

Newsletter of the NORFOLK HISTORICAL SOCIETY

SUMMER 2017

NORFOLK, CONNECTICUT

World War I Posters: A Stunning Visual

You won't want to miss the vibrant display of original posters interspersed throughout this summer's exhibition *Norfolk in the Great War*. Thanks to the generosity of several donors, the oversize posters have been restored, and their brilliant colors and striking graphic design bring to life the importance of the poster as a tool to sell the war to the American public.

Posters were both visually appealing and easy to reproduce. As an advertising tool, they could be placed on walls, in windows, in trains or cable cars, and in magazines. To merge this popular form of advertising with key messages about the war, the U.S. government asked Charles Dana Gibson, one of most famous American illustrators of the period, to encourage the country's best illustrators to contribute to the war effort. The result was an extraordinary group of posters, many of which are in the Society's collection.

Posters inspired men to join the military and women to serve in relief organizations such as the YWCA and the Red Cross, or as government stenographers. Posters asked you to do your part to finance the war

by purchasing bonds or subscribing to war loans. If coins transform into bullets and crush the enemy, so will your money help win the war. Propaganda posters made you fear the enemy depicted as butchers with blood on their hands or in caricature wearing a pickelhaube [if you don't know what a pickelhaube is, come to the exhibition to see one on display]. Posters told you, with pointed finger, what you could do, as in the most iconic poster *I Want You for the U.S. Army*. The image of Uncle Sam was created in 1917 by James Montgomery Flagg. Inspired

by a British recruitment poster showing Lord Kitchener in a similar pose, Flagg used his own face for that of Uncle Sam.

Less well known than Uncle Sam is the vibrant image of Columbia, the female personification of the United States. *Columbia Calls*, designed by Frances Adams Halsted in 1916, shows the symbolic figure holding a U.S. flag and a sword while standing on top of a globe. In the lower right of the poster is the text of Halsted's patriotic poem, "Columbia Calls."

A century later, these indelible images retain their emotional power.



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From the President

This year, our exhibition on Norfolk and World War I has allowed us to delve into a past — one that is not always pleasant, but that is ever so important to preserve and record for the future. An important part of our mission to preserve Norfolk's distinctive history involves gathering our Norfolk stories, and I want to thank all of you who have told us your family's story. These personal accounts make our history come alive. They help us understand what our ancestors endured to bring us to where we are today, an important history lesson we should not forget.

For a small museum, we are fortunate to have such a diverse collection that allows us to bring to life compelling and interesting aspects of our past. Our period WWI posters, for example, shed light on the mood of the country at that time. 17 of these

amazing works of art are on view in our current exhibition. A special thank you to the eight patrons who adopted one of these posters for cleaning and conservation. The results are spectacular! It is so wonderful to see these works of art brought back to the vibrant objects they were intended to be for building morale and motivating a nation to join a terrible war.

I would also like to thank each and every one of you, our members, for your continued patronage. I am please to report that we have seen a rise in both membership and giving levels, which is so meaningful to us and helps us move ahead with our mission. We have many interesting programs this season, and we hope to see you often.

Barry Webber

NHS Begins Multi-Faceted Marie Kendall Project

Marie Kendall (1854–1943) was a self-taught photographer who moved to Norfolk in 1884 and for the next few decades produced a visual record of the town's landscape, people,



Marie Kendall

activities, and built environment. Kendall made tens of thousands of glass negatives and multiple prints, creating a remarkably rich document of Norfolk's "Golden Age"—a time when the town and the world were changing rapidly.

The Norfolk Historical Society owns the largest Kendall archive of glass negatives and prints, one of the treasures of the Society and of the town, and we are planning three ambitious projects to bring her pioneering work to larger public view.

The Summer 2018 exhibition will be devoted to Kendall and her place in the history of female photographers. The next in our series of books on significant aspects of Norfolk history will be a monograph on Kendall. And lastly, we are digitizing 461 of Kendall's glass negatives, plus approximately 1500 of over 3000 photo prints in our collection. We have received a grant from the Norfolk Foundation for

the digitization project, which will make this archive accessible to the public and potentially an important resource in town planning. Our goal is to include these digital images in the Connecticut Digital Archive, a statewide repository of historic material, so that Kendall's work can be searched and viewed by a much larger audience.

