

Newsletter of the NORFOLK HISTORICAL SOCIETY

SUMMER 2015

NORFOLK, CONNECTICUT

A Farmer, a Sportsman, and a Diplomat: The Romance of Collecting

This summer marks 55 years since the founding of the Norfolk Historical Society. Our mission to preserve, protect, and interpret the town's history can best be achieved through our collection of artifacts, and we celebrate that mission in an exhibition that features collections within our holdings.

Collecting began as an aristocratic pursuit in the Renaissance, when gentlemen displayed their objects of interest in small rooms, or *studioli*. In this country, collecting became a widespread activity following the 1876 Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia, as Americans reflected on their past and sought to define a national identity. Placing themselves into an historical continuum, they collected antiquities both for patriotic sentiment and personal expression.

Norfolk townspeople were no exception to this trend. Farmer Austin Wooster was one of 58 Norfolk residents who registered at Connecticut Cottage, the state building at the Centennial Exposition, and this likely fueled his interest in Connecticut mantel clocks, which he collected, many with patriotic motifs. The Wooster collection of mantel clocks is on display, along with Wooster's journal which gives us a wonderful glimpse into his daily life [see page 4].

The six decades that followed the Centennial were a time of enormous socio-economic change and increasing self-reflection. The Colonial Revival, a nationalistic design movement, provided reassurance of cultural continuity in the face of an uncertain future. As Americans embraced their colonial past, collectors sought objects and houses emblematic of that past. Frederick Barbour, a sportsman who was drawn to Norfolk for its hunting and fishing opportunities, found his colonial house in Goshen and had it dismantled piece by piece and relocated to Norfolk, where he filled it with fine early Connecticut furniture. The Frederick K. and Margaret R. Barbour Furniture Collection is now at the Connecticut Historical Society. But in Norfolk we have a few of his prized finds: an early Hitchcock chair, a tall case clock, and the original painted turnpike signs that stood on the Village Green.

The romance of collecting in Norfolk extended to exotic wares from the Far East. While living in China, Norfolk summer resident Professor Frank Johnson Goodnow and his wife Elizabeth collected not only ceramics but also an exquisite group of rigid silk *pien mien* fans, delicately painted and embroidered. The Goodnows' son-in-law American diplomat John V. A.

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Top: Round *pien mien* "face cover" fan, painted silk; Bottom: *Pien mien* "face cover" fan, tapestry-woven (*kesi*) silk depicting goldfish and wisteria, with a phoenix on the carved sandalwood handle.

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From the President

I am pleased to announce that the Norfolk Historical Society has been given an Award of Merit by the Connecticut League of History Organizations for last season's path-breaking exhibition *From the Mills to Main Street: Irish Families in Norfolk*. Documenting the struggles and achievements of an immigrant population that settled in a small New England town, the exhibition was met with great enthusiasm by our members and visitors, including many of the descendants of these pioneering families. The idea of the award-winning exhibition was the brainchild of our curator, Ann Havemeyer. She realized there was an untold story and began to research the lives of this large group of citizens who played such an important part in building the fabric of our town. Thank you, Ann, for bringing this fascinating story to life in such a meaningful way.



Many wonderful programs accompanied the exhibition. A Memory Event was held at Klauer Hall, an afternoon of great Irish music and colorful stories told by many local residents and visitors in the audience. I would like to extend a tremendous thank you to the Ladies Auxiliary of the Church of the Immaculate Conception for a bountiful spread of Irish treats, sweet and savory alike, and an interesting display of Irish memorabilia.

In the fundraising category, we held two themed dinners. An Evening at the Breezes, the former home of Abel I. Smith, was a recreation of an elegant 1920's-era seated dinner for 30 using recipes from Mr. Smith's own notebooks. The Smiths employed several Irish domestics, and a team was assembled to serve dinner, playing the part of the household staff. I wish to thank our hosts, Lynn and John Carter, and the cast who made up the "help:" Phyllis Diggle, Eileen Fitzgibbons, Chris Hanley, Ruthann Olsson, Christine Hinsch, Richard Johnston, and John Funchion. It was a great team effort, and a fantastic time was had by all! Close to St. Patrick's Day, we hosted an Irish Stew dinner at the Museum with many members of the NHS Board contributing to another fun evening. This first-time event was a great way to close the exhibition, which provided a stunning backdrop for a memorable dinner.

