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From East to Midwest: The Jacobs Family Travels to the World's Fair

With summer travel season underway, it seems an appropriate time to discuss a family trip—the 1893 visit to the World's Fair in Chicago by the Jacobs family (who lived in the Jacobs Farmhouse). Letters between Dr. Henry Barton Jacobs and his mother, Frances, tell the story of one small-town family visiting the city to see the “world!”

by Susan Ames

In the year 1893, the United States faced an economic panic that lasted four years and ended the Gilded Age.

In Chicago, a World's Fair celebrated (belatedly) the 400th anniversary of Columbus's expedition to the Americas in 1492. The Fair featured many technological innovations including the Ferris Wheel, built to rival the Eiffel Tower showcased at the 1889 World's Fair in Paris. The Fair also showcased many popular items including a new flavor of chewing gum, a surprising snack, and an award winning beer (according to the U.S. National Park Service)!



The Ferris Wheel at the 1893 World's Fair. Photo courtesy of the Library of Congress.

Here in Norwell, the town remained largely agricultural. One of these farm families was the Jacobs: Mr. Barton and Mrs. Frances Jacobs and their two sons Henry and Fred (all of whom had lived at the Jacobs Farmhouse—which today is the Society's museum).

Mrs. Jacobs corresponded regularly with her sons and saved many of the letters she received. These primary sources today give us a wonderful window into the stories of a local family.

In 1893, son Henry corresponded with his mother from Baltimore, where he was currently serving as the personal physician to Robert Garrett, former president of the Baltimore & Ohio (B&O) Railroad.

On February 14, 1893, Dr. Henry Jacobs wrote to his mother encouraging her and the family to take a trip to Chicago to see the World's Fair (also called the World's Columbian Exposition). He offered to pay \$500 (around \$17,000 today according to the US Labor Department of Statistics) for a two week excursion. It took Henry some time to convince his family to make the trip, but they ultimately went in September. Henry offered the following advice:

...take it all slowly and look out for over fatigue and cold draughts... Take along some sewing and knitting

for the evenings. Tell Fred to look out and not go above the 2nd floor in the hotel for neither you nor father enjoy climbing many flights of stairs. Get a good big room, have a fire and be comfortable. Don't mind spending a few dollars more for the sake of comfort. Be sure to use wheel chairs in the Exposition Grounds and you will be surprised to find how easy it is to get about and how little tired you will get if you use them.

“ Don't mind spending a few dollars more for the sake of comfort.”

On September 23, Dr. Jacobs wrote he was glad the family was enjoying themselves but was concerned they were overdoing it. He also wrote that they must see the B&O Railroad exhibit in the Transportation Building “as many say it is the most interesting at the Fair.” He encouraged them to avoid crowded trains going home and reassured them that he would send more money if needed.

In October, Dr. Jacobs himself made the trip to Chicago with Mr. and Mrs. Garrett, clearly wishing he could have enjoyed the Fair freely with his own family. On October 6th, he described the hotel where he stayed with the Garretts—circling his room number on the Hotel Windermere stationery.

(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.

Things that find their way to the Historical Society Archives often by a circuitous route!

In April, we received a call from Amanda Maguire in Pembroke offering us a copy of *The New Practical Navigator*, once owned by Capt. Thomas Stetson (1769-1838) of Old Scituate (today's Norwell).

Amanda's mother worked at a library on Cape Cod and sometimes salvaged books that were being discarded. Amanda found the book in a box and noticed it was signed by Thomas Stetson.

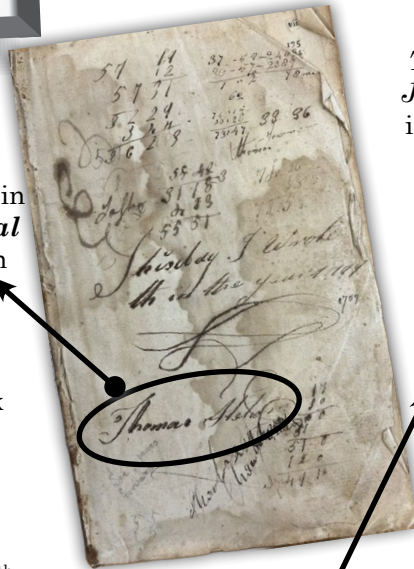
Recognizing the antiquity of the book and the Stetson name, she called the Historical Society.

