



# NORTH RIVER PACKET

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## When the Grimke Sisters Came to Town

*Who were these revolutionary women who spoke of equal rights and freeing enslaved people? Accused of threatening “the female character with widespread and permanent injury,” they were considered radicals.*

by Janet Watson

In 1973 when Ruth Bader Ginsburg gave her first oral arguments to the Supreme Court, she quoted Sarah Grimke in her summary: “I ask for no favors for my sex. All I ask of our brethren is that they take their feet off our necks.”

Most people do not know the name Sarah Grimke or know that in October 1837, Sarah and her sister Angelina—the most famous, or to some, infamous, women of their day—were the guests of Rev. Samuel May, minister of the South Parish in Scituate (now First Parish of Norwell). Rev. May invited the sisters to stay at his home, “May Elms” at 841 Main Street, and address his congregation on the subject of slavery.

Sarah and Angelina Grimke were 45 and 33 respectively in 1837. They came from a wealthy slave-holding South Carolina family where they saw first-hand slavery’s injustice and cruelty. Deeply unhappy with Southern society, Sarah moved to Philadelphia and became a Quaker in 1821. In 1829, Angelina left home and joined Sarah.

The sisters became involved in the anti-slavery movement and were in high demand as speakers because they knew the evils of slavery from direct experience.

Meanwhile, Rev. Samuel May was exposed to the thinking of William

Lloyd Garrison—an association that changed the course of his life and ministry. Rev. May first heard Garrison speak at a lecture he attended with his brother-in-law, Bronson Alcott, and his cousin, Samuel Sewell, minister of the Scituate Church.

“The hearing of Garrison’s lecture,” Rev. May wrote in his memoirs, “was a great epoch in my life. The impression which it made upon my soul has never been effaced; indeed, it moulded it anew. It gave a new direction to my thoughts, a new purpose to my ministry.” May noted “I had become a convert to the doctrine of immediate, unconditional emancipation.” May became opposed to racism and segregation, and he believed in the equality of the races.

Most people opposed to slavery at the time favored Colonization (see inset) and didn’t think that freed slaves could be integrated into American society. Garrison, on the other hand, called

**Col’o-ni-za’tion The’o-ry** *n.* The idea of freeing slaves and sending them back to Africa. This solution was thought to be a compromise between antislavery activists and slavery supporters.

for “immediate and unconditional emancipation.” Reverend May was deeply affected and came to believe that this was the only moral path—but it was considered radical at the time.

From the beginning of the Abolitionist Movement, women played an important role. Although they attended many meetings, most women could not be persuaded to speak.

In 1836, the Grimke sisters were urged to come to New York to address women at sewing circles or other all-female groups regarding abolition. Soon their fame and celebrity began to grow.

“ I ask no favors for my sex... all I ask of our brethren is that they take their feet off our necks.”

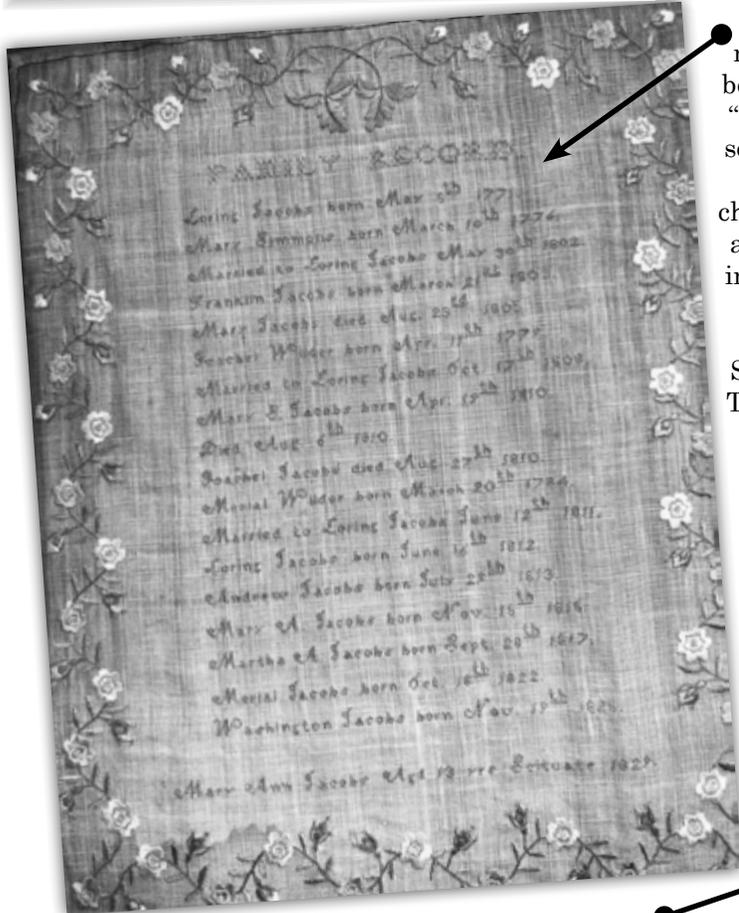
In 1837, the Grimke sisters were invited by the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society (of which Rev. May was president of the Plymouth County Chapter) to address women audiences at all-female gatherings. When their audiences grew too large, they were invited to speak from Church pulpits. A few men attended uninvited, and the number of males continually increased as the power of the speeches drew larger and larger audiences.