Last but not least, thank you to our members. Without your support and participation in our events, we would not be able to produce these exhibitions and programs that bring our history to life. I look forward to seeing you this summer!

Barry Webber

COLLECTIONS CORNER

Last summer a collection of early phonograph records in a carrying case was given to the Society by the family of John Spofford Morgan (1917–2015), grandson of Norfolk summer resident Charles Spofford who built The Alders (now Manor House) on Maple Avenue. One of John's greatest passions was music. As a young boy in Germany, where his father worked from 1924–1931, John was introduced to the Berlin Philharmonic and the great Wagnerian operas. At Harvard, John sang in the Glee Club and occasionally had a role as an extra in performances of the Metropolitan Opera during their spring season in Boston. In his reminiscences "Stories for my family," John recalls his first performance in Verdi's *Otello*:

The opening scene shows Otello leaving his ship after a bad storm. The Metropolitan staging had a staircase

from the ship to the square below and the Otello, Giovanni Martinelli, was preceded by four extras. I was directly in front of Martinelli when he burst out with his first word "Exultate" without any throat clearing. It came as such a shock to me that I stumbled on the stairs and the audience laughed at my mishap. Still it was a great performance.

The Morgan collection includes some of the earliest recordings of these operas as well as recordings by artists who were frequent performers at the Music Shed in Norfolk: Fritz Kriesler, Efram Zimbalist, Alma Gluck, Enrico Caruso, and violinist Maud Powell, the first instrumentalist to record for Victor's Celebrity Artist Series in 1904. On single-sided wax disks, Victor recordings of stars were issued on a special red label, known as the famous Victor Red Seal recordings. Now all we need is a Victor Talking Machine!

“I Never Saw a Purple Cow...”

Although the old verse goes on to say that I never hope to see one, in 1962 Frederick Barbour used this “bit of doggerel” to describe his quest for a particular type of antique table which he very much hoped to see. Not only see, but add to his growing collection. The sportsman and Norfolk resident had become famous for his pursuit of fine 18th-century Connecticut furniture and was addressing the Antiquarian and Landmarks Society of Connecticut at its annual meeting, held in Norfolk that year, when he referenced purple cows. In his address, Barbour charmingly recounts his adventures (about which he often uses sporting metaphors like “bagging” and “tracked to its lair”) in collecting fine furniture, and he gives credit to a Norfolk antiques dealer, Earle Smith, for securing a number of rare and beautiful pieces for his collection.

Smith was known as a real sleuth when it came to antiques, as Barbour said, “ringing doorbells throughout New England” looking for good finds. Earle and Marjorie Smith opened their store in Norfolk in 1934 in a distinctive stone house on the Blackberry River, just west of town. As noted in Waldecker’s *Norfolk, Connecticut, 1900-1975*, the Smiths bought and sold “lovely American pewter

and fine pieces of furniture made by Massachusetts and Connecticut cabinet makers” in this location until 1955, when the building was damaged in August’s devastating flood. The stone house was subsequently demolished, and the Smiths moved their antiques store to a building behind their home on Maple Avenue.

The fact that Frederick Barbour had to look no further than his near neighbor as a source for scarce high-quality 18th-century Connecticut cabinetmaking is an indication of the thriving and diverse retail trades to be found in Norfolk in the first half of the 20th century. A list of the shops in town made by shopkeeper William O’Connor in 1935 includes Earle Smith plus three other antiques dealers, a florist, four grocers, a dry goods store, and four meat markets, among others. A full range of goods, from autos to furniture to dresses to ice, could all be found in Norfolk stores.

Earle Smith’s Norfolk business supplied collectors with extraordinary finds, like the first cherry block-front chest that he sold in the 1950’s to Barbour, who whimsically called it “a block-buster... a wing-ding, or possibly even a zinger.” Or maybe, the antiques equivalent of a purple cow.