The book, written by John Hamilton Moore, was the standard work on maritime practice in the 18th century. It was the predecessor to the more famous *American Practical Navigator*, which was written by Nathaniel Bowditch. The Bowditch book was based on Moore's text but corrected thousands of errors (some of which had led to maritime disasters!).

Capt. Thomas Stetson was a descendant of Cornet Robert and Honour Stetson (the first settlers to live in today's Norwell).

Capt. Thomas was a mate on the brig *Pacific* (built on the North River in 1796) which was used as a blockade runner and for smuggling goods during the War of 1812.

The Society is grateful to Amanda and thrilled to have this important text which was owned by a mariner from Norwell.



The Jacob Brothers Discuss the War: July, 1776 (a play recently re-enacted in the Jacobs Farmhouse West Barn) utilized items from the Farmhouse museum and objects found in the barn (when access was temporarily granted to the Historical Society).

Horse bridles and oxen yokes were hung from hooks on the walls (the items were found in the West Barn tack room).

The "broke" barrels referred to in the play were borrowed from the Tool Room of the museum.

Shown in the photo below with the actors is Bunny, a South Shore 4-H cow who starred in the performances.



Just The Facts

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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.

Two Upcoming Events

The 2026 celebrations continue into August and September! Be sure to visit the [events page](#) on our website for more information.



1776
NORWELL HISTORICAL SOCIETY
Est. 1935

MIDDLESEX COUNTY VOLUNTEERS
Massachusetts

FREE EVENT FOR THE WHOLE FAMILY!

Revolutionary Concert
COMMUNITY EVENT
WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 12th
6:45–8:15 pm
NORWELL TOWN COMMON

The Norwell Historical Society is bringing the American Revolution to Norwell Center! This event is free and includes an hour-long interactive concert by the Middlesex County Volunteers Fife & Drum Corps, livestock from the South Shore 4-H, and a kids photo area for pictures in colonial costume!

NORWELLHISTORICALSOCIETY.ORG




NORWELL HISTORICAL SOCIETY
Est. 1935

BOOK LAUNCH PARTY!

This celebration is free to attend

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 18th
OPEN HOUSE: 5:00–7:00 pm
Cushing Center, Norwell Center

- Buy a book (or many!)
- Meet the authors
- Have your books signed
- Eat, drink, and have fun!
- Stop in to support the Norwell Historical Society!

Norwell
Where history lives.

NORWELLHISTORICALSOCIETY.ORG

THROWBACK PHOTO OF THE MONTH

The photo at right is NOT old, but recently taken in the West Barn of the Jacobs Homestead. This item hangs next to the large barn door and is typically used to hold a security camera for the gift shop located on the site. Made of cast iron and wood, we originally thought it was a wall-mounted base for an oil lantern. But Google image search revealed a different story!

This item dates from the 1870–80s and was designed to hold horse whips. Such a description makes sense, given it hangs next to the door where whips could have been quickly grabbed if needed.



Jacobs Family *at* the World's Fair, cont'd.

(continued from page 1)

Unfortunately, the Garretts and Dr. Jacobs encountered terrible weather with wind and rain. Undaunted, they put on coats and went to the Fair. Henry reported that the Massachusetts building was “very pretty indeed” and was “built after the Longfellow’s house in Cambridge and is one of the best types of colonial architecture.”



Photo of the Manufactures & Liberal Arts Building at the 1893 World's Fair.
Photo by E. Benjamin Andrews

He also enjoyed the Pennsylvania building describing it as “very beautiful with its cupola [sic] modeled after that on old Independence Hall in Philadelphia.”

