



NORTH RIVER PACKET

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Preservation Awards *in* Norwell

Historic buildings come in all shapes and sizes, and it's often easier to look at a structure and picture "new" rather than "restored." People sometimes don't appreciate history until it's gone, so let's celebrate these residents who helped maintain Norwell's rich history.

The Norwell Historical Commission, a Town board that protects and preserves Norwell's historical integrity, bestows its Preservation Awards to deserving Norwell citizens each year. This year, however, things were a little different. First, three structures in town (not the usual one) were deemed worthy of the honor! Second, the pandemic threatened to make the presentation of the awards slightly anti-climactic—how does one "hand over" a framed certificate and house plaque during a Zoom meeting?

Thankfully, Norwell Spotlight TV offered to produce three videos that highlight the history and restoration of each of the award winners. The Norwell Historical Society prepared the research and scripts for the videos, and the following are excerpts from them.

AWARD FOR 690 MAIN STREET (CHEEVER TAVERN):

The written history of the commercial property that today is located at 690 Main Street in Norwell Center begins in 1843. That year Consider Merritt and sons Joseph and William opened a blacksmith business on the site. Consider and his sons were direct descendants of Henry Merritt, one of the earliest settlers of Scituate in 1628.

Son Joseph Merritt worked at the site until his death in 1904. His son, Joseph Jr., was not one who liked to work with his hands—he was a man of numbers.

Joseph Merritt, Jr. would later become Norwell's Town Clerk and wrote many books on the history of our town. So in 1928, Joseph, Jr. sold (what is referred to in the deed as) "my garage building" to John H. Sparrell.



Joseph Merritt, Jr. wrote the book *History of South Scituate-Norwell* in 1938.

John Sparrell was the son of the town's undertaker and began his career as his father's assistant. But by the 1920 census, he was noted as the proprietor of a garage—perhaps this same building?

In 1930, two years after he bought the "garage building" from Merritt, Sparrell and his wife Nellie (after whom Sparrell School would later be named) took out a \$2,800 mortgage—perhaps to build a new, updated garage specifically intended for the up-and-coming business of the repair and sale of automobiles.

The Norwell Historical Society recently received photos showing the building's original exterior. One picture shows the original structure (built circa 1930) with Sparrell's "Norwell Motor Sales" above the door. The garage had a car lift inside that could bring the autos from the lower level (where the entry



The two cars at right in this photo have been dated to around 1936.

to Cheever Tavern is today) to the upper level. A second photo received (shown above) shows the building with an addition to the left—much more reminiscent of the structure that is there today. These photos were sent to the Society by the grandson of a local architectural engineer named Parker, who designed the addition circa 1935. Of note, Sparrell took out another mortgage on the property in 1933—this time for \$500. It is probable that he used those funds to pay for the new addition which, as the photo shows, includes newly-installed gas pumps.

“Eleven years after he first bought the land and built his garage, Sparrell sold the business.”

In 1939, Sparrell sold the building to Francis MacFarlane and the name of the business changed to MacFarlane's Garage. Eleven years after he first bought the land and built his garage,

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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.



This “found treasure” does not reside in our Archives or at the Jacobs Farmhouse Museum... but with its finder, Norwell resident Rhys Medaglia.

While at Gaffield Park with his family, Rhys wandered up the hill behind the main play structure to explore the woods. While rock hopping he came upon an old skeleton key among the leaves and dirt. Rhys’s mother said he was so excited and claimed it his own “buried treasure!”

Have you found treasure in Norwell? If so, please share a photo of your “found treasure” with the Society via Facebook or Instagram.

Richard Warren Hatch wrote a prequel to the book below in 1929 entitled *Into the Wind*. If you happen to have a copy in your bookcase or see it when browsing used books, please consider donating it to the Society for our local historical fiction collection.

This book, *Leave the Salt Earth* by Richard Warren Hatch, is in the Society Archives and available for members to borrow. Published in 1933, it is a beautifully-written chronicle of the lives of the Bradford family, who lived at Two Mile Farm in Marshfield. The era of shipbuilding is over, the war of Rebellion has ended, and this family must cope with changing times and consequences along the North River.

Grandfather Bradford relives his dream to return to Chittenden Ship Yard in Scituate (today’s Norwell) and build one more schooner, as his grandchildren make their way in a world anchored to the past. Young men find adventure and opportunity off the farm, but struggle to leave home and family.

