



# NORTH RIVER PACKET

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## D. Willard Robinson Returns Home The Robinson Family Story of an Ancestor's Burial

*Members of the Robinson family who lived on Ridge Hill recently told Jody Vermette the story that has been passed down from generation to generation of the death and burial of D. Willard Robinson. It is not possible to verify every detail of this family tale, but for Memorial Day we wanted to share this poignant story of patriotism, loyalty, loss, and renewal as it is remembered by the Robinson family.*

by Jody Vermette

One of the names etched in the granite Civil War monument on the Norwell common honoring the twenty-four South Scituate men who died in service to the Union is "D. Willard Robinson."

Born David Willard Robinson on September 6, 1848, he was called Willard and was the only son of David and Lucy (Prouty) Robinson who lived on High Street. Willard's father, David, was a bootmaker.

Willard was just 14 years old when his father volunteered for the Union Army in the early days of the war. David Sr.



This portrait of D. Willard Robinson hung in the G.A.R. Hall, located in what is today Ridge Hill School on High Street.

enlisted in Company K, Massachusetts 7<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment on June 15, 1861, and was discharged from service on March 10, 1863 at Falmouth, Virginia after being wounded.

Nine months later, David Sr. had recovered enough to reenlist, and this time he was joined by his young son Willard, who was only 16 at the time. Father and son were mustered into Company H, 2<sup>nd</sup> Heavy Artillery of Massachusetts on December 7, 1863. We can imagine as he left the little cape on High Street, young Willard had dreams of coming home with brave stories to impress his friends and the young ladies of Ridge Hill. Sadly this was not to be.

Despite brave resistance by their Company, father and son were captured at the battle of Plymouth, North Carolina in April 1864. From there, father and son were sent to the notorious Andersonville Prisoner of War Camp in Georgia. Considered the worst Confederate prison, it was referred to as "26 Acres of Hell."

When Union General William T. Sherman began his march through Georgia, the Confederates evacuated the prison camps in his path to prevent the prisoners from being repatriated. Father and son were moved to the hastily constructed and unfinished

prison camp in Florence, South Carolina called the Florence Stockade.

The Stockade was in use from September 1864 to February 1865, and in that short time span, 18,000 Union soldiers were imprisoned there and 2,800 died.

*“... young Willard had dreams of coming home with brave stories to impress his friends... Sadly this was not to be.”*

Willard was among the prisoners who did not survive. When David, Sr. woke on the morning of October 7, 1864, he found his only son dead from starvation and exposure beside him beneath the blanket they shared.

His father went to the Commander of the Stockade to ask for permission to personally bury his son but he was denied, and young David was buried in a trench that served as a common grave.

After the war ended, prisoners were reburied in individual graves. This work was done by the formerly enslaved

*(continued on page 3)*

# 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.*

*I think that in a hundred years the people will ride in balloons I think the population of our country will then be twice what it is now. We know but little now of Africa and the North Polar region but in a hundred years we will know as much about them as we do now of other countries. I think all the governments of Europe will then be republics, and that women will vote, and a woman be President.*  
C. M. Ford

This essay by Carrie M. Ford was recently loaned to the Society. It can be assumed that Miss Ford's writing prompt was "What do you think our world will look like in 100 years?" We believe this essay was written circa 1885. It is fascinating to read her answers—some correct (women can vote!) and others peculiar (riding in balloons?). At right is a photo of Carrie, who lived on Main Street across from Stoney Brook Lane.



The provenance of this portable organ displayed at the Jacobs Farmhouse Museum is unknown, but it was built by the Estey Organ Company in Brattleboro, Vermont—which was in business from the late 1800s through the 1950s. This "cottage organ" was small and portable so it could travel easily—perhaps to home-based church services?

Want to visit the Estey Organ Museum website and learn more about their line of traveling organs? Scan the QR code below or click here online.



## 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 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.

### 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  
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# DISCOVER MORE ONLINE!