It was considered inappropriate at the time for women to address mixed

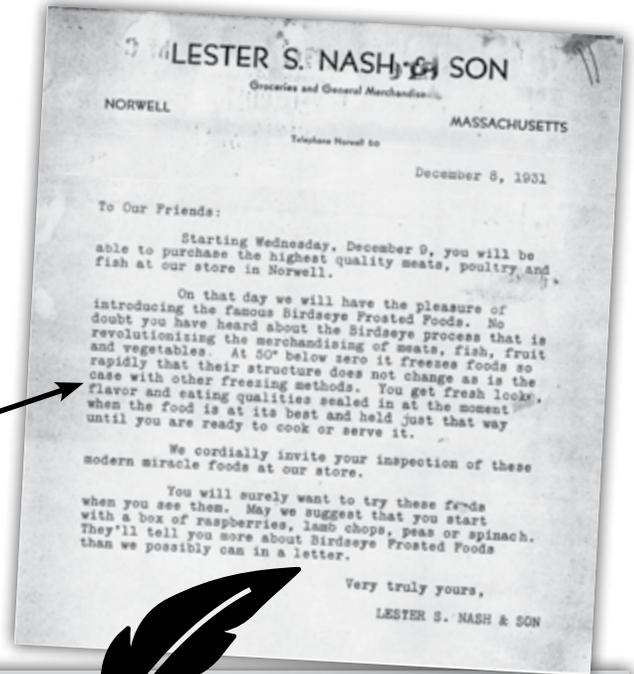
(continued on page 6)

# FROM THE ARCHIVES

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



The Historical Society got an email recently from Carole Hathaway of Canton, Massachusetts. She came across a needlepoint sampler with the Jacobs' family name—it had belonged to a friend who had since passed away. Carole said “I was going to throw it away, but then thought that maybe someone may want it.” Thankfully she contacted us through a friend who knew of the Jacobs Farmhouse! The sampler chronicles the Loring Jacobs family tree—Loring Jacobs lived at 81 Jacobs Lane and was the brother of Joshua, who lived in the Jacobs Farmhouse. The sampler was sewn by Loring's daughter, Mary Ann Jacobs, age 13 years, in 1829. The Society brought the sampler to Textile Conservator Marie Schlag, who assessed and treated the piece for conservation. The sampler will be framed and displayed at the Farmhouse!



Lester Nash lived with his son, Earle, on Stetson Road (according to the 1930 census). We are unsure of the home on Stetson (which, prior to the building of Route 3, included both Stetson *and* Stetson Shrine Roads). We welcome information on the location of this cutting-edge grocery store that featured Birdseye frosted foods!

## Just The Facts

### Officers

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### Board of Directors

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Janet Watson, Archivist

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

### 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  
781-659-1888 (Research Library)



# DISCOVER MORE ON OUR WEBSITE!

Look for the magnifying glasses in this issue—that means there is more to discover on-line at the Society's website [NORWELLHISTORICALSOCIETY.ORG](http://NORWELLHISTORICALSOCIETY.ORG).