Highlights include a carriage ride through the river towns, details of a 19th century courtship, harrowing sea tales of trawling for cod on the grand banks, and a voyage in a terrifying gale from coastal Maine to the safety of White’s Ferry (in Marshfield) with a load of lumber. The skill and bravery of those 19th century sailors can be appreciated by those of us who have navigated the swirling currents and changing tides where the river meets the sea.

Leave the Salt Earth is a lovely story of times past and a North River family, their traditions, challenges, and determination to make their way in the world.

Summary written by Jane Estabrooks



Just The Facts

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Sarah Jane Baker, Secretary
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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

Rachel Wollam

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 ONLINE!

Look for the magnifying glasses in this issue—that means there is more to discover on-line and at the Society’s website NORWELLHISTORICALSOCIETY.ORG.

The Portland Gale—a Local Tragedy

Norwell residents Burt and Fred Henderson died in the 1898 Portland Gale—two of four local boys who were lost in the North River during the storm. The Henderson brothers will be depicted by young actors at this year’s First Parish Comes Alive! Cemetery Tour on Saturday, October, 16th. Here is their tragic story...

In 1898, brothers Burt and Fred Henderson were 23 and 22 years old respectively.

From a large family of ten children (with eight boys!), the Hendersons lived in a large historic house on the banks of the North River at the Blockhouse—today’s 45 Block House Lane.

In those days, much of the recreation of the young people in the town centered



Burt Henderson (left) and Fred Henderson (middle) will be portrayed by two Norwell High School brothers. The Hendersons are shown here in happier days with Albert Tilden (at right).

on the river. Many young men owned either a sailboat, rowboat, or canoe. In 1893, the North River Boat Club was organized. Land was leased near the town landing, and the club’s boathouse was built. During the next few years, the boat club became the center of social life for many in town. Races were held in the summer, and during the fall and winter there were dances, minstrel shows, and all kinds of entertainment.

Fred and Burt Henderson were popular members of the Boat Club.

Thanksgiving in those days was a festive holiday with both family and community celebrations. For the Henderson brothers, the holiday was the beginning of a wonderful weekend of goose hunting. The Hendersons had a shanty on the North River near Fourth Cliff, and they kept a gundalow (see inset) at the shanty that they used to harvest salt marsh hay. The goose hunting season was from October through January (when the geese are finished raising their young and are migrating to warmer areas to

gun·da·low \ˈɡʌndə,lō\ *n.* A type of flat-bottomed cargo boat generally used in tidal rivers, estuaries, and bays for the transport of hay, cordwood, livestock, horses, carriages, and people.

feed). Huge flocks flew over the river and the boys could shoot enough to have a feast for the family *and* sell the extras for income.

The trip began with five hunters: Burt, Fred, Albert Tilden, George Ford, and George Webster. On Saturday morning, the party got an unexpected visitor—one of the lifeguards from the Fourth Cliff Life Saving Station who rowed out with a warning about a storm he had heard about. In those days, meteorology was in its infancy and it was impossible to predict storms like we do today.

George Webster decided to leave with the lifeguard, but the rest of the group was

confident... and even looking forward to a storm because stormy weather was good for hunting waterfowl.

Snow began to fall that evening as predicted, but it got heavier as the hours passed. The winds got worse and the water started to rise. Then the storm took on new dimensions—suddenly, water was up to their armpits and they realized they had made a terrible mistake and needed to try to make it across the river.

The Hendersons saw that the gundalow they kept for haying had become untethered and was floating randomly on the waves. They got into their boat and started to row for shore, but they soon lost control and were being swept away. The Clapps, friends who also had a camp on Fourth Cliff, were also trying to escape. As the Clapp boat began to sink, they were able to leap onto the Hendersons’ loose gundalow. The Clapps could see the Hendersons and their friends crying for help, but they didn’t have any oars and couldn’t do anything to help the other boat.

The Clapps were able to reach land, but no one heard from the Henderson brothers, Albert Tilden, or George Ford again.

(continued on page 4)

Want to sign up for the Cemetery Tour? Scan the QR code below to learn more.



A Local Tragedy, cont'd.

(continued from page 3)

For days the Clapps, Norwell neighbors, and family searched for the boys—hoping they had made it out alive. Their bodies were found a couple of days later.

The Henderson brothers were buried in a ceremony at First Parish Church, and young Edna Clapp wrote a poem that was read at the services:

*What ye lift upon the bier,
Is not worth a single tear,
'Tis an empty sea shell one,
Out of which the pearl is gone.
The shell is broken, it lies there.
The pearl, the all, the soul is here.*

“The Portland Gale,” as it came to be called, was one of the most devastating storms ever to hit the South Shore. There was widespread destruction of homes and ships and much loss of life.