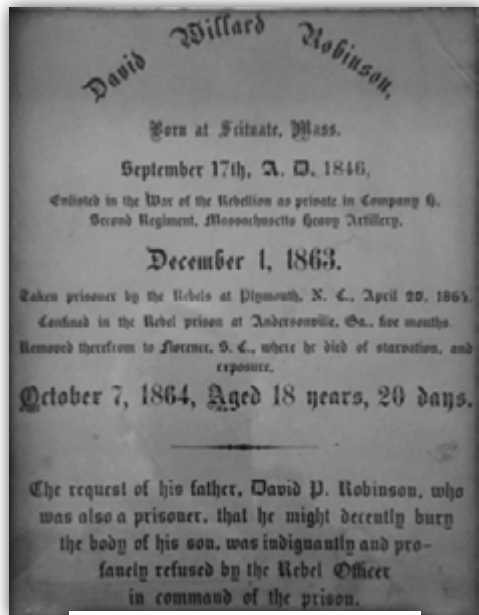
Look for the magnifying glasses in this issue—that means there is more to discover on-line and at the Society’s website [NORWELLHISTORICALSOCIETY.ORG](http://NORWELLHISTORICALSOCIETY.ORG).

## Willard Robinson, cont’d.

*(continued from page 1)*

people of Florence who felt compassion and respect for the men who had given their lives in the war.

David Sr. was released from the Florence Stockade through a prisoner exchange on December 17, 1864, and he returned home. It had been about a year since father and son had left South Scituate for the war, and now that David was returning home alone, it must have been a very sad reunion with his wife and his daughter.



The Robinson family owns the above document that shows David Robinson was denied permission to properly bury his son.

not known, but Howard took the train to South Carolina and was referred to the people who had buried the Union Soldiers. They wanted to help him and seemed to know where David was buried. With their assistance, Howard found the plain wooden coffin said to contain Willard’s body and transported it to the train which would carry it North.

When the body arrived home, the coffin was placed on saw horses in the yard until they could arrange for the burial. The coffin was interred at the Union Cemetery in Assinippi where Willard’s headstone can be seen today. Willard was finally home.

There is a little more to the story: it seems that Willard had brought home a gift for his mother in the soil attached to his coffin. The next spring, a bed of violets grew where the coffin had rested in the yard. They were white and blue, and the Robinson family named them “The Confederate Violets.” It is said that these violets have spread to many gardens on Ridge Hill where they still come up every spring.

**G.A.R. Grand Army of the Republic.** A fraternal organization composed of veterans of the Union Army who served in the American Civil War. It was founded in 1866 and grew to include hundreds of “posts” (local community units) across the nation (predominantly in the North, but also a few in the South and West). It was dissolved in 1956.

The Robinson house and cobbler shop are still standing at 59 High Street. The Norwell G.A.R. Post was named in Willard’s memory. That G.A.R. Hall still stands today as the Ridge Hill School on High Street.

At the foot of Park Hill, on the corner of Oak and High Streets, was the home of Howard Mann, a Captain in the Union Army. He was determined to go south and try to find some of his fallen South Scituate comrades. How much time had elapsed since Willard’s death is



Want to learn more about Civil War soldiers in Norwell? The Society has created a driving tour of sites in town related to Union soldiers. Scan the QR code above to see the tour guide brochure, pick up a copy of the brochure at the Norwell Public Library, or click here in the online newsletter to see the brochure.

### THROWBACK PHOTO OF THE MONTH



This photo was loaned to the Norwell Historical Society by Sarah Colman Lincoln whose great aunt, Carrie M. Ford, is shown above in the class picture. Read more about Miss Ford on page two of this newsletter.

Unlike many of Norwell's old school-houses, this building remains at its original location.

**Where is the District 4 school located today?** *(Answer on page 6)*

# “No Pork Hill” by Mary L.F. Nash Power

*Norwell historian Mary Power wrote prolifically about our town, its homes, and its many residents. The center of Norwell, referred to by Mrs. Power and many of her contemporaries as “No Pork Hill,” and the peculiarities of the homeowners is the subject of this story.*

*This article, written by Mary Louisa Foster Nash Power in 1943, was recently transcribed by Historical Society Board member Dan Neumann. Editorial parenthetical notes are written by Society president Wendy Bawabe.*

*The December 2021 and Winter 2022 issues of the Society newsletter have the first two installments of this tale. The final installment will appear in the next issue of the Society newsletter.*

Before 1800, another house stood on the north side of Main Street across from the Common [the location of 667 Main Street today]. Just when or by whom it was built is not definitely known, but it may have been older than the John Nash house next door [661 Main Street today which was built in 1794]. This earlier home was taken down in 1831.

The earliest record of the house notes that it was purchased by Consider Merritt from Elijah Turner in 1816. Elijah Turner or his son Lemuel built the saw mill on the Second Herring Brook in 1797 [off of today’s Mill Lane]. Both father and son lived on Pleasant Street, and it is probable that this house was built for their occupancy, given its proximity to the mill.