This winter a professional archivist provided us with a site consultation through the State of Connecticut Traveling Archivist program, for which we received a grant. She advised us on the best storage for our collection of large-scale framed Marie Kendall prints. A recent bequest will make this possible. Her report also recommended prioritizing the Kendall digitization project. By making Kendall's remarkable work more accessible, we advance our mission in the preservation and publication of Norfolk history, a boon to the town and beyond.

Artwork from the Trenches

Sheds Light on WWI Soldiers' Lives

Businessman and Norfolk summer resident Frederic C. Walcott went to Europe in 1915 to negotiate war loans with France and Italy so they could buy materials from the U.S. While there, he was asked by John D. Rockefeller, Jr. to become an agent for the Rockefeller Foundation to investigate the condition of refugees in Belgium and to meet with Herbert Hoover, who had organized the Commission for Relief in Belgium in 1914.

Walcott had an unusually close-range look at the effects of the war when he was given safe passage into Belgium and Poland, and what he saw made him determined to raise awareness for the plight of over a million starving and dying refugees. He not only wrote about what he saw, but also brought back physical evidence of the effects of the war.

A selection of objects, on view in our exhibition *Norfolk in the Great War*, includes scraps of medieval stained glass, barbed wire strands, part of a shovel, a misshapen canteen, and missile heads—all of which he likely retrieved from roadsides, ruins, and trenches, and all attesting to the destruction and misery of the war.

Walcott also brought back “trench art.” Soldiers fended off boredom and combat fatigue in the trenches

by making objects, often of remarkable grace and sophistication, out of materials at hand, such as bullet or artillery shell casings. They created objects of beauty from the horrors of the war. Walcott’s collection includes several rings made from cut and carved bullet shells, and lighters made from belt buckles.

Art was also used to rehabilitate soldiers in hospitals, especially those with nerve damage from “shell shock,” a terrifying condition caused by diabolical new warfare methods like mustard gas, tanks, and machine guns. Included in the exhibition are several wood and paper figures made by the wounded, apparently bought by Walcott in Paris to benefit the war effort.

The flat wooden figures depict such tropes as an American airman carrying a German warplane under his arm and a British soldier pulling by a rope a green-faced German with his pockets full of plunder. Such subjects made light of the war and also gave Allied soldiers hope for a good outcome. Some of these figures have remarkable and very important survivals: paper tags from the store on the Champs Elysees where they were purchased. Written by hand is the name of the wounded (blessé), type of wound, where they were wounded, and date. These small objects, so carefully kept by Walcott, speak volumes about the lives of wounded soldiers and the efforts to rehabilitate them.



The Gay Widow and the Doomed Spy

A NORFOLK MAN—REGINALD ROWLAND, FATHER OF AYRESLEA DENNY—WAS UNWITTINGLY TANGLED IN A WEB OF INTRIGUE DURING WORLD WAR I WHEN ENGLAND AND EUROPE WERE SWARMING WITH SPIES AND HIS IDENTITY WAS STOLEN. THIS ARTICLE APPEARED IN *MASTER DETECTIVE* MAGAZINE IN 1936 AND WAS WRITTEN BY SIR BASIL THOMSON, LEGENDARY CHIEF OF THE CRIMINAL INVESTIGATION DEPARTMENT FOR SCOTLAND YARD DURING THE WAR.

On a morning in May, 1915, I was at work in my office in Scotland Yard when a Staff Colonel from the War Office was announced. I must not give his real name: for the purpose of this story I will call him Colonel Dallas. From his pouch he produced a letter written in perfect English. This letter had been intercepted by the Postal Censor because it was addressed to an office in Rotterdam which we knew to be used as a 'cover' address for communications from German spies.

It was a rambling kind of letter, apparently written by an American tourist of ample means, for it described his rides in the Park, and his excursions with "Lizzie" to various beauty spots in England and Scotland. But there was a suspicious absence of any reference to the war and there were passages and words in it that did not make sense.

Some of these words, we knew, were those that were taught to German spies in the German espionage school in Antwerp to indicate classes of warships. At any rate there was ample ground for sending for the writer and getting him to give a full account of his movements, as well as the meaning of the doubtful passages in his letter, which was signed 'Rowland.'

"Now, B.T., it is up to you to find Rowland and put him through the hoop," said Dallas. "Ring me up when you get him and I'll come down."