NOTE: the online version of the newsletter has other links so you can discover even more!

Below is an edited interview with **Loring (Spike) Wadsworth** conducted by Norwell Middle Schooler Kim Boden in 1985. Mr. Wadsworth passed away in 1994.

I've lived in Norwell all my life and I was born two houses away from where I live today.

When I was growing up, there were about 2,200 people here and it was very scarcely populated. You could walk through the woods then and find old foundations. Then we had the big influence in 1950, when they started to build [more] housing. It was a lot different back then than it is today. There wasn't as much traffic and there were a lot of dirt roads. Now, all of the roads are tarred except for Wildcat Lane.

It's hard to say if it was better then or now because you can't stop progress. I think you knew every single person in the town then, which is impossible to do now. Hardly anybody moved so the family grew up in a house and they stayed there until they passed away.

I thought [Norwell schools] were pretty good. I didn't pay attention like I should have. It was more like a social thing then.

One [of my schools] was where the bank parking lot is located [in Norwell Center]. Downstairs was the first and second grades and upstairs was the third and fourth grades. We went from that school up to where the Osborn School [Norwell Town Hall] is now. There was an old school building there—that is where the fifth grade through the high school was. Then in the back of [the building] was the town hall. That burnt down in 1935. Then, we went to school nights at Hanover High School. We were all bussed over there at night.

I didn't finish High School because I got interested in farming and earning money so I could take trips all around the country. So, I just quit in the eleventh grade. Then [after World War II], I got my equivalency.



## Oral History Transcriptions

*Volunteers are urgently needed to reformat the deteriorating oral history cassette tapes to a digital format before they are lost for good. It is an easy task that can be done at home. Please contact Janet Watson at [watsonje@comcast.net](mailto:watsonje@comcast.net).*

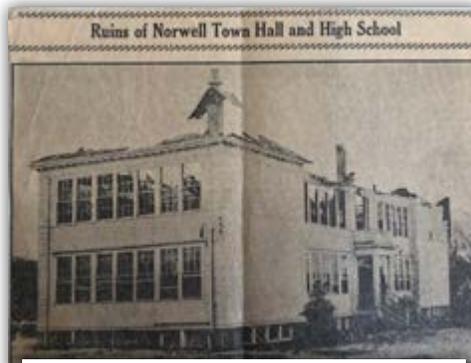
I was a member of the Second Ranger Battalion in World War II, part of the Army's Specialized Troops—in between the army and the paratroopers. On D-Day morning we climbed Pointe Du Hoc in France and knocked out the 6 guns they could fire down on Omaha Beach and Utah Beach. When we got up there they had moved the guns back but we found them and spiked them with some grenades or else they would have moved them back up there.

way to Brant Rock—took all of those houses out in one afternoon.

My father was a funeral director and I was in the contracting business after World War II. My father called me up one day and said that the law was going to change the qualifications for funeral directors and embalmers, and if I wanted to get in on it I had to enroll in school and be an apprentice for two years. So, I went into Boston [to school] and I finished my apprenticeship with my father in 1950. I worked at Sparrell Funeral Home with the stipulation that if there were any fires and we weren't busy, I could go to them. That was in the working contract!

Sparrell Funeral Home was founded in 1782. They were cabinet makers and they made barn doors, and they also made coffins. It wasn't like the funeral home is now. Somebody would come up here on horseback and they would say that someone had died and Sparrell would make up a coffin or they would already have one made.

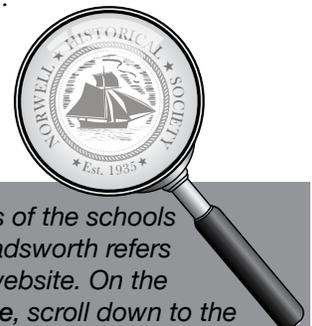
I have owned and run the Sparrell Funeral Home since 1966 when my father died. I sold the business in 1982 to McNamara Funeral Home of Brighton.



This newspaper article in the Society Archives chronicles the Norwell High School fire of 1935.

Last year [in 1984] I went over to France on the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of D-Day. President Reagan made a speech at the same place and then he came down and shook hands with everybody. Only the old rangers were on stage with him. It was a big thrill.