Romance of Collecting . . . continued from page 1



MacMurray collected images of China with his camera lens, taking over 1,600 photographs of rural scenes while he was secretary to the American Legation in

Peking (1913-1917) and Minister to China (1925-1929). His daughter Bisi Starkey still returns to the family camp on Doolittle Lake and will give a slide talk this summer on her father’s photographs of Peking, 1913-1929 [see Calendar, page 8].

Meet our new Associate Curator



DIANNE PIERCE

Dianne Pierce is no stranger to museums. When she offered to help out at the Museum last summer, we jumped at the opportunity. Dianne is a Museum Education Director and Curator with a Master’s degree in the History of Design and Decorative Arts. She serves as Adjunct Faculty at the State University of New York at New Paltz, Parsons The New School for Design, and The Boston Architectural College. Dianne divides her time between her homes in Cambridge, MA, and Winchester, CT. As she would be the first to say, her claim to fame in Norfolk is that she is the daughter of Norfolk Library Associate and former Circulation Assistant DeVere Oakes. Dianne has ably co-curated this summer’s exhibition and will be helping on all fronts in the months to come. Welcome to the team, Dianne!

"Milk nine cents a quart, Everything is high!"

Austin F. Wooster is one of the three Norfolk collectors featured in our 2015 exhibition, *A Farmer, a Sportsman, and a Diplomat: The Romance of Collecting*.

A thrifty Yankee farmer, Wooster kept a careful record of all of his expenditures in a slim notebook that gives us a glimpse of his life, his possessions, his travels, and his humor. Among his capital expenses was a piano, bought in 1903 for \$310; in 1906 his farmhouse on Litchfield Road was wired for electric lights for \$106. Money withdrawn from the bank and a yearly tally of his net worth were carefully documented.

One of the trips Wooster recorded in his notebook was his journey to the Centennial Exposition (1876) in Philadelphia. He notes that he was there three days, spent \$21, and stayed on Merrick Street. He doesn't say so, but it may have been that dose of American patriotic spirit that spurred him to buy Connecticut mantel clocks with Founding Fathers, presidents, and Revolutionary War landmarks painted on their fronts. The romance of history won over this thrifty farmer who became an avid collector.

Tucked among the pages of Wooster's notebook is a copy of a poem he wrote in 1917 as a "reply to Hazel." At the time Wooster was married and the father of young Gertrude, who inherited her father's propensity to collect Americana. The poem includes references to farm life, modernity, aging, weather, and of course high prices.

*Your letter came so sudden,
It nearly knocked me down.
To hear from a lady,
From old Lakeville town.*

Hotels I have stayed nights.		Wood Bought.	
1870 Putnam House, E. 347-4 ave. New York City, N.Y.	1906 - 3.00	April 30 1926 (3 Cords) 12.00	
1874 Eldridge Hotel, Foot-Edward, N. Y.	1907 - 15.00	Oct. 8 1926 (9 Cords) 36.00	
1874 American House, Windsor, Canada.	1908 - 11.00	Oct. 30 1926 (3 Cords) 12.00	
1879 Bardwell House, Rutland, Vermont.	1909 - 20.50	Oct. 31 1926 (9 Cords) 36.00	
1879 Hotel, South Vernon, Vermont.	1910 - 18.00	Oct. 31 1928 (9 Cords) 36.00	
1880 Earle's Hotel, A. Canal & Centre St. New York City, N.Y.	1911 - 12.00	Aug. 23, 24 1929 (9 Cords) 36.00	
1880 Atlantic Hotel, cor 10 & Howard St. Omaha, Nebraska.	1912 - 11.00	Sept. 30 1930 (6 Cords) 24.00	
1880 Valley House, opposite Tabernacle, Salt Lake City, Utah.	1913 - 4.50	1931 (6 Cords) 22.00	
1880 Arcade Hotel, Reno, Nevada.	1914 - 12.63	1932 (6 Cords) 22.00	
1880 Western Hotel, K. St. Sacramento, California.	1915 - 19.00	1933 (6 Cords) 22.00	
1880 Murphys Hotel, Murphys, California.	1916 - 15.00		
1880 Golden Eagle Hotel, Montgomery St. San Francisco, California.	1917 - 18.90		
1880 International Peninsula Hotel, Kearny St. San Francisco, California.	1918 - 39.00		
1880 Red Lion Inn, cor 16 & Haze St. Denver, Colorado.	1919 - 25.00		
1890 International Hotel, E. 17 & 19 Park Row, New York City, N.Y.	1920 - 42.00		
1893 Grand Union Hotel, E. 4 ave & 41 St. New York City, N.Y.	1921 - 36.00		
	1922 - 38.50		
	1923 - 36.00		
	1924 (9 Cords) 36.00		
	1925 (6 Cords) 24.00		