In 1821, Consider Merritt sold the old house to another Litchfield: Barnard Litchfield who turned right around and sold the house to John King Nash, who was about to marry Sarah Delano Foster... of the “up river road.” The streets of the town were not named until late in the 1870s. Main Street was “the fore road,” Central Street was “the back road” and “back street,” and River Street was the “up river road.”

After purchasing the old house, Mr. Nash engaged James N. Sparrell, the local builder, to make certain proposed repairs and alterations on the house.

We know very little of the old house’s appearance at the time, but judging

from the estimate of the proposed alterations to be made by Mr. Sparrell, we know that it had a central chimney; a “tee” [ell] part that needed new sills and a roof; and front, back, and cellar stairs, all needing replacement. The total for repairs was \$380. It was finally decided to instead take down the old house and build another, using what timber was usable and suitable.

On September 3, 1831, Mr. Sparrell agreed to build a new house similar to that of Capt. John Manson’s at Scituate Harbor [shown in the photo below] for \$480.



The “new” house at 667 Main Street (above) was modeled after the John Manson House (below) in Scituate (on 5 Clapp Road today).



John King Nash and Sarah Delano Foster were married in November, 1832 and lived in their new residence until 1836, when they moved next door into his father’s house.

The young couple moved so that Rev. Samuel May, the newly-called minister [at the Second Parish across the street], might have a suitable residence, no other then being available.

When Mr. May, a year later, moved to the vacated Elijah Curtis place

[“May Elms” at 841 Main Street], Mr. and Mrs. Nash went back to their own house where they lived until his father’s health failed about 1855, and then returned to the family homestead next door to care for him.

From 1844 to 1848, Rev. William O. Mosley, the young unmarried pastor of the church, made his home with the young Nash couple. For several years after 1855 [when the couple moved next door to care for the elder Mr. Nash], George Sparrell and his young family also occupied the house.

In 1858, Mrs. Nash’s father Samuel Foster died, and the Nashes moved to the old Delano-Foster farm on River Street [today’s 303 River Street] where they remained until the summer of 1868, and then returned to their home on the corner of Central Street.

During that interim time, their house had been occupied by Ebenezer T. Fogg, II. Mr. Fogg had purchased the Nash store about the time of his marriage to Helen L. Smith of Duxbury, and he moved the old store building to the site of the present bank building. Mr. Fogg added a room for the Savings Bank opening into the grocery store—for his convenience.

These primitive quarters housed the bank until the building was burned in 1884, and the white wooden building was built the same year [see photo below].

About 1870, Edwin Studley from North Hanover, carried on a shoe business in the vacant space over the store and bank.



The South Scituate Savings Bank, built by Ebenezer Fogg. It is told the current brick bank was built around this structure.

*(continued on page 5)*

# “No Pork,” cont’d.

*(continued from page 4)*

On the north side of the fore road [Main Street] opposite the cemetery and common land [at the site of The Tinker’s Son restaurant today], Anson Robbins built a house on the hill at the time of his marriage to Rachel Sylvester in 1803. [This house was moved in 1967 when the center of Norwell was developed for business, and it is now located at 777 Main Street.]

There is currently [in 1943] a vacant lot where the Turner House, the local hotel once stood. Edwin A. Turner, who had carried on a grocery business

“ *The Turner House Hotel in Norwell Center was a popular boarding house in its prime.* ”

at Greenbush for several years, moved to Norwell and built a French-roofed house in the late 1870s. The Turner House and the adjoining store building were burned in 1926. The Turner House was a popular boarding house in its prime.

Sometimes dances in the old Town Hall [located where the bank is today] were continued into the “wee sma’ hours” (sometimes until 3:00 or 4:00 a.m. on holiday nights!). Music was provided by Boston orchestras of six or eight pieces which came to town (by way of Seth Foster’s horse-drawn coach) from the 4:10 afternoon train. The players would have supper at The Turner House and, after the ball was over, they sat around the coal fire in the hotel office until breakfast time.

A few years after 1800, a small one and a half story house stood on Central Street [at the site of 7 Central today]. Homer Bowker lived in the small

house after he married Tryphena Sylvester. “Uncle Homer” and “Aunt Pheeny” were very popular with the children of the village. This old house was taken down in the 1860s by George Sylvester, who married Nancy Bowker, a daughter of Homer, and the Sylvesters built a new cottage on the old site. This small cottage has since



The house at 7 Central Street was owned by Prof. Tenney Davis, a Bowker relative.

been enlarged and improved by Dr. Tenney L. Davis whose grandmother, Eliza Ann Bowker, was the daughter of Homer and Tryphena.

