

Newsletter of the NORFOLK HISTORICAL SOCIETY

2022 SEASON

NORFOLK, CONNECTICUT

"Silents Please" and No Spitting!

SETH MOSELEY (1909-2001) grew up in Norfolk and wrote colorful reminiscences about the fun he had in the 1920s, from sliding down a snowy Main Street on the "Big Ripper" to watching silent films in Village Hall. His articles give us a taste of life on Main Street in Norfolk, complementing the

photographs and artifacts on display in our 2022 exhibition *Main Street in Norfolk*.

A journalist by profession, Moseley reported first for the *New York Evening Journal* and then the Associates Press. Among his "scoops" was an exclusive interview with Charles A. Lindbergh

just hours after the aviator's infant son was kidnapped in 1932. Moseley was covering the Hindenburg landing at Lakehurst, New Jersey, when the airship went down in flames. His favorite story, however, was a chance meeting with Greta Garbo whom he found hiding in the men's room on board the S. S. Gripsholm ocean liner in 1937. She told him emphatically that she was not a recluse.

But it was the movie stars of the early silent film era that packed the upstairs theater in Village Hall when Moseley was a teen, as he recalled in his article "Silents Please."

"I wish they'd bring 'em back alive. I mean the movie stars who twinkled on the screen on the second floor of Norfolk's Village Hall above the O'Connor store. Mary Pickford was the superstar and Doug Fairbanks in *The Mark of Zorro* [1920] was every boy's hero. All you had to have to see those silents in the early 1920s in the

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Village Hall during the silent film era.

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Main Street: A Look Back 100 Years

Main Street was ubiquitous in America in the early 20th century. More than just the primary retail street of a village, town or small city, it was the hub of social interaction, a place that nurtured community and gave the town its distinctive identity. Yet the designation “Main Street” can conjure up widely different images: nostalgic visions of a carefree past as romanticized by Walt Disney’s theme park recreation; or the parochial nature of small-town life as satirized by Sinclair Lewis in his 1920 novel of the same name. Whatever connotations Main Street brings to mind, its architectural fabric provided townsfolk with a sense of place.

Norfolk too had a Main Street. As seen on period maps, it ran from the sharp curve just past the Village Green north to the Catholic Church. Our 2022 exhibition traced its evolution from the time when frame houses contained both places of residence and individual shops in the mid 19th century to the construction of multi-purpose commercial buildings in the early 20th century and the stores, restaurants, and businesses they housed as the century progressed.

Photographs capture life on Main Street: shopkeepers outside with their wares; villagers in horse-drawn carriages stopping to greet one another as they passed on the



street; visitors relaxing on the porch of the Norfolk Inn or dining at the Martini Hotel, returning home with colored postcards of Norfolk’s attractive “Business District;” automobiles parked on either side of the street as people stopped to get groceries at the food market, or chatted on the steps of the Norfolk Savings Bank.

When the architectural fabric of Main Street was torn apart in the later 20th century with the destruction of three significant structures (the Norfolk Inn, the Martini Hotel, and the Hardware Store on Station Place), a feeling of loss pervaded the community, akin to losing a loved one or a friend. Although new buildings were built on the site of the old, the town’s identity and well-being was tied in a very

profound way to the sense of place nurtured by what was once called Main Street.



Old Norfolk Trade Signs from Norfolk Historical Society Collection



Main Street Memories



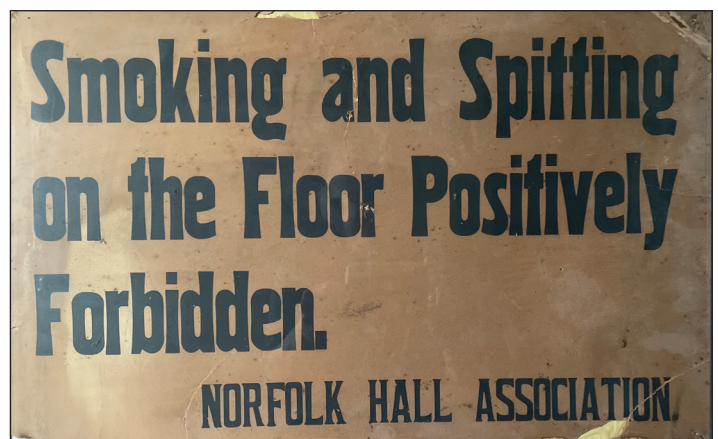
Reactions to our exhibitions are always a fun surprise and this year's *Main Street: A Look Back 100 Years*, is a good example. Almost every visitor, Norfolk and beyond, had a memory to share. A local example included the comment "Kevin O'Conner made the best butterscotch sundaes! Harkening back to the day when the Norfolk Pharmacy sported the ever popular soda fountain. Here in this photograph Kevin is seen with Joe Pallone in the new pharmacy, built in 1960 with customer Peggy Hoover.