He “marveled” at the Manufactures and Liberal Arts Building (which was the largest building in the world at the time of the Fair) and was fascinated with its elevator “...as it climbs up gradually getting smaller and smaller till finally it is almost out of sight (and one realizes the height of the roof.”

At the Japan Exhibit, they saw:

many beautiful things, lacquer, vases, jars, a little room furnished in native luxury with rugs, chairs, screens, lanterns, etc, [and] then went on to see Tiffany’s jewelry exhibit, thence wandered through Russia’s exhibit and then went back to the hotel for luncheon.

Lunch at the hotel was described as “pretty fairly good” if you ordered “... plain simple things. The roast beef is particularly good as one would expect to find in this great city of pigs and cattle.”

In an October 9th letter to his mother, Dr. Jacobs summed up his recent visits to the Word’s Fair.

[He had] been round the Ferris Wheel, seen the trained animals, been nearly squeezed to death in a vain effort to get into the Cairo Street, [and] taken a cup of coffee in Java. [I also found...] Old Vienna... very pretty and perfectly characteristic of the old parts of the Austrian cities... The old cities we visited last year in the Tyrol [a western Austrian state] were just like this representation.”

He also noted that he and the Garretts “went to the Transportation Building and saw the B&O engines from the teapot of Isaac Newton down to the 60 mile per hour locomotive of today.”

Henry admired Richard Morris Hunt’s architectural design:

The beauty... when one... looks backward to the Administrative building... the center of the most beautiful and impressive group of buildings ever built in the world.



Chicago Day broadside from 1893.

Henry opted out of visiting the Fair on October 9th (Chicago Day), which was the anniversary of the Great Fire in 1871. He wrote:

...every one turned out to make this the most memorable day of the fair,

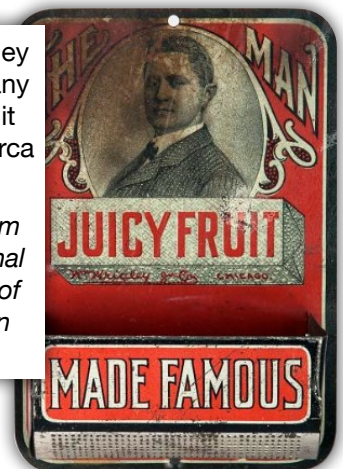
souvenir tickets were issued, and many attractions arranged. We decided it was no day for us and made no attempt to go... We thought it a good day to go to town... and started off at 12 o'clock.... When we reached home at 6 o'clock the procession of symbolical floats were just forming in front of the hotel... Each was drawn by 8–12 horses and each represented some nation or some incident... Later this evening we have seen some of the fireworks as they shot high into the air and exploded there. The rumor about the hotel tonight is that 800,000 people passed through the gates today... Tomorrow we expect to go to the fair in quiet.

Dr. Jacobs does not mention chewing a stick of Wrigley’s new Juicy Fruit flavored gum or snacking on the Cracker Jacks that happily surprised fairgoers with a combination of popcorn and peanuts (the most memorable attractions of the 1893 fair according to the U.S. National Park Service). Nor does he mention enjoying a glass of Pabst Best Select beer with a blue ribbon tied around its neck.

We know, however, that Dr. Jacobs rode the Ferris Wheel and enjoyed many exhibits. We also know that, despite an economic depression, Dr. Jacobs made it possible for his Norwell family to join the 27 million people who visited the World’s Fair that year to celebrate the accomplishments of the United States. 🍃

Wm. Wrigley Jr. Company
Juicy Fruit
gum tin, circa
1893.

Photo from
the National
Museum of
American
History



Square Dance Central *on* Central Street

Who knew that a 9,000-subscriber magazine was published on Central Street in Norwell? Given the editor of the monthly publication was the grandfather of the author, she knew!

by Betsy Baldwin Brink

Historically speaking, we townspeople tend to think of the West End of Norwell as the business district in town. But it wasn't the only part of town where businesses thrived.