I have been a volunteer firefighter in Norwell for 45 years, and I think the most exciting fire story was in 1940 or 1941. Marshfield had a big fire—550 houses burnt in one afternoon. All the surrounding towns' firefighters were there and Duxbury lost a couple of fire trucks that day. The wind just swept from Fieldston all of the



See photos of the schools that Mr. Wadsworth refers to on our website. On the Home Page, scroll down to the Historic Photo Gallery and find the Norwell Schools & Town Buildings.

# WANTED

## Sightings of AMERICAN ELM TREES in Norwell



If you've seen an American Elm in Norwell, please contact the Society with the location, and we will send you a swell prize!

We've had two sightings thus far: at the Norwell Gardens complex on Washington Street and at the Stetson-Ford House off of Stetson Shrine Lane.

The best way to identify American Elms, especially without the leaves, is the way the branches spread from the main trunk like a fan.

The American Elm population in Norwell was largely decimated in the early 1900s by Dutch Elm Disease. A photo of Main Street lined with elms can be viewed on our website main page. Scroll down to "Norwell Houses" and see the photo "Main Street" which shows the old elms.

## On Facebook?



**Looking for something interesting, educational, (sometimes) funny, and (always) kind to view on Facebook?**  
Follow the Norwell Historical Society!

Our social media gurus Jon Bond and Christian Jevne find wonderful tidbits from Norwell history and great links to timely topics. The comments section is always a treat to read with many interesting observations on the strange news of olden days.

A recent post on "Talk Like A Pirate Day" (September 17<sup>th</sup>, FYI) elicited comments on Norwell's own Thomas Briggs who was taken prisoner by the British while on a privateer during the War of 1812!  
Our own hometown pirate!

**pri·va·teer'** *n.* A ship, privately owned and crewed but authorized by a government during wartime to attack and capture enemy vessels.

See a photo of the school barge from this article on our website. On the Home Page, scroll down to the Historic Photo Gallery and find the Buildings & Misc. Photos. Is that Barber Minot on the back of the barge? Perhaps he's up front keeping the horse secure?



# Barber Minot

*Sometimes we find interesting old articles worthy of re-printing—snippets of yesteryear in both writing style and content...*

*From "Along the Route," Ginny Magee, December 19, 1969 (from an unknown newspaper)*

Long before I moved to Mount Blue Street (I lived at Queen Ann's Corner for fourteen years), I met a woman who said she lived here and, in fact, had bought the barber's house.

After taking up residence here I had often wondered who the woman was or at least where the barber lived. The mystery was solved when I visited Mr. Gleason. ["The Barber"] is Mr. Minot Williamson, and he was born, grew up, and died living right in the house that is now the home of Mr. and Mrs. Bruce Hawthorne [85 Mount Blue Street today].

Actually Minot learned to cut hair when he was thirteen and it might be called an "avocation" because he was a shoe worker in Litchfield's factory around the corner on Norwell Avenue. The factory was located right near Bentings' house.



Minot Williamson with his barber brush and apron.

Minot drove a barge (my country-born husband said that was like a big hay wagon or flat bed on wheels pulled by horses) and carried the kids to the Center School (which was next to the Scituate Savings Bank) and the old High School. In the winter he used a pung [a low, one-horse box sleigh]. He had the bus contract for thirty-nine years and his knack of handling and love of children endeared him to kids and parents alike.

Mike Coffin lived with Minot in his later years and tended the garden. Minot kept a cow and sold milk until the time of pasteurization. And before a license was needed everyone depended on him to care for their sick cows and horses. He would go out any time of night.

Even in 1950 he was only getting a quarter to cut hair. Friends told him to raise his price but he enjoyed having people come. He would never go up on his price.

He showed his love and interest for children by never missing a graduation and it was on one of those occasions (1957 or 1958) that he died from a heart condition. Only that morning he had cut two of his friends' hair.

# FIRST PARISH CEMETERY

*Comes Alive!*

FEATURING GRAVESIDE PORTRAYALS  
OF NORWELL'S OWN

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 31<sup>ST</sup>

1:00-4:00 PM

FREE!

Join the Norwell Historical Society for its first-ever 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 socially-distanced small family groups.

