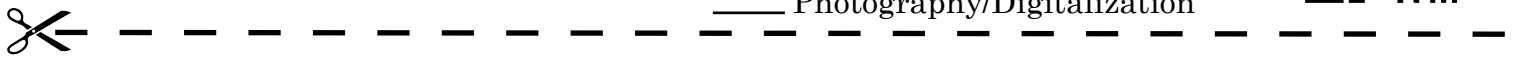
_____ Organizing at the Archives

_____ Farmhouse Tour Guide

_____ Farmhouse Maintenance

_____ Event Planning

_____ Photography/Digitalization



Ooka Rock Mineral Spring Water

Recent interest in the Native American encampment off Block House Lane in Norwell Center reminded us of a 2007 newsletter article on the Ooka Rock Spring Water Company.

For tens of thousands of years, indigenous people in what is today Norwell lived along the North River, where fish were abundant and game was plentiful. On today's Block House Lane, there is a natural spring that Natives used for fresh drinking water.

European settlers discovered the fresh water spring and found that no matter how hot or how dry the summer, the Ooka Rock spring kept flowing with cool, clean water.


Around 1888, John Philip Henderson (who lived at today's 45 Block House

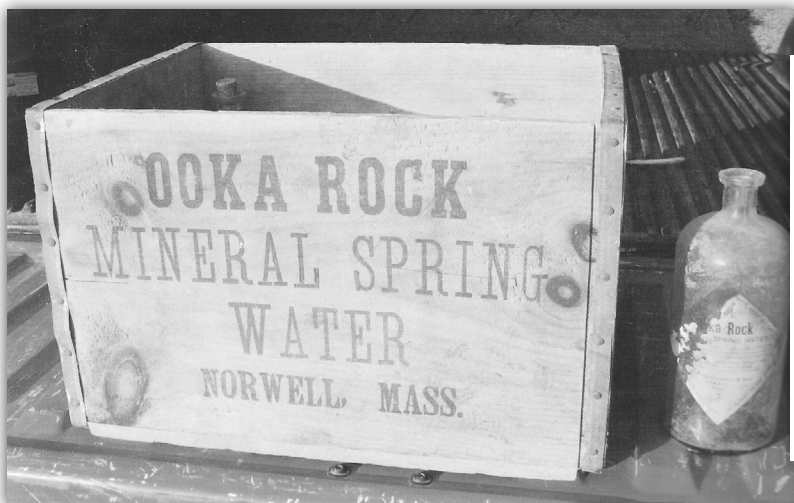
Lane) realized the value of the spring on his property. Thus began the Ooka Rock Mineral Spring Water Company of Norwell, Massachusetts.

The water was advertised as a cure for many illnesses, and the company flourished for several years.

Nancy Henderson Joseph remembers going to her great grandfather's farm on Block House Lane and seeing the spring (which was inside a spring-house) and was the home of many friendly frogs and not-so-friendly snakes.

When Nancy purchased the wooden box and bottles bearing the company's name, she was delighted to have this piece of her heritage back in the family. She shared a poem about the spring, part of which is as follows:

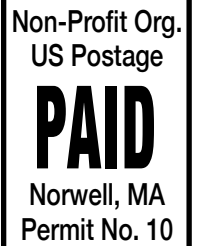
*"Listen all, and I will tell you
Of the legend of Ooka Rock Spring;
Of that sweet and constant water,
Boiling up through rock and
mineral;
Cold and pure, never changing,
Never shrinking in drought of
summer,
Never chilled by winter's breath.
Thus it has been from time
primeval;
Quenching the thirst of beast &
man;
The heart of the earth gave it
conception,
The riven rocks its natural birth.
Thus it was when the doughty
pilgrim
Landed on New England's shore;
It was flowing then and will flow
forevermore."* 



Nancy Joseph bought the wooden box and bottles bearing the company's name from Marie Anderson's Stone House Antiques. She recently donated them to the Society.



NORWELL HISTORICAL SOCIETY
P.O. Box 693
Norwell, Massachusetts 02061
NORWELLHISTORICALSOCIETY.ORG



RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

Summer 2025

Upcoming Events

For an up-to-date listing of events, please see the Society website "[Events](#)" page or use the QR code at right.



"History of the North River" by author Lyle Nyberg

6:00–7:30 pm at the Norwell Public Library, 64 South Street

Wednesday, July 23rd

Join author Lyle Nyberg as he explores topics covered in his new book, *On a River*, which includes tales of the river and its amazing people (and fish)—shipbuilders, toolmakers, storytellers, ministers, river pilots, fishermen, farmers, salt hayers, scientists, and politicians John Quincy Adams and Daniel Webster (as noted in the article beginning on page 1). **(FREE, but register here)**

First Sundays open museum day

3:00 to 5:00 pm at the Jacobs Farmhouse, 4 Jacobs Lane, Norwell

Sunday, August 3rd

Come for a tour of the Jacobs Farmhouse Museum. **(FREE)**

First Sundays open museum day

3:00 to 5:00 pm at the Jacobs Farmhouse, 4 Jacobs Lane, Norwell

Sunday, September 7th

Come for a tour of the Jacobs Farmhouse Museum. **(FREE)**

Annual Meeting & "Rep. Charles H. Turner & the War of 1812" presentation by Prof. Jim Goode

5:30–7:30 pm at the Union Mission Chapel, 315 Old Oaken Bucket Rd., Scituate

Wednesday, October 8th

Jim Goode, Professor Emeritus of History at Grand Valley State University in Grand Rapids, Michigan, will talk about Congressman Charles Turner, a Scituate (Norwell) resident who lived on today's Winter Street in Norwell. One of the original "War Hawks" who moved our young nation towards war in 1812, Turner supported the cause despite the fact that it would harm the interests of many of his constituents who earned their living from the sea. What experiences and beliefs made Turner become a staunch advocate for the war? The event includes: meet and greet at 5:30, Annual Meeting at 6:00, Turner presentation at 6:15, and a Q&A at 7:15. **(FREE)**

First Parish Cemetery Comes Alive! tour

noon to 3:00 pm at the First Parish Cemetery in Norwell Center

Saturday, October 25th

(Rain Date: Sunday, Oct. 26th)

Join the Norwell Historical Society for its 6th annual re-enactment tour at First Parish Cemetery. Actors will portray a variety of historic individuals who are buried in the graveyard—telling their personal stories to small groups. Sign up using the QR code above to visit the [Events](#) page on the Society website. **A suggested donation of \$15/adult is being requested of all who are able.**