Austin Wooster's Journal

*I was happy to receive it,
It made me feel so gay.
It will not be many days,
Before I am on the way.*

*I am trying to get ready,
Have fed the horse and cow.
So be prepared to meet me,
For I am coming now.*

*I may come by airplain [sic],
But probably by rail.
I am so afraid of autos,
You may look for me by rail.*

*Now don't be disappointed,
If I cannot get away.
I think of it so often,
And wish I could come today.*

*The clouds are moving fast,
It looks like a storm.
So I must give it up,
And wait for a bright morn.*

*We are having all kinds of weather,
Some days are bright and fair.
Some days the wind blows,
Like a cyclone in the air.*

*I fear I would get ill,
If I travel in the cold.
Remember Hazel what I say,
For I am getting old.*

*There is nothing like youth,
You will find that out some day.
When you begin to grow old,
You will know it by the way.*

*Do your hens lay much,
Ours don't lay at all.
Don't know what the trouble is,
Have not layed [sic] since fall.*

*Milk nine cents a quart,
Everything is high.
Groceries of all kinds,
Enough to make one sigh.*

*Tell Irving not to work so hard,
For it will kill him sure.
For only about so much
Can anyone endure.*

*Lots of love
From the Woosters three,
Father, Mother and Baby G.*

Houses on the Move

In the nineteenth century, it was not unusual for a house to be moved. Often it was less costly to relocate one's home than to build from the ground up. There is documentary evidence of a number of houses that were moved within Norfolk. Winthrop Cone, manager of the Stoeckel Estate, moved his house from the estate, where it is pictured here, to Terrace View.

Moving houses from farther afield is a form of collecting. As in collecting clocks, paintings, furniture, or fans, there is the romance of preserving a piece of the past, perhaps an example of extraordinary craftsmanship, or one with an interesting story to tell.

Robert Carrère was the architect responsible for moving three houses to Norfolk: Wood Creek, built about 1790 on East Street in Goshen and moved to the Frederick Barbour property on Ashpohtag Road in 1933; Cobble Hill or Torrington house, built in 1805 in West Torrington and moved to the Charles Garside property on Old Goshen Road in 1940; and the Rose Terry Cooke house, pictured here, built in 1795 in West Winsted and moved to the F.S. Jerome property on Doolittle Drive in 1937. It was perhaps the romantic and literary connection to the writer Rose Terry Cooke that appealed to Jerome when he commissioned Carrère to move her house to Norfolk.

The daughter of affluent, middle-class parents, Rose Terry (1827–1892) grew up in Hartford where she attended Catherine Beecher's Hartford Female Seminary. After teaching at Hartford, she took a post at a Presbyterian school in Burlington, New Jersey, and then worked as a governess for a clergyman's family. She returned to Hartford in 1847 to pursue her literary career and to earn her living as a writer.

She published her first poem "Trailing Arbutus" in 1851 in the *New York Daily Tribune*. She continued to write (at times very prolifically, especially when money was a concern) until her death in 1892. Her writings appeared in all the major periodicals, including Putnam's, Graham's, and Harper's. Terry exhibited such skill and popular appeal during her career that she was one of only two women invited to appear in the first issue of the *Atlantic Monthly* in November of 1857. Her short story "Sally Parson's Duty" premiered alongside works by writers more familiar to readers today: Harriet Beecher Stowe, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, John Greenleaf Whittier, and Ralph Waldo Emerson.