The storm was named after the *Portland* ferry, which sank off of Boston during the unnamed gale. 192 passengers on the *Portland* drowned.

The storm tore open the beach that connected the Third and Fourth Cliffs in Scituate, and made a new mouth for the North River. The new mouth (today called “New Inlet”) caused the tides to become stronger and swifter in the North River. Salt levels of the surrounding marsh increased so greatly after the storm that the salt haying industry on the river was ruined.

Things changed for the Henderson family too. The boys’ father developed a dislike of the river and never allowed his remaining sons to fish or swim there again. Within a year of the tragedy, Mr. Henderson relocated the family from the banks of the North River to a house on Main Street.

With the deaths of three members fresh in their minds and the change in the North River tide levels, members of the North River Boat Club decided to disband. At a meeting in 1899, the club decided to sell the boat house at public auction. The boat house was moved to

Winter Street, where it remains today as a testament to a happier time on the North River—before the Portland Gale and before the deaths of four of Norwell’s promising young men.

Much of the information in this narrative comes from Warnings Ignored: The Story of the Portland Gale, November 1898 by Fred Freitas and Dave Ball, published 1995.



The North River Boat Club was disbanded in 1899, one year after the Portland Gale.



The NORWELL HISTORICAL SOCIETY
presents
**AN EVENING OF
HISTORY & COMMUNITY**
Annual Meeting, Historical Presentation, & Social Hour



THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 30TH
at the home of Karl & Linda Swenson, 793 Main Street, Norwell
5:00 86th Annual Meeting
5:15 Norwell Center Presentation ☸ 5:45 Outdoor Social Hour

Space is limited, please RSVP via email to NorwellHistoricalSociety@gmail.com
In case of inclement weather, this event will be held indoors with masks, and vaccinations will be required.
Parking only on Winter Street and entrance will be via the Winter Street gate. Limited accessible parking available in the driveway.



Society News

**New Administrative
Consultant Hired!**

At their August 25, 2021 Board meeting, the Norwell Historical Society Board of Directors voted unanimously to hire Rachel Wollam as a part-time (up to 10 hours/week) Administrator.

Rachel brings with her many years of experience as a Norwell volunteer, a Special Education teacher, and an Office Administrator.

In her new position, Rachel will increase community engagement, plan Society events, coordinate fundraising, and provide administrative support for the Board.

Welcome, Rachel!

Answer from page 6: The house and barn are located at 32 Winter Street. The former North River Boat Club building (as shown above on page in this newsletter) was added on to the larger barn some time after 1899.

Preservation Awards, cont'd.

(continued from page 1)

Sparrell sold the business. It's unclear why, but 1939 was The Great Depression, and it's possible the trying economic times could have been a contributing factor.

Historic buildings come in all sorts of shapes and sizes, and it is easy to look at a historic structure like this and picture "new" rather than "restored." It's important, therefore, that the Norwell Historical Commission recognized the work that Mike Sheehan did to restore the back side of what used to be the John H. Sparrell Garage and transform it into Cheever Tavern.

Watch the Preservation Award video for Cheever Tavern using this QR code:



AWARD FOR 127 MAIN STREET (THE EUNICE CLAPP BARN):

Using deed research, family history, and information from the Norwell Historical Society Archives, it has been determined that the house at 127 Main Street was built circa 1805. But the house you see today doesn't necessarily look as if it is over 200 years old. Fascinatingly, the structure you see today was built around an original small Cape.



The original Cape around which the current house at 127 Main Street is built. Although hidden behind the house, you can see the barn in the background.

The history of the house and barn at 127 Main Street began when Eunice Silvester, the first child of James and Joanna Brooks Silvester, was born in 1766. Eunice's father died when she was 15 and after his death, his property was divided among the family. In 1790, at age 24, Eunice married Michael Clapp, a Scituate (today's Norwell) neighbor. The couple moved to Hanover and started a family. Ten years later, in 1800, Eunice's husband died and she moved back to Scituate—pregnant and with three children under the age of ten.

We believe Eunice used the land that her father had willed to her years earlier and on that land, circa 1805, built a home for her young family. We believe the barn was also built around that time.

Around 1826, Eunice's son James Silvester Clapp built the Cape on the opposite side of Prospect Street from his mother's home. The 1830 census notes Eunice living in her home with her other son Michael and his young family.