If you turn off Main Street in Norwell Center down Central Street, four houses down on the right, you arrive at McNamara-Sparrell Funeral Home. Originally called Sparrell's Funeral Home, it has been located on Central Street since 1820.

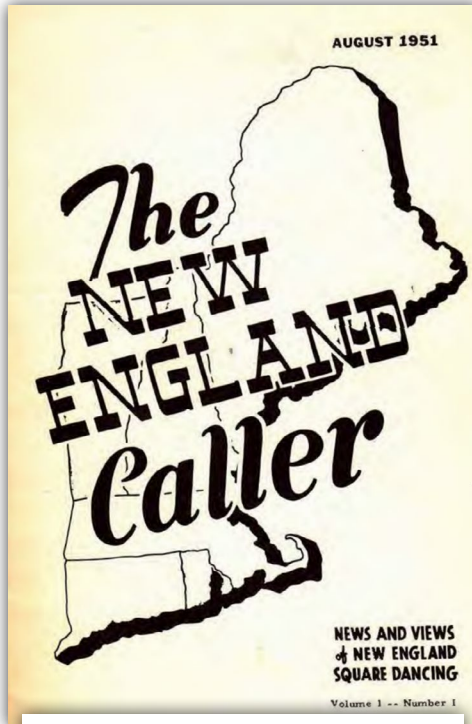
Heading further north on Central Street (four houses down from the funeral home on the same side of the road) at the crest of the hill, you arrived at a lesser-known, happier enterprise.

The New England Caller magazine's bustling home was in the barn behind the house at 80 Central Street and served square dancers and callers for 31 years, from 1951 to 1982.

Charlie Baldwin was editor/publisher of the magazine, a thriving publication whose "only excuse for existence [was] to be of service." This mission statement appeared on the inside cover of every issue, followed by an Editor's Note.

The only hint neighbors may have had that a magazine was being edited and produced right in their backyard was the arrival each month of the box truck from Rumford Litho in Abington, delivering the printed magazines for distribution. *The Caller*, as it was known, grew from its modest 18-page beginning to an 80+ page magazine, with monthly circulation of more than 9,000.

So who is Charlie Baldwin and why did he decide to publish a square dance magazine?



Cover of first issue of *The New England Caller*, August 1951.

As a square dance caller since about 1940, Baldwin understood the fun of western style square dancing. In the first issue of *The Caller* in 1951—with a subscription price of \$1 per year for 12 issues—he stated that the primary purpose of the publication was “to increase the enjoyment you [dancers] derive from this ever more popular form of recreation.”

Baldwin also understood his fellow dancers' desire to locate dances and callers for hire and their frustration with the countless telephone calls necessary to do so. Baldwin's idea was to offer “under one cover” caller listings from across New England, news and photos of square dance activities, articles about square and folk dance clubs and organizations, record and book reviews, and advertisements of items to benefit dancers.

At its inception, the magazine staff included Baldwin as editor and publisher, a business manager, and seven associate editors covering the following:

- dance listings and news from the South Shore, North Shore, and Cape Cod;
- book and record news;
- and black and white artwork for the magazine.

Example of a caller listing from the magazine.



Over the years, Baldwin became a thought leader in the square-dancing world, around New England, and nationally. The Charlie Baldwin papers housed at the University of New Hampshire include approximately “1,500 letters to and from every well-known (and many lesser known!) callers and dancers across the country.”

In a pre-email world, Baldwin held far-ranging conversations by letter and phone—even inviting leaders in the square dance world to 80 Central Street in Norwell! Invariably, those meetings included lunch at Sargent's Restaurant in Assinippi.