It was less difficult to find the writer of the letter than I had anticipated. An All Station message to comb the hotels in each division for an American bearing the name of Rowland, brought in information about him within six hours. A Reginald Rowland was staying in a well-known London hotel, much frequented by Americans, and had been going the pace—lunching and dining at expensive restaurants and always with the same lady—a Mrs. Wertheim, who had registered as a British subject. She, as it appeared, was not in London at the moment, but was believed to be touring Scotland in her own car with a lady's maid.

Clearly she must be a lady of expensive tastes to be doing this during wartime when everybody else was cutting down personal expenses. The long-distance telephone to the Scottish police soon ran her to earth and we had the satisfaction of knowing that she was

on her way to London under the escort of a constable.

Meanwhile we were collecting information about her. She had been born in Germany and had come to England on her marriage with Wertheim who had taken out British naturalization papers, and therefore, since under British law the wife takes the nationality of the husband, she had legally acquired British nationality.

The couple had not been happy together, and they had obtained a legal separation on terms that made her financially independent, though not wealthy—in fact, she had had to be content with life in cheap hotels and boarding houses. She had then been living in England for nearly ten years, but she was said to be equally at home in Berlin, the Hague and London.

As soon as Lizzie Wertheim arrived in London, she was brought to Scotland Yard and kept in a waiting room while her American friend was being brought in. As soon as he was brought in, I telephoned to Colonel Dallas and Sir Reginald Hall, the Director of Admiralty Intelligence, who came down immediately. A stenographer was called in: he sat unobtrusively at a table apart. The low armchair in which throughout the war all the spies sat for interrogation was wheeled up and Rowland was brought into the room. He was a man of a little over thirty—slim, well dressed and intelligent. He spoke English fluently and might easily have been taken for an American.

My first question was to ask him for his passport and he produced it. On the face of it the document appeared genuine enough, but I slipped it into an envelope and sent it by messenger to my friend, Edward Bell, who was second secretary to the American Embassy. Before I had got very far with the interrogation, Edward Bell himself was announced and the room was cleared to receive him.

He was excited and indignant. "This passport," he said, "is a forgery right through. Look at it side by side with this genuine American passport that I've brought down to show you. The texture of the paper is all wrong and so is the red paper of the seal, but the American eagle! Look at him! You'd think he'd been fighting: he's lost a feather in his tail and his feet are turned round the wrong way."

In order to test Mr. Bell's diagnosis I sent to the

laboratory for a bottle of hydrochloric acid and then and there we touched both seals—the genuine and the forgery—with a drop of the acid. Both changed color, but it was not the same color.

When the suspect returned to his chair I was on stronger ground. “Where did you get this passport?” I asked him.

“From the State Department in Washington, sir.”

“Think again, Mr. Rowland. This passport is a forgery and a very clumsy forgery. Where did you get it?”

“I can give you no other answer than that.”

“Well then, I’ll ask you another question. Since you are carrying a forged passport, your name is not Reginald Rowland. What is your real name?”

He began to twist his nervous fingers together. I had had a hint from the hotel that he used to play the piano in the evenings and played it very well, and as he continued to stare at me without replying, I said, “You are a professional pianist, are you not?”

This new question relieved the tension. “Yes, sir, I am.” He was now on the surer ground of veracity. He told us that he had played at concerts in New York, Boston and Philadelphia, and he was proceeding to enlarge on the theme when I asked him where he had first met Mrs. Wertheim. He pulled up with a start and after a moment’s hesitation said that he had met her for the first time after he had landed in England which was quite true.

“She is a lady of expensive tastes?” There was a passage in his intercepted letter complaining of ‘Lizzie’ in this respect. He seemed to be startled by the correctness of this suggestion, but he agreed. He was even more startled when I produced the intercepted letter and took him through it sentence by sentence and asked him to describe the Dutch friend to whom it was addressed.

He said that he was a man whom he had met in a hotel in America; that when he (Rowland) had come to England this man had gone on to Holland and they had promised to keep up a correspondence.

“That’s very curious,” I said, “because we know all about him. He keeps an office in Rotterdam for one purpose only—to receive letters from German spies in England. You didn’t know that?”

The poor man had turned very white. “No, I didn’t,” he stammered.