This photo shows the Mollas' renovations—featuring a taller second story to the front of the home and the distinctive stone exterior that we all recognize today. The barn, however, remained relatively unchanged until its recent restoration by Megan Kennedy.

Eunice Clapp died in 1833 at the age of 67 in the home she built. The house was sold to William Farrar in the mid-1800s, and then inherited by his daughter, Ruth Studley, so for many years it was referred to as the William Farrar/Farrow house. The Studleys sold the house to the Molla family in 1910. It was under the Mollas' ownership that the home underwent its exterior transformation (see above photo and caption).

Most families in Scituate in the 1800s and early 1900s had small farms and raised crops to support their families. As historian Joseph Merritt recalled in his *History of Scituate-Norwell* book: "Most people kept a horse, one or two cows, a pig and poultry." The barn built by Eunice Clapp in the early 1800s was utilitarian—but it served the Clapp, Farrar, Studley, and Molla families for many generations. The presence of so many historic barns in Norwell attests to our town's rich agricultural past.

In 2020, Ripley-Thorne Builders of Hingham were hired by the Kennedy family to restore their barn and bring it back to its former glory. Maintaining and restoring these historic outbuildings is as important as restoring old homes. Today, we often forget how important farming was to the economy of our town—these historic barns remind us of that past. Thank you to the Kennedy family for renovating their historic barn and, therefore, helping to preserve Norwell's rich history for generations to come.

Watch the Preservation Award video for the Eunice Clapp House & barn using this QR code:



AWARD FOR 840 MAIN STREET (THE THOMAS SOUTHWORTH HOUSE)

The land on which the house and barn at 840 Main Street sit is adjacent to land owned by the James family—the original owners of the Block House shipyard. That shipyard was active from 1701 until 1834 and over 51 vessels were built there.

(continued on page 6)

Preservation Awards, cont'd.

(continued from page 5)

Immediately next to that shipyard was the home of John James—now located at 45 Block House Lane. This area of Scituate (now Norwell) was populated by the James and the Tilden families for many generations as they worked at the Block House Shipyard.

The house at 840 Main Street is located on the corner of Block House Lane, and is actually the second home on this site—both having been built by the Southworth family. The first house has been described (by historian Mary Power) as a “mansion house—much larger than the present house.” That home was said to have partially burned and the current home was built to replace it.

Capt. Thomas Southworth, who built both of the homes on the site, was born in Duxbury in 1771 and he married Sarah James—daughter of Elisha James, around 1792. The James family lived in the house (referred to previously) down Block House Lane. In 1804, about 8 years after they were married and already had at least two children, Elisha James granted land to his daughter and son-in-law to build a home next door to his own.

Capt. Southworth was a shipmaster—an officer in command of a merchant ship. According to historian Samuel Deane, Southworth was “an intelligent and exceedingly amiable man.”

Recent historical research found a routine shipping news piece from May, 1819 that mentioned “the Brig *Hero*, captained by Southworth, setting sail from Boston.” The ship was headed to New Orleans and only two months later, on July 16, the ship hit a storm and Capt. Thomas Southworth drowned at sea. Capt. Southworth owned half of the brig *Hero*, and the ship was later listed in Capt. Southworth’s estate as “out of repair and lying in Boston.”

Sarah James Southworth continued to live in the home after her husband’s death with her children: James, Lucy, Nathan, Thomas, Temperance, and George. Three of her sons had artistic talent and Nathan, in particular, established himself as a miniature

painter in Boston. He later traveled to Europe, New York, and Philadelphia to practice his art, but eventually his health failed him, and he died in 1858.



This miniature of Scituate resident Mary Louisa Foster was painted by Nathan Southworth around 1842.

Thirteen years after his father died, Sarah’s oldest son James married his neighbor Julia Tilden—daughter of Luther Tilden of the Block House Shipyard.

In 1843, Sarah Southworth sold her family home to the Brooks family of Scituate. Elijah Brooks was also associated with shipbuilding and was a partner in the Brooks and Tilden yard just above Union Street in Marshfield.

In 2019, the current owner of 840 Main Street, Mary Williams, began to restore the Capt. Thomas Southworth house. Very experienced in restoring antique homes, Mary immediately contacted the Norwell Historical Society to learn about the history of the house. A wonderful example of a Federal Cape-style home with an attached barn, the Southworth house epitomizes Scituate/Norwell architecture. Although simple and utilitarian, this home now shines after its historically-sympathetic restoration.

Thank you, Mary Williams, for helping to preserve the history of Capt. Thomas Southworth, his widow Sarah, their family home, and the Block House shipyard.