In 1873, at the age of forty-six, Rose Terry married Rollin H. Cooke, a bank clerk in Winsted, Connecticut. While living in Winsted, she greatly admired an old house built by Jenkins and Boyd, Winsted scythe makers, in 1795. She bought the house, restored it and its gardens,



Winthrop Cone house on Stoeckel estate



Rose Terry Cooke house in Winsted

and filled the house with antique furniture. Her house soon became a social center of the town.

This summer we feature the Rose Terry Cooke house and Torrington house at a "Houses on the Move" progressive historic house dinner on the evening of July 25. Reservations are required for this special fund-raising event.

This Day In History: August 19, 1955

This summer marks 60 years since the Great Flood of August 19, 1955, devastated many parts of New England. After one of the hottest and driest summers Norfolk had ever seen, back-to-back tropical storms, the remnants of Hurricanes Connie and Diane, deluged the town with an unprecedented 23 inches of rain. As the Blackberry River overflowed its banks and rampaged down Greenwoods Road, houses, bridges, and trees were washed away, along with two miles of Route 44. Reverend Justin Hartman, pastor of the Congregational Church, remembered:

WE WERE AWAKENED THAT MORNING BY A POUNDING ON THE FRONT DOOR. THERE WAS CLARENCE CARD, AND HE WAS SPEAKING QUITE EXCITEDLY FOR CLARENCE.

“DO YOU KNOW WHAT HAPPENED?”

EVEN BEFORE I COULD ANSWER, HE WENT ON.

“THERE’S BEEN A FLOOD. HOUSES HAVE FALLEN INTO THE BLACKBERRY RIVER. WINSTED AND TORRINGTON ARE IN RUINS.”

I DRESSED AS FAST AS I COULD, RUSHED DOWNTOWN, AND I COULD HARDLY BELIEVE WHAT I SAW. BLACKBERRY RIVER WAS RUNNING DOWN MILL STREET [WESTSIDE ROAD]. THE BRIDGE AT THE CATHOLIC CHURCH WAS GONE. MRS. JACOBSEN’S HOUSE WAS HALFWAY INTO THE RIVER. THE STORES WERE WITHOUT LIGHTS, AND SILENT GROUPS OF PEOPLE STOOD ABOUT ON THE STREETS.

RUMORS WERE ALREADY RIFE ABOUT CONDITIONS, BUT IT DID SEEM FAIRLY CERTAIN THAT WE WERE CUT OFF FROM WINSTED, CANAAN, AND TORRINGTON. WE WERE MOST CONCERNED OF ALL ABOUT MR. AND MRS. PETER CURTISS AND THEIR SIX-MONTH OLD BABY, ALL OF WHOM WERE IN THEIR HOUSE WHEN IT HAD BEEN SWEEPED AWAY. IT SEEMED UNLIKELY THAT ANY OF THEM COULD HAVE SURVIVED. WHAT A SURGE OF RELIEF WENT THROUGH THE TOWN LATER THAT DAY WHEN WE HEARD THEIR STORY AND KNEW THAT THEY WERE SAFE.

Peter and Betty Curtiss were rescued by the heroic actions of Frank Treadway, who crossed the raging waters of the Blackberry River hand-over-hand on a rope, the force of the current tearing at his clothes, to reach the family. For his heroism, he was honored by the Carnegie Hero Fund with a Bronze Medal.