There were no houses on the east side of Central Street from the brow of the hill [around 24 Central Street]

About 1860, Thomas Tolman, a 49’er, and his father-in-law George French came to South Scituate from South Weymouth, and began the manufacture of buckets on Central Street just north of the “pound field.” Around that time Mr. French purchased the building that had been Ebenezer Fogg’s store and moved it to Central Street and made it into a two family house. George French lived in the south side, while his son Edwin occupied the north part. [This house is today’s 10 and 12 Central Street.]

Edwin W. French was a skilled shoe worker and had an inventive turn of mind. It was he who invented what later became known as the McKay stitcher, which revolutionized the shoe industry. Not having the money to develop and patent his invention himself, he sold it to his brother-in-law, a Mr. Blake, who developed and patented it, and sold it for a considerable amount.

Tolman and French did not continue to manufacture buckets very long after coming to South Scituate. Thomas Tolman soon opened a grocery store



The east side of Central Street after 1849. The dark building at left is the moved District School (by then a house), the white building to the right of that is 10-12 Central Street (painted red today), and the Tolman store and house are no longer standing, but where the Cushing parking lot is today.

up to the old “pound field” [today’s Cushing Center] until after 1849 when the new Town of South Scituate was incorporated. Some time after that, a new schoolhouse (District No. 6) was built on Main Street and the former schoolhouse was moved to the east side of Central Street and made into a dwelling [today’s 18 Central Street].

in a building which he attached to his house. He had returned from California with money made there in the mining district, and carried on his store on Central Street until a short time before his death when it was purchased by John C. Nash.

# Pattie Hainer Donates Research

*Local historians like Mary Power, Joseph Merritt, Sam Olson, and George C. Turner have special collections preserved by the Society for posterity. Historian Pattie Hainer now joins this illustrious group with her own collection of research and writings in the Society Archives.*

*The Norwell Historical Society counts itself as extremely fortunate to have received a large collection of writing and research from Norwell resident Pattie Hainer. Pattie worked as a reporter for the Patriot Ledger and the Norwell Mariner, but it is her curiosity about local history and her meticulous and creative research that led her to become involved with the Historical Society and ultimately to donate her work to the Society Archives.*

*Pattie is best known for her seminal research work on slavery on the South Shore, but her interests extend to all disadvantaged communities found in early South Scituate. The Society would like to publicly thank Pattie for her generosity and share an excerpt from her work on the care of the poor in early Scituate/Norwell.*

## **PAUPER AUCTIONS: 1794–1820** *by Pattie Hainer*

New England towns provided for their poor in three ways: bidding at a town meeting, privately with town officials arranging placements, or bidding at an auction usually held in a local tavern.

The poor in Scituate and the surrounding towns were carried each year to the town houses of the several towns and sold out to service for the following year. Families could be seen being carried to and from the sales packed in old farm ox-carts.

Unlike slave auctions where winning bidders paid the *highest* price, paupers went to the *lowest* bidders because the town paid the bid price. The lower the bid, the lower the tax rate. In return for providing room and board and sometimes clothing, bidders got the labor of the poor for one year. The town's costs were reduced if a pauper owned his or her own bed and carried it from placement to placement.

Were the poor, like slaves, made to climb a platform to be viewed by bidders? Were they well known enough around town that their presence was not required? Did bidders yell out prices or was it done as a silent auction with bids submitted privately? Was the room crowded, noisy, dark? How did it smell? Were the children and babies who were auctioned off present? The Scituate records are mute about these specifics.

“... auctions were conducted in a local tavern, and... they were not a somber or even sober affair.”

In Scituate, auctions were conducted in a local tavern, and the town's account ledgers indicate they were not a somber or even sober affair. Taverns were the center of social life in early New England and frequently used for public meetings. Located at town centers, at docks and ports, and intersections of well-traveled roads, they were usually one or two rooms in a large house with a taproom, a fireplace, chairs, dining room tables, a bar, and a desk.

Tavern owners were typically prosperous members of the town. Three brothers, Joshua, Snow, and John Bryant operated taverns where auctions were held. Local histories reveal little information about Joshua Bryant except that at least on one occasion he received \$2 “for putting out the poor at his house” and received from \$6 to \$8 between 1805 and 1816

on a regular basis for “Liquor and Expenses at putting out the Poor.” Town records also contain one entry about John Bryant who was paid \$7.69 for “putting out the poor.”



Part of Snow Bryant's Tavern still stands today at the intersection of Lincoln, Central, and Grove streets.