Watch the Preservation Award video for the Capt. Thomas Southworth house using this QR code:



THROWBACK PHOTO OF THE MONTH



This photo was donated to the Norwell Historical Society by Mary Knapp, who lived her entire life in the home shown above.

Mary’s father, Perry Osborn, was the Norwell Highway Surveyor for many years, and barns on this property were used to store equipment that maintained the town’s roads.

In 1899, the barn was added onto, and this undated photo shows the addition of the smaller “barn” (formerly the North River Boat Club, as shown on page 4) to the left of the original outbuilding.

Where are the house and barns located today? (Answer on page 4)

FIRST PARISH CEMETERY

Comes Alive!

FEATURING GRAVESIDE PORTRAYALS OF FASCINATING PEOPLE FROM NORWELL’S PAST



SATURDAY, OCTOBER 16TH
NOON–3:00 PM

RAIN DATE: SUNDAY, OCTOBER 17TH

Join the Historical Society for its 2nd 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 groups of all ages.

Registration is required.

NORWELLHISTORICALSOCIETY.ORG

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

DATE _____ NAME _____

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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



New Driving Tour Brochure



As part of the North River Lecture Series this past spring, Historical Society president Wendy Bawabe gave a virtual presentation on some of the Norwell homes associated with the North River shipyards.

To South Shore historians, the North River's shipbuilding history can seem second nature. But many residents don't know much about the river's past and may not be aware that the North River was one of the shipbuilding capitals of the East Coast.

To many, the only easily-recognizable link to the North River shipyards is the antique homes where the shipbuilders

once lived. This brochure will allow residents to tour Norwell while reading about some of the shipbuilders' homes and the shipyards where they worked.

The new brochure is available at the Norwell Public Library, the Norwell Town Hall, and the Norwell Historical Society Archives on the third floor of Sparrell School. You can also view the brochure online at our website (under "Learn More") and print a copy at home.

What's in a Name? NORWELL LOCALES

It's interesting to come across old names and places when reading early histories of Norwell. Joseph Foster Merritt mentions several in his History of South Scituate-Norwell Massachusetts. Society member Jon Bond summarizes a few here:

Where is Studley Hill?

There probably isn't anyone alive today who would recall the name Studley Hill—located between River Street and Pine Street and the highest elevation in town. Today it is known as Tara Drive.

Where is The Prairie?

The "Prairie" was on the Hanover end of High Street, and was known for its fertile, level land.

Where was Oakman's Ferry?

Oakman's Ferry goes back to 1644 at the site of what is now the Union Street Bridge. Oakman's Ferry was located there until the first bridge was built in 1802.

What is Herring Brook Hill?

Herring Brook Hill is another name for Norwell Center. Second Herring Brook runs under Main Street east of the Center (near the intersection of Dover and Main).

Where is Delano Hill?

This rise (just barely a hill!) was named for the Delano Mansion (370 River Street) built on the crest of land.



NORWELL HISTORICAL SOCIETY
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Norwell, Massachusetts 02061
www.norwellhistoricalsociety.org

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HISTORICAL SOCIETY ITEMS FOR SALE



- The ABCs of Norwell** (*shown at left*) **\$10**
by Gertrude Daneau
A coloring book 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 historic people and sites.
- Historic Homesteads of Norwell** **\$15**
Always wanted to know the history behind the antique homes in town? This book delves into the background of many of Norwell's historic houses and the people who lived in them.
- A Narrative of South Scituate & Norwell** (*shown at left*) **\$20**
by Samuel H. Olson
This book chronicles the life and times of our town from 1845-1963 with a collection of articles previously published in *The Norwell Mariner*. Each chapter is its own story, so this book is very readable. Looking for a single book to summarize Norwell's more recent history? This is the one.
- History of South Scituate-Norwell** **\$25**
by Joseph Foster Merritt
This history of the town, originally written in 1938, was republished in 1988 by the Society. A unique narrative with illustrations, it is an invaluable account of Norwell prior to WWII.
- Norwell town seal pin** **\$5**
Looking for the perfect teacher gift for the coming school year? Since all faculty wear lanyards, the brass and enamel town seal pin (1-inch wide) is a great gift for your child's teacher.

Looking for
more items?
Use this QR code
to visit our
website.



All the above items are available for delivery (within Norwell) or will be mailed (for a \$5 fee). You may purchase items online or you may use this form and mail a check (made payable to NHS) to: NHS, P.O. Box 693, Norwell, MA 02061.