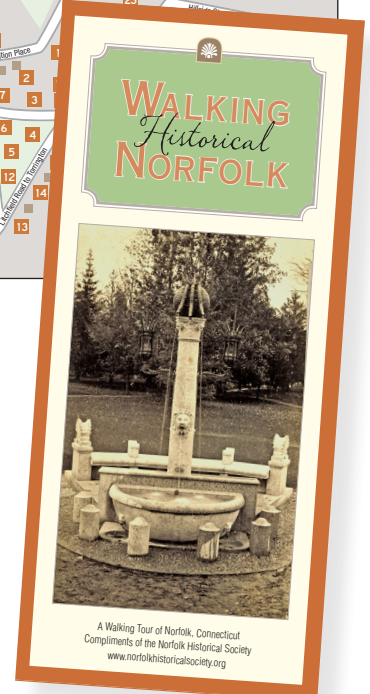
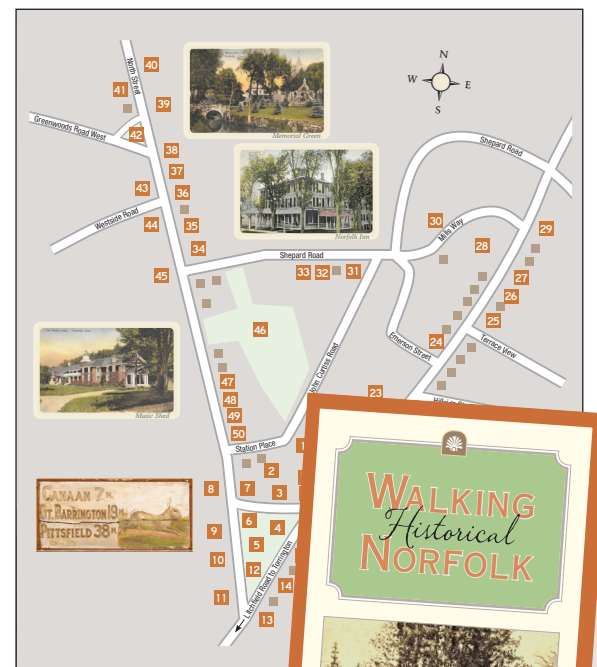


Jacobsen house on Westside Road, 1955

Now Available!

Walking Historical Norfolk Map and Guide

A self-guided walking tour map through the town’s Historic District and beyond is now available free of charge at the Museum, the Library, Town Hall, and Norfolk B&B’s. Depending upon your pace, the tour takes about one hour. It begins and ends on Station Place and takes you around the Village Green and neighboring residential area to Memorial Green and back. Along the way, select historic buildings and sites are pictured in photographs by Christopher Little and numbered with brief descriptions. Walking Historical Norfolk Map and Guide has been generously funded by the AKC Fund, Inc. Mark your calendars for Sunday, Sept. 20, for a special guided “Walking Historical Norfolk” tour. Meet at Station Place at 1:00 P.M



Thanksgiving 150 Years Ago

This year marks the 150th anniversary of the end of the Civil War. Although during the war President Lincoln had sought to establish a nationwide Thanksgiving date, times for its observation varied from state to state. In an effort to foster unity between the North and the South, in 1863 Lincoln proclaimed the final Thursday in November to be the day on which all states would celebrate Thanksgiving. However, the Confederate states did not recognize his authority, and so the date of Thanksgiving remained in flux. In 1865, President Andrew Johnson proclaimed the first Thursday in December a day of national thanksgiving for the end of the "fearful scourge of war" and the "blessings of peace, unity, and harmony."

In Norfolk, the Eldridge and Battell family gathered at Whitehouse on December 7 to begin a celebration that would last two days. The event was documented in a handwritten journal (now at the CT Historical Society) entitled "Thanksgiving Festival & Family Gathering of the Battell Family — Thanksgiving Week 1865." After attending services at the Congregational Church, the family sat down to a traditional turkey dinner, as described by the journal keeper:

THE TURKEY PRESENTED HIS ROASTED SIDES TO THE CARVER AT ONE END OF THE TABLE, WHILE IN NO LESS TEMPTING CONDITION THOUGH [?] BOILED APPEARANCE HIS MATE REARED HER DRUMSTICK HEAVENWARD AT THE OTHER. CHICKENS THAT HAD NEVER KNOWN A DIGESTIVE PANG GRACED THE CENTER OF THE BOARD, WHILE A BRACE OF PARTRIDGES, THEIR "WANDERINGS OVER" QUIETLY FOLDED THEIR WINGS AND BROODED IN [?] GRAVY.

We do not know who was responsible for this colorful description, but every family member present was asked to sign his or her name. The meal lasted four hours. There was a hymn and prayer, and then the family enjoyed games, plays, songs, and stories. The entire event concluded on December 9, 1865.