Registration is required. Sign-up instructions below.



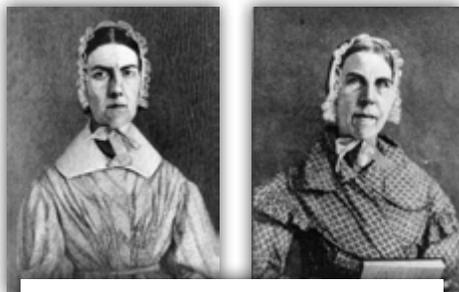
- ① Go to [www.norwellhistoricalsociety.org](http://www.norwellhistoricalsociety.org) and click on EVENTS
- ② Under the listing for the Burial Tour, click on the link to the Sign-Up Genius (you may have to create a Sign-Up Genius account to use this format)
- ③ If unable to sign-up online, please call Becky Freed at 781-659-4711
- ④ Choose the time for your tour
- ⑤ Masks are required and a rain date may be chosen if necessary and email instructions sent

# Grimke Sisters' Visit, cont'd.

(continued from page 1)

audiences. Orthodox Congregational ministers, already opposed to preaching abolition from the pulpit, were further scandalized by the spectacle of women speaking to an audience of men and women, and they issued a Pastoral Letter in July 1837:

*"We cannot, therefore, but regret, the mistaken conduct of those who encourage females to bear an obtrusive and ostentatious part in measures of reform, and countenance any of that sex who so far forget themselves as to itinerate in the character of public lecturers and teachers."*



Angelina (left) and Sarah (right) Grimke stayed at the South Scituate home of Rev. Samuel May. Credit: U.S. Library of Congress

Rev. May became minister of the South Parish in Scituate (today's First Parish Norwell) in October 1836. He was known for following his conscience, and in defiance of the leadership, he invited the sisters to stay at his house and embark on a speaking tour of Plymouth County churches. He confessed that "at first I was myself not a little disturbed in my sense of propriety... but I saw it was a miserable prejudice that would forbid women to speak or to act on behalf of the suffering."

They came the last week of October 1837 and stayed eight days. On Sunday evening, Angelina addressed an audience from May's pulpit, and then the sisters went on to churches in Scituate, Duxbury, Hanover, and Hingham. Of the visit May said, "It was a week of highest, purest enjoyment to me and my precious wife, and most profitable to the community."

## Personal Memories of the Grimke Visit...

In the local history pamphlets titled "Historia" by George C. Turner, the August 1899 issue contains a reminiscence of Susan Damon, then 75, of Rev. May and the Grimke sisters' visit. Susan's memories were faulty—she had come to remember the sisters not as wealthy white southern women, but as slaves—but the events still resonated with her over 60 years later.

*"Well do I remember [Rev. May's] active service in the Anti-Slavery cause, the deep impression he made of the awful iniquity of the entire system. He invited the Misses Sarah and Angelina Grimke to his home. They were very dark and having been reared in slavery, could neither read nor write, but they gave the most eloquent Anti-Slavery lectures not only in his own church, but in the surrounding towns, and this, with his own inspired utterances, exerted a decided Anti-Slavery influence in the whole community."*

While both sisters made it a point to avoid issues other than abolition and slavery during their talks, Sarah Grimke was gradually developing a theory of a woman's right to equality.

In 1838, Sarah wrote what is considered the first women's rights tract in American history. In February 1838, Angelina Grimke became the first woman in U.S. history to address the members of an American

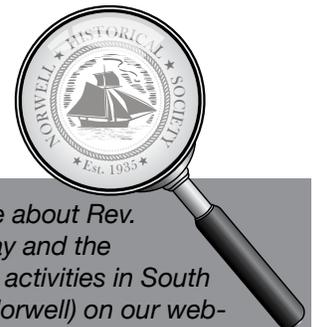
Ginsburg over 130 years later. The letters, published that fall in a reform newspaper and the following year as a book, *Letters on the Equality of the Sexes*, set forth landmark arguments for women's equal rights in the United States.