Then I took him though his movements in Scotland in the neighborhood of the Grand Fleet; his attempts to get on familiar terms with British Naval Officers. He denied all accusations. In one respect he was a most incompetent spy: he had never envisaged the possibility that he would be detected, nor thought out what line he would take. Quite suddenly I broke off the interrogation, rather to the disappointment of my officer colleagues.

“Why didn’t you go on pressing him,” asked Dallas.

“You didn’t notice his face when I told him that

Lizzie Wertheim was in the building and that we were going to put her through the hoop? He doesn’t trust that woman and unless I’m very much mistaken he will try to get in first and tell us the whole story.” Rowland was sent over to the cells in Cannon Rowe, the police station which adjoins Scotland Yard, to meditate over his interrogation, and Lizzie Wertheim was sent for.

She was a stout, flashy-looking person, verging on middle age. She was full of assurance—tough, brazen and impertinent. When I questioned her about her tours in Scotland she replied impudently that as a British subject she had a right to travel where she would. Whenever I put an embarrassing question she laughed brazenly, and getting up from the low armchair, she walked up and down the room, flirting a large silk scarf as if she were practicing a new dance step.

With a woman of that type it was a waste of time to carry on a detailed interrogation. While she was dancing across the room I pulled her up short. “As you won’t sit still in your chair and answer the questions put it to you, Madam, I shall send you over to a police cell on suspicion of being a German spy, but it is only fair to tell you that you are in a very serious position.”

In time of war, when half of Europe was closed to us, the collection of evidence took time. It was ascertained from the passenger list that a man named Reginald Rowland had come from New York four months before, but he did not land in any British port. Was this Rowland our prisoner, and if so, where had he been in the meantime? And where, if not in Europe, had he obtained the forged passport? The answer to these questions was being sought by Colonel Dallas in Holland while I was trusting to the loneliness of a police cell working on Rowland’s artistic temperament to furnish the solution.

They brought me a daily report in him from Cannon Row police station. He was growing increasingly nervous and started at every sound.

“I forgot one formality the other day, Mr. Rowland [I said at my next visit]. I did not get you to sign for your property.” He took the pen from me mechanically and stooped to sign his name.

“Thank you,” I said, folding the paper and turning toward the door. He stopped me. “Will you tell me one thing, sir? Am I to be tried for my life?”

“I believe that you are to be tried.”

Forgetting that he had made no confession, he leaned toward me and asked, “What is the penalty for what I have done? Is it death?”

“I cannot tell you. You have not yet been tried.”

“I can see from your face that it is death. I must know. I have to think of my poor old mother in Stettin. Will you let me write a full confession?”

“If you wish to, yes, but it is my duty to warn you that anything you do write will almost certainly be used

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Birthday Bags Uncovered on Floor of Barn

You never know what you'll find when cleaning out an old barn. Much to our delight, the birthday bags in the photo were recently discovered on the floor of an old barn, covered with dirt, and donated to our collection just before the opening of our summer exhibition. These birthday bags were made as a way to raise money for "comfort bags" for the troops. Comfort bags consisted of warm clothing, stationery, chocolate, string, needles and thread, and toiletry items, and were given to the troops as they shipped out. The birthday bags were designed for children to put pennies in, one cent for each year of their life, and came with a tag that read:



*Come! Come! A penny a year
For the boys at the front
From us at the rear
Your pennies will send a packet of cheer
To those who fight for us over here.*

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against you at your trial."

"Never mind that. I have carried the secret long enough. Now I want to tell the whole truth."

"Very well. Sit down at this table and take your time. I will head the paper. 'Statement of' What name shall I put?

"Georg T. Breeckow. That is my real name. My father was a piano manufacturer in Stettin and my mother is still living there."

Two hours later the statement was brought over to me. It was four pages long and as we knew then and afterwards, it was true in every particular. It was a remarkable story. After his father's death Breeckow had gone over to New York to try his luck as a professional pianist.

This was in 1908. He was only moderately successful in obtaining engagements, and when war broke out his finances were at a very low ebb. During his six years in America he had learned to speak English without a trace of a German accent. One day he had met a German who told him that he could introduce him to someone who would put him in the way of earning good money. The man belonged to von Papen's organization, von Papen being then the German military attaché in Washington.