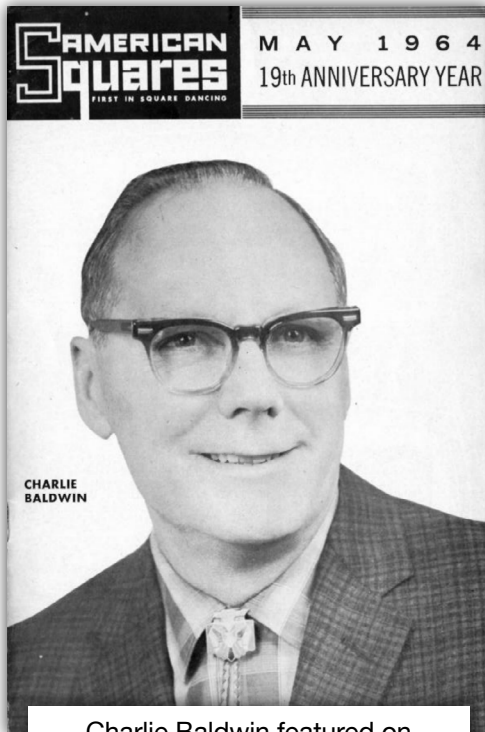
Sargent's Restaurant on the corner of Route 53 and Route 123.



(continued on page 6)

Central Street, cont'd.

(continued from page 5)



Charlie Baldwin featured on the cover of *American Squares* magazine, May 1964.

From his thought leader perspective, Baldwin stated in his Editor's Note in that first issue:

Your editor and publisher will bring you information on controversial subjects, to make it easier for you to form your opinion, but will never try to persuade you. In this matter of personal opinion, you have an advantage—you can express your own convictions in comments, suggestions, and criticisms. You are invited—in fact, urged—to exercise this privilege. You can be assured that whatever you have to say will be certain of an attentive audience.

On a personal note, Baldwin was born in Camden, New Jersey and later graduated from Wayland High School and Wentworth Institute of Technology. He was married to Bertha Lincoln Baldwin, daughter of Mabel (Pinkham) and Isaac Lincoln, who ran another Norwell business—a small general store tucked into the corner of today's Lincoln and Grove Streets—where Bertha grew up.

Bertha and Charlie later raised four sons at 80 Central Street, the former homestead of James Pinkham, Bertha's maternal grandfather.

Baldwin began his career as a caller and teacher during the 1940s, while also serving as postmaster for the Town of Norwell.

In the late 1940s Baldwin met Lawrence Loy, a professor at the University of Massachusetts, who was spreading the square dance experience in 4-H Clubs and Grange Halls. Working with Professor Loy, Baldwin helped to form the earliest square dance caller association in New England, the Old Colony Callers and Teachers Association.

Baldwin was also the leader of the Country Dance Serenaders, formed in 1953, and he and Bertha and the band traveled around the country dancing and teaching the art of calling. In 1969, they spent 16 days in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, teaching square dance to U.S. military and their families.

Locally, Baldwin called square dances at the Norwell Grange Hall and in the public schools. He also directed and called the first TV square dance in Boston in 1950.

“...I worked at The Caller as part-time news editor after school... reading and editing reports on dances, covered dish suppers, and the like...”

According to a tribute published in *The Patriot Ledger* on September 13, 1986 (two days after Baldwin's death at age

79) he was known as the “Granddaddy of Square Dancing in New England” and the “Dean of Callers,” and was inducted into the National Square Dancing Hall of Fame in Los Angeles in 1980.



Bertha (Lincoln) Baldwin on the cover of *The New England Caller*, February 1980.

In addition to being a devoted wife, mother, and supporter of Charlie and the magazine, Bertha Baldwin was a talented dancer and a skilled dressmaker—making, wearing, and sharing many beautiful square dance dresses and men's shirts (with bolo ties!) with dancers around New England.

As a Norwell High School student and Baldwin's oldest granddaughter, I worked at *The Caller* as part-time news editor after school for a few years, reading and editing reports on dances, covered dish suppers, and the like from square dance organizations around New England, then typing them up on an IBM Selectric Composer for publication in the magazine.

Baldwin's next-door neighbor Sandra Newton, another Norwell High student, worked as advertising editor, a position she assumed full-time after graduating from high school.