MEMBERSHIP FORM

The Norfolk Historical Society cordially invites your support through membership. You will receive our newsletter, free admission to programs such as our popular Walks Through History, and invitations to special events.



Name(s) _____

E-mail _____

Address _____

Please check one: ☐ New ☐ Renew

Membership Year: June 1, 2015 to May 31 2016

☐ Family & Friends \$10–1\$25 ☐ Supporting \$50–75

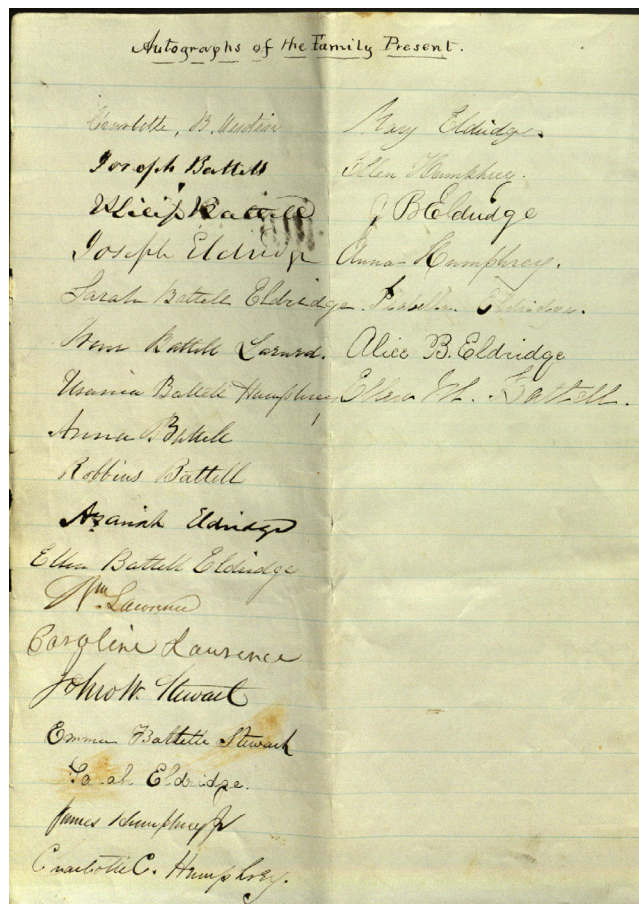
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Membership dues are tax-deductible contributions.

Please visit www.norfolkhistoricalsociety.org to pay online or mail your check payable to:

Norfolk Historical Society, P.O. Box 288, Norfolk, CT 06058



Battell Family Thanksgiving Journal with signatures

Calendar of Events

Sunday, July 19 ***John V.A. MacMurray: Photographs of Peking, 1913-1929.*** A slide talk by Bisi Starkey at the Norfolk Library. 4:00 P.M.

Saturday, July 25 ***Houses on the Move: A Progressive Historic House Dinner.*** 6:00 P.M.
Reservations required.

Sunday, July 26 ***The Recluse Collector: Grenville Winthrop.*** A slide talk by Libby Borden and Robert C. Hobbs at the Norfolk Library. 4:00 P.M.

Sunday, Sept. 6 ***A Walk through Norfolk's History.*** 1:00 P.M. Check website for details.

Sunday, Sept. 20 ***"Walking Historical Norfolk."*** A guided tour with Ann Havemeyer and Barry Webber. Meet at Station Place, 1:00 P.M.

Saturday, Oct. 3 ***Behind-the-Scenes Tour at the Museum.*** 2:00 P.M.

Sunday, Dec. 6 ***Annual Meeting of the Norfolk Historical Society.*** 1:00 P.M.

The Norfolk Historical Museum is open Saturdays and Sundays from 1:00 to 4:00 P.M. June through October and by appointment, 860-542-5761.

Editors: Ann Havemeyer and Dianne Pierce
Illustration of Norfolk Historical Museum by Mary Beth Whalen

The Norfolk Historical Society
13 Village Green
P.O. Box 288
Norfolk, CT 06058-0288