The man assured him that he could pass for an American in England, and that being an intelligent and well-educated man, he could serve his country far better as a secret agent than if he joined the German army. Breeckow consented. Well furnished with money and with the forged passport which was his undoing, he sailed for Holland. The German spy agent

in Rotterdam sent him on to the German espionage school in Antwerp to be instructed in his work, and in due course he crossed to England with the address of Lizzie Wertheim in his pocket.

As a wealthy American travelling for his health he passed the port officers without difficulty: the flaws in his forged passport were not detected. Having to keep up the character of a rich American tourist he had been liberally furnished with money, but Lizzie Wertheim's passion for spending caused him continual anxiety, and eventually he arranged that she should go to Scotland alone while he stayed in London to work up her reports and send them over to his employers.

Colonel Dallas was delighted when he read the confession that was to save him a great deal of unnecessary work in building up the evidence for the prosecution. The opportunity for learning more about the enemy spy school in Antwerp from its latest graduate was too good to miss. At that period of the war there was a refreshing innocence about the German methods.

Mrs. Wertheim, sobered by her sojourn in Holloway Prison, was in no mood for attempting to blandish the jury. The two were tried before three judges of the High Court on September 20th, 1915. Both were found guilty. Breeckow was sentenced to death by shooting: Mrs. Wertheim to ten years penal servitude, as it was humanely considered that she had been acting under the influence of Breeckow. She was sent to Aylesbury Female Convict Prison where she died in 1921.

Reginald Rowland kept a scrapbook with clippings documenting the passport forgery. The scrapbook and his passport are on display in our summer exhibition Norfolk in the Great War.

Archival Sleuthing

Over the course of innumerable hours spent at the Museum last winter, Board member Gregg Carrier read and indexed a cache of material related to the Stevens and Pettibone families in Norfolk, most from 1790 to 1850. Along the way, Gregg not only helped us organize an important archive, but he also uncovered some interesting information about the early history of the town. Some highlights include:

A group of legal documents gives a sense of how legal matters were handled by town officials. One interesting finding was a group of receipts for reimbursable expenses, like the 1824-1825 New Year's Eve Ball, and items relating to the construction of the meetinghouse in 1814. In addition, there is a series of "bills," listing who was present at various social events and how much each owed for their libations, which in some cases was considerable!

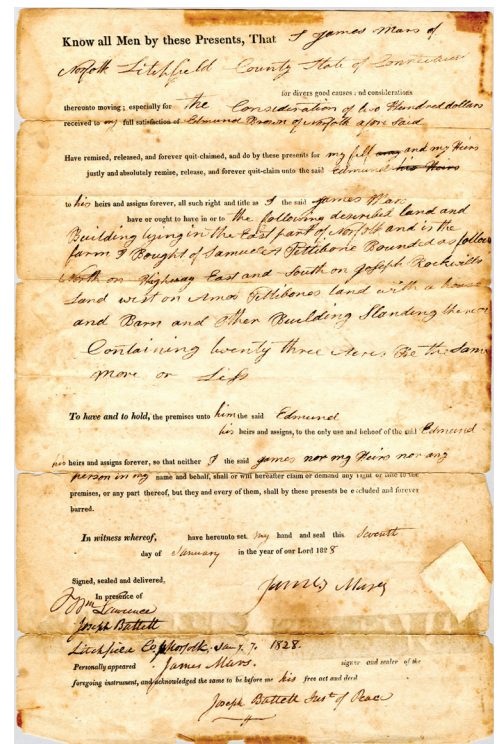
Around 1805 the Pettibones were involved in the construction of roads and bridges for the

Greenwoods Turnpike in CT and the Mohawk Turnpike in NY. A group of documents relates to this important moment of connecting Norfolk to the larger world, showing the complexities of infrastructure creation in a time when these things were done as private enterprise.

Many of the Stevens papers are related to the intestate death of Halsey Stevens, husband of Desiah Pettibone, with Probate Judge Amos Pettibone presiding. The papers include legal judgements by Amos and other Pettibone judges involving various townspeople.