A gigantic table in the center of the Central Street barn served as our layout space, where Sandra and I used X-ACTO knives and Lepages mucilage glue to cut and paste together the 80-odd pages of the magazine.

Other Norwellians joined the staff over time, including Nancy Joseph and Earl Raymond.

(continued on page 7)

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



Central Street, cont'd.


(continued from page 6)

Distributing the magazine was a family affair. When that truck from Rumford Litho maneuvered into the driveway at 80 Central Street and unloaded nearly 10,000 magazines, the free family labor kicked into high gear. Bertha manned the Addressograph machine, which printed addresses on the magazines from embossed cards. Her beloved cat Smokey sat atop the machine as she fed cards into it.

At lunch time, everyone gathered in her cozy kitchen for grilled cheese sandwiches and tomato soup. My father and uncle then bundled the magazines



into canvas mailing bags and loaded their cars to overflowing, making several trips to the Norwell Center post office with their deliveries. By that time, Sandra and I were already at work on next month's issue.

Sandra remained Baldwin's right-hand girl, helping to run all aspects of the magazine, up until August of 1982 when he sold it to Ray & Carole Aubut—at which point the operation moved out of its 80 Central Street home.

But *The Caller's* quiet existence on Central Street remains in the annals of Norwell business history. 



Charlie Baldwin calling a dance in 1952.



The **Colonial Military + Craft Festival** on the Jacobs fields on Sunday, June 28, 2026 was a big success! Did you miss the event? Society Board member and photographer Karl Swenson compiled the pictures he took that day to create a YouTube video. [Watch it here!](#)



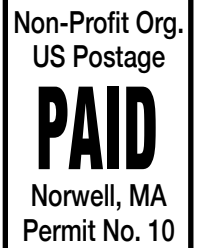
T-SHIRTS FOR SALE AT ALL 2026 EVENTS!



Visit the Society's **EVENTS** page to see the 2026 events where t-shirts will be sold for \$25.



Norwell Historical Society
P.O. Box 693
Norwell, Massachusetts 02061
NORWELLHISTORICALSOCIETY.ORG



RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

Summer 2026

2026 *Upcoming Events*

A YEAR OF CELEBRATION

For an up-to-date listing of events with detailed descriptions, see the website "[Events](#)" page or use this QR code



FIRST SUNDAYS OPEN MUSEUM DAY

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

Come for a tour of the Jacobs Farmhouse Museum every first Sunday of the month. **(Free)**

Sunday, Aug. 2nd + Sunday, Sept. 6th

REVOLUTIONARY CONCERT COMMUNITY EVENT

6:45 to 8:15 pm on the Norwell Town Common

The Norwell Historical Society is bringing the American Revolution to Norwell Center! This event includes an hour-long interactive concert by the Middlesex County Volunteers Fife & Drum Corps, livestock from the South Shore 4-H, and a kids' photo area for pictures in colonial costumes! **(Free)**

Wednesday, Aug. 12th

BOOK LAUNCH PARTY FOR POSTCARDS OF NORWELL + NORTH RIVER PACKET

5:00 to 7:00 pm at the Cushing Center in Norwell Center

The Norwell Historical Society is producing two new books for 2026: Jon Bond's *Postcards of Norwell* contains historic images of our hometown and the North River; and *North River Packet: Historic Tales of Norwell* (edited by Wendy Bawabe, Betsy Brink, and Daniel Neumann) is a compilation of the Society's best newsletter articles, oral histories, and cemetery tour scripts. Stop by to buy your copy of both books, have the authors sign your books, and enjoy snacks and drinks. **(Free)**

Friday, Sept. 18th

NATIVE HISTORY IN NORWELL PRESENTATION + ANNUAL MEETING

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

Join the Historical Society for its (brief!) Annual Meeting followed by Native historian Darius Coombs, who will relate the 12,000 year history of the indigenous tribes who lived in what we today call Norwell. *Registration for this event will be open on the NPL website in August.* **(Free, but registration is required as space is limited)**

Wednesday, Sept. 30th