Village Hall *continued from page 1*

Norfolk business district were 10 cents and a chaperone: i.e. an older person responsible for your conduct; one who would tell you to cool it, and not punch the wooden floor with your feet when Theda Bara, the vicious vampire, destroyed men, and Charlie Chaplin duck-walked off the screen and into our hearts to live there forever. Those were the days.

Adults paid a quarter. The orchestra was up front, slightly to the right, and consisted of one piano, played at the start by Miss May O'Donnell and later by Katherine Blow. When Mary Miles Minter simpered, the music was softly romantic; when Mack Sennett's Keystone Kops and cross-eyed Ben Turpin burst on the scene, the piano went wild. The pianists dearly earned their salaries – if there were any.

They used to pack them in every Saturday night and of course it was always a serial. Richard Dix's episodes kept us coming every week. We saw Pearl White



hanging to the edge of a cliff in *Perils of Pauline*. In order to see what happened to Pauline, or the cliff, we had to go back for next week's episode. Pearl always recovered. Of course the film would always break. And one slide said "Please don't spit on the floor." But when they put on the serial in which a man had a red eye in the middle of his forehead, eventually we were not permitted to go because we suffered from nightmares."

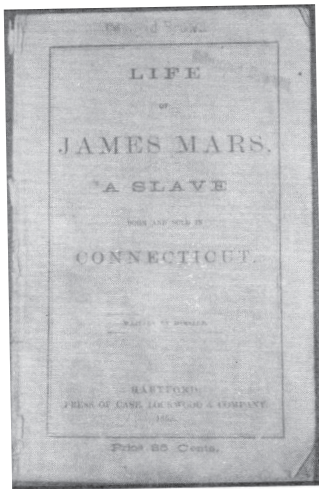


Update from the Executive Director

Well, another year has flown by in a blink! The end of 2021 was busy with our well-attended Baubles, Bangles & Beads fundraiser and exhibit. We were fortunate to have been loaned a marvelous collection of jewelry made specifically for the Women's Suffrage cause. The exhibit was one of the more "glittering" we have ever mounted! This was followed by another successful Cake Auction (see page 7).

GRANTS AND AWARDS

We are very pleased to announce that the Norfolk Historical Society has recently been awarded several grants. Thanks to an NHS patron, we received funds (in a 3-to-1 match) from the Nellie Mae Education Fund to help reprint the autobiography of James Mars. Mars's first-hand account of his life as one of the last slaves born and sold in Connecticut is an important historical document. The booklet we published 30 years ago, which included his autobiography, will be updated with additional material discovered since then.



The AKC Fund has awarded us a grant to update and reprint our popular walking tour map and guide. And the Connecticut Humanities Council (CHC) awarded us a

CT Cultural Fund Operating Support Grant for 2022. These funds are being used to photograph our collection. Photographs will then be added to our database, which will be searchable online through our website. We are grateful to our friends and supporters for enabling us to continue our work.

Clockwise from left: an original cover of the Mar's pamphlet; a sampling of the items on display at the Baubles, Bangles & Beads fundraiser; the signature quilt purchased by the Norfolk Historical Society



The Automobile Comes To Norfolk

When automobiles appeared on the streets of Norfolk, Augustus P. Curtiss converted the stable housing his horse and carriage livery business to a garage stocked with automotive supplies and gasoline. The garage was located on Shepard Road. Look carefully and you will notice Shell's familiar scallop shell logo on top of the gasoline pump, which was on display in our Main Street exhibition this summer. The price of gasoline is advertised as 22 cents, the average price of a gallon of gas in the mid 1920's. If you think that sounds too good to be true, remember to adjust for inflation. In today's dollars 22 cents translates to about \$3.50. The price of gas was just as much a concern then as it is now. In just

ten years, the price had almost doubled from 14 cents a gallon in 1914. The demand for gasoline during World War I and the increase in consumption by the growing number of automobiles precipitated the steep rise and fueled fears that the supply would soon run out. On January 6, 1916, headlines in *The New York Times* predicted that within thirty years the oil fields in this country will be facing exhaustion.



Finding Treasure: Adding to the NHS Museum Collection

In recent years, we have acquired very special collections, either through purchase or donation: Marie Kendall's personal photographs and memorabilia, donated by her granddaughter; family, church, and town artifacts collected over a lifetime by Janice Bruey Gabelmann and purchased from the Gabelmann estate; Gregg Currier's extraordinary postcard collection; and items from the Stevens/Hamant family, donated by a granddaughter. Collections are carefully processed by curator Ann Havemeyer, cataloged, numbered, and entered into our database.

We also look for Norfolk-related artifacts online, and it is always fun when we find an item of real interest. Recently a Norfolk signature quilt came up for auction, and NHS was the successful bidder. Signature quilts were popular in the mid-nineteenth century.