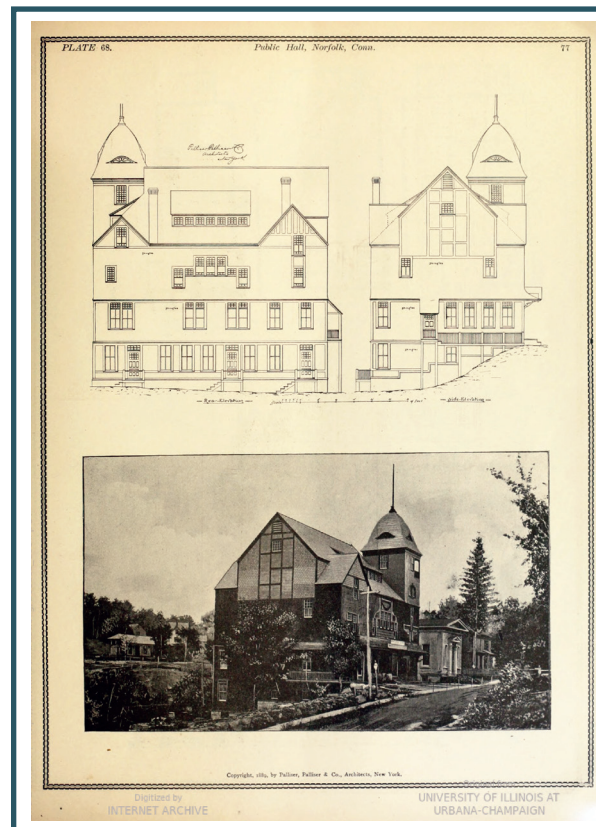
Although very little mention of the important Stevens hat-making enterprise was found, land transfers, loans, business deals, and contracts are included, giving a glimpse of how commerce was conducted in Norfolk at the time.

Lastly, there are two papers of significance to Norfolk's African-American history. The first involves the bonding process in 1798 for transferring slaves Jupiter Mars, his wife, and daughter from Virginia to Norfolk. The other is a simple land transaction from a Pettibone to freed



slave James Mars—a remarkable moment in time.

These documents give us a glimpse into the social, legal, and commercial life of Norfolk in this period. They are in remarkably good shape, and thanks to Gregg they are now carefully organized and indexed for easier searching.



Village Hall Architect Discovered

While researching for her Master's dissertation at the University of Cambridge (UK), Lorie Komlyn stumbled upon a pattern book that contained an architect's rendering of Norfolk's Village Hall (now Infinity Hall). Lorie's dissertation was a study of the purpose-built, multifunctional opera houses of regional New England constructed between 1875 and 1910. She found the Norfolk Opera House/Village Hall to be an intriguing example, particularly as the decision to build it and the fundraising effort was initiated by local townswomen. Determined to uncover the identity of the architect, Lorie focused her research on the styles of many different types of public buildings, not just opera houses. And that was how she happened upon George Palliser's pattern book Court Houses, Village, Town and City Halls, Jails, and Plans of Other Public Buildings (New York: Ogilvie, 1889). As luck would have it, there were three renderings for "Public Hall in Norfolk" in the book. George Palliser was a very influential architect and designer of the time. Lorie sent us the good news, writing: "I do enjoy that I was an American, doing research on a very American-type of building for a degree at a British university, to discover that this particular building was actually designed by a British architect who emigrated and then made his mark in America!"

Program at the Norfolk Library: Songs of World War I



In conjunction with our exhibition *Norfolk in the Great War*, Doug Schmolze, singer and guitarist, will present a centennial retrospective of songs from the 19teens at the Norfolk Library on Sunday, July 23, at 4:00 pm. With anecdotes and historical notes the program provides insight into the mood of the era that ushered in the “War to End all Wars”. Audiences will recognize (and sing along to) patriotic songs such as “Over There” and “You’re a Grand Old Flag” by George M. Cohan that remain popular, especially on civic occasions. But composers of the era also produced ragtime, waltzes, and romantic songs such as “The Land Where the Good Songs Go” by Jerome Kern and, on the lighter side, “When I Had a Uniform On” by Cole Porter. Visuals and lyrics to sing-a-longs are provided by an accompanying power-point presentation. This program is suitable for families.

Save the Date!

Our historic house dinner this year will take place on September 23 at the Frederic Collin Walcott House overlooking Tobey Pond. You will find out much more about Walcott, his role in World War I refugee relief, and the interesting house he built in Norfolk. Look for invitations in the mail!



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Illustration of Norfolk Historical Museum by Mary Beth Whalen

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