Snow Bryant was the owner of a tavern at Bryant's Corner, what is now the intersection of Lincoln, Central, and Grove Streets in Norwell. Assumed to be the auction site, it had a large swinging sign with a black horse announcing “Entertainment for Man and Beast.” Members of the local militia company are known to have quenched their thirst there after strenuous drills in the field opposite.

No one came in for more scathing criticism from social welfare reformers than those men and women who bid on the poor. If one were to believe the writers of the time, bidders were a greedy, slovenly bunch only one step away from poverty themselves. They kept the wolf from the door by eking out an existence for themselves and their families by starving and abusing the less fortunate. Nothing in the record indicates if those characteristics apply to Scituate bidders. The vast majority sheltered only one pauper at a time and sometimes that pauper was a relative. There were a few bidders who sheltered two to four paupers to whom they were not related. No bidders sheltered more than four paupers at any one time. However it is the same people year after year who bid on paupers.

In 1800, about 28 families sheltered paupers, five of whom accepted more than one person.

*(continued on page 7)*

*Answer from page 3: The District 4 Schoolhouse is located at 100 Old Oaken Bucket Road (in front of Vinal School).*

DATE \_\_\_\_\_ NAME \_\_\_\_\_

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### INTERESTED IN VOLUNTEERING?

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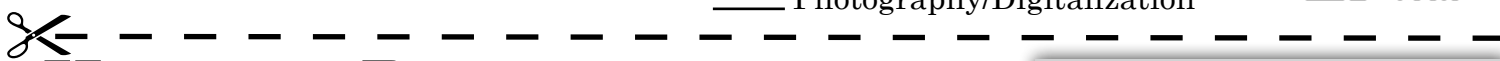
\_\_\_\_\_ Organizing at the Archives

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

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

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

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



## Hainer Donation, cont'd.

*(continued from page 6)*

A prime motivation for taking in paupers, even children, was the labor that bidders received in return. Widows got needed help with heavy lifting and household and farm chores. Men staffed business operations. None of the records indicate what work paupers did, but since farming was the foundation of the economy at the time, it is likely that many engaged in farm work. In Scituate, it is also likely that many participated in some way in the ship building industry. Women, particularly Black women, were put to work spinning.

A prime consideration in bidding on a pauper was the amount of labor which could be expected from him or her. Paupers were subject to the whims and mercies of those who would take them in. Some were sheltered for long periods of time in the same location, others for a year or less. Families were broken up and sent to live where it was cheapest for the taxpayer. Their movement was strictly controlled, and paupers could generally not own property. The town was able to spend less for the support of able-bodied paupers because their labor was worth more than paupers who were sick and feeble. Prices that were paid for particular paupers provide some clue to their health, age, and general employability.

The children of the poor worked as soon as they were able to pick stones, clean corn, scare crows, or drive a flock of geese.

What the town paid for care of its paupers included food as well as shelter, but the amount paid was often inadequate and so paltry that paupers would spend their days begging or otherwise foraging for nourishment. In some instances the town required that clothes be provided as part of the bidding price. In other instances, the town paid extra to provide clothes. As the number of paupers grew, the town took to buying clothes for groups of paupers such as when Scituate paid Jonathan Silvester \$15.58 in 1811 for 15 pairs of shoes for the poor.



The Almshouse (at left) was built in 1818 to house the town's poor and was located at the site of the Cushing Center today.

In 1816 in Scituate-Norwell, two years before the Almshouse opened, taxpayers of the town spent \$2,536.94 on boarding expenses and supplies provided to people in their own homes.

## ESSAY CONTEST

Reading the circa 1885 essay written by Carrie M. Ford (see page 2 of this newsletter) prompted the Norwell Historical Society Board of Directors to announce an essay contest asking the same question:

**“What do you think our world will look like in 100 years?”**

The Society would like to archive the essays and instruct a future Board to open them in 2122.

Will replies be as positive as Carrie's answers (How will we travel in 100 years?), or will today's difficult issues prompt more somber responses regarding the environment and global relations?

The Society is offering a \$10 Lucky Finn Coffee gift card to any Norwell High School junior or senior who submits a short essay (250 words or less). **Essays can be emailed to [info@norwellhistoricalsociety.org](mailto:info@norwellhistoricalsociety.org). Deadline: Thursday, June 30<sup>th</sup>**



**NORWELL HISTORICAL SOCIETY**  
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**Spring 2022**

**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? Scan this QR code to visit our website or click here the online version.

*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.*