They were made with squares of fabric signed in ink or with embroidery. These quilts were usually made as gifts: for a trousseau, to celebrate a milestone, for a family heading west. Sometimes the signatures are local, and other examples show names from afar. A signature quilt is a precious keepsake for the owner and represents the friendships and memories of the time the quilt was made. We currently have six signature quilts in our collection

and, interestingly, there are very few repeat signatures among them. The newest addition to the collection has some names familiar to us. Two squares were signed by Mr. and Mrs. John Shepard, owners of the Shepard Tavern (now the Norfolk Condominiums) on the Village Green; Mrs. Warren Cone, whose family operated the Cone & O'Connor store (now Infinity Hall); and O. L. Wolcott, a jeweler and silversmith in Norfolk.



Battell Fountain Restoration

The beautiful and historic Battell Fountain commissioned and erected in 1889 by Mary Eldridge in memory of her uncle, Joseph Battell, was designed by the well know architect Stamford White, with bronze work by noted sculptor Augustus Saint-Gaudens. This architectural gem has greeted man and beast as they approach the village from the west. Designed with a supply of fresh drinking water the fountain has a large basin for passing horses, with two shallow bowls are ground level for all other smaller four legged friends. To the rear of the column is another small basin with a stream of water coming from the open mouth of a fish carved into the stone. Originally there was also a bronze cup hanging on a chain for those who might not want to drink right from the flowing jet.

130 years had taken it's toll on the structure and thanks to the Norfolk Community Association, the fountain is now fully restored and functioning again. Francis Miller of Conserve Art spearheaded the restoration(see articles in Norfolk Now for full details).

To commemorate this achievement the NHS is offering a limited addition Holiday Ornament depicting the historic fountain. This will be the first in a series showcasing the unique architectural gems of our town. The ornaments are available on our website or at the Town Clerks office.



CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Museum Gallery
open by appointment

December 10, 2022

January, 2023

February 12, 2023

Main Street: A Look Back 100 Years

Annual Cake Auction 5:30 at the Museum

Zoom presentation to be announced

Annual Meeting, 2:00 PM at the Norfolk Library

*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.*

Annual Cake Auction

Back and better than ever! On December 4th, 2021 we hosted our Seventh Annual cake auction. The live and in-person event drew an enthusiastic crowd of bidders, all vying for the delectable confections made by Norfolk's top bakers! Auctioneer John Fernandez brought in "record setting" prices making for a fun and profitable evening for the Museum's fundraiser! Many thanks to all who participated. Our bakers were: Lisa Aicclair, Jennie Brown, Jill Chase, Walter Godlewski, Larry Hannafin, Tom Hlas, Hartley Mead, Caryn Trager, Alyson Thomson and an iconic "cake painting" by Turi.

This year's cake auction will be held at the museum on December 10th.



2021 Cake Sale
photos by Peter Coffeen



MEMBERSHIP/YEAR-END GIFT 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: 2023

☐ Family & Friends \$25

☐ Supporting \$50-75

☐ Donor \$100-\$300

☐ Patron \$500

☐ Benefactor \$1000

☐ Additional Gift of Support _____

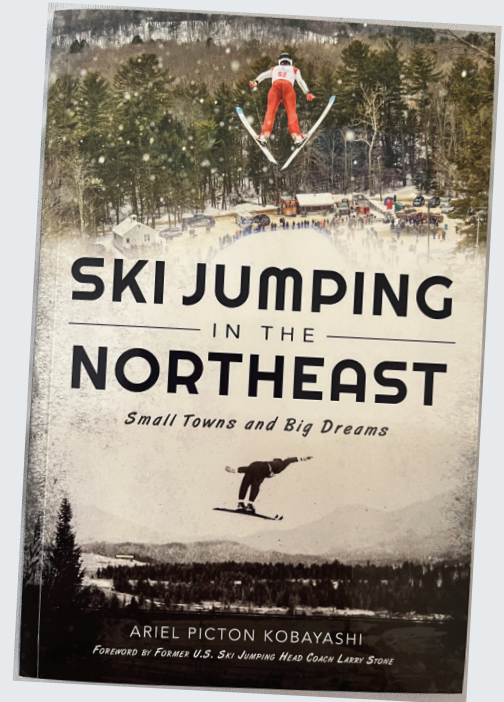
Membership dues are tax-deductible contributions.

Please visit www.norfolkhistoricalsociety.org to pay online or mail your check payable to:
Norfolk Historical Society, P.O. Box 288, Norfolk, CT 06058

Ski Jumping in the Northeast

Our 2022 programing began with a virtual presentation featuring author and coach Ariel Picton Kobayashi in conversation about her new book, *Ski Jumping in the Northeast: Small Towns and Big Dreams*.

Dozens of towering ski jumps once dotted the landscape across the northeastern United States. Introduced by Norwegian immigrants in the late 1800s, ski jumping became a popular winter sport. The Norfolk Winter Sports Association built a jump near the Blackberry River Inn and hosted competitions from 1933 to 1938. Special "Snow Trains" brought spectators and competitors to town. Ariel's book tells the tale of past glories and the continuing story of jumping in our area. A recording of the program and her book are available on our website www.norfolkhistoricalsociety.org.



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