Rev. May was deeply influenced by his association with Sarah and Angelina Grimke. He continued his commitment to his anti-slavery work, but went on to advocate for women's rights and suffrage. In 1846, he wrote *The Rights and Condition of Women* in favor of giving women the right to vote and equality in all aspects of life. He also became convinced that women ought to be as thoroughly educated as men, allowed to engage in any employment, and paid the same compensation as men—a radical theory for the mid-1800s.

*"It was a week of highest, purest enjoyment to me... and most profitable to the community."*

legislative body when she spoke to the Massachusetts Legislature. Her subject for the lecture was the demand for the immediate end of the slave trade in Washington, D.C. Rev. May was in the audience for this momentous occasion.

In 1837, Sarah Grimke wrote a series of public letters on the equality of the sexes. In the second letter she wrote the quote used by Ruth Bader



Learn more about Rev. Samuel May and the abolitionist activities in South Scituate (Norwell) on our website. Go to the **Learn More** page and scroll down to the **Read Interesting Articles** section.

 **JOIN or RENEW online**  [NORWELLHISTORICALSOCIETY.ORG](http://NORWELLHISTORICALSOCIETY.ORG) or fill out this form:

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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:

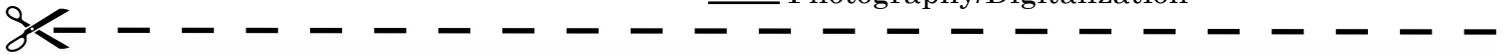
\_\_\_\_\_ Organizing at the Archives

\_\_\_\_\_ Farmhouse Tour Guide

\_\_\_\_\_ Farmhouse Maintenance

\_\_\_\_\_ Event Planning

\_\_\_\_\_ Photography/Digitalization



## NOTICE OF THE 85<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL MEETING of the NORWELL HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Thursday, October 22<sup>nd</sup> at 6:00 pm

The 2020 Annual Meeting will be held virtually on Zoom. Please see the “Events” page on the Society website for the link. You must have an account with Zoom to attend. All are welcome!

### THROWBACK PHOTO OF THE MONTH



The Scituate Historical Society generously donated a few old photos of Norwell to our Archives recently.

This photo (at left) stumped us for a few reasons. It was labeled “Assinippi line—left current bank” on the back. But the Hingham Savings Bank in Assinippi is brick, not white. And the house on the right in the photo still has that large barn today, but it does NOT have a center chimney—it has two gabled-end chimneys.

Mary Williams, Society member and former resident of both houses, saved the day! She told us the brick bank used to be painted white, and the 1920s owner of the other home, a Mr. Leavitt who was ambassador to China, removed the center chimney and added the two end chimneys during his tenure.

The only remaining question was regarding the group of children and why they were gathered for the photo. Further research needs to be done—was there a school in the area?

If you have any information, please contact the Society via our website and let us know!



NORWELL HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
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Norwell, Massachusetts 02061  
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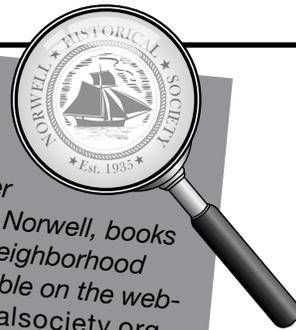
RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

Who IS  
this man?



This handsome WWI soldier's photo was recently found in the Society Archives. Does he look familiar? If you know who is he, we would like to label the picture. Please email the Society at [info@norwellhistoricalsociety.org](mailto:info@norwellhistoricalsociety.org).

Past issues of newsletters, virtual tour of the Jacobs Farmhouse and other historic properties in Norwell, books for sale, articles on neighborhood histories... all accessible on the website: [norwellhistoricalsociety.org](http://norwellhistoricalsociety.org).



CALLING ALL THOSE WHO ARE  
TEACHING FROM HOME!

*The ABCs of Norwell* will help you teach Norwell's history. A map of locations (perfect for in-town "road trips!") will show you where to find the historic sites with your kids.

*A Narrative of South Scituate & Norwell* is a great way to read short tales about our town's history. Each chapter is a new story—perfect for your Middle or High Schooler because it gives local history in bite-size portions!

BOOKS CAN BE PAID FOR ONLINE &  
DELIVERED TO YOUR DOORSTEP (WITHIN NORWELL)  
OR MAILED FOR A \$5 FEE.



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