



THE MUSE

NEWSLETTER OF THE NORFOLK HISTORICAL SOCIETY

FOUNDED 1960

SUMMER 2011

Covenant & Community

On December 24, 1760 the Church of Christ was gathered in Norfolk. The town had been incorporated two years earlier and, while the religious needs of the townspeople were addressed with the hiring of transient preachers and the construction of a meetinghouse, the gathering of the church meant something more. It was the formation of a covenanted community, one marked by a sense of fellowship, dedication, and purpose. Living in dispersed farms hard won from the dense Green Woods of Norfolk, this small group of fourteen men and nine women, who initially formed the church, bound themselves in solemn covenant "to walk with this Church in all the Ordinances of the Gospel and to watch over Fellow Members in Meekness and Love." Although it would be another century before Christmas Eve was celebrated in New England, it was an appropriate time for the birth of a church. Two hundred and fifty years later we recognize this important milestone in our summer exhibition *Covenant & Community: The Church of Christ in Norfolk*.

At first the life of the church intersected with the civic life of the town. Taxes were levied annually to pay the minister's salary. The meetinghouse served a religious purpose but was also an important center of community life, where town meetings were held several times a year. It was only with the construction of a stylish new meetinghouse on the Village Green in 1813 that an Ecclesiastical Society was established to handle church business, separating religious and civic affairs. The meetinghouse became a sanctuary for worship and a flagship for the Church of Christ in Norfolk. Eventually it was called a "church."

Highlights of the exhibition include the conch shell that was used to call townsfolk to mandatory Sabbath services; foot warmers to ward off the chill in the unheated meeting house; an 1860 silk Sunday School banner; and recordings of church music, which historian Theron Crissey called "that stone of stumbling and fertile soil of trouble in most congregations." Among the more unusual artifacts on display is an early lightning rod which was once part of the church's lightning protection system. Oddly shaped compared to today's devices, this iron rod with hooked end was one of a series of ground conductors that were attached to each other, running up the side of the meetinghouse. The heavy rod is not smooth but is covered with small barbed points, reportedly to prevent boys from clambering up the rods to the roof of the church.

(Continued on page 2)



On display in the exhibition is a section of the lightning rod, pictured at the far left of the photograph, which ran down the side of the meetinghouse as part of the lightning conduction system.

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From the President

2010 marked an important milestone for the Norfolk Historical Society as we celebrated the 50th anniversary of our founding by launching the 50 for 50 campaign. We are proud to announce that to date we have raised \$50,000 which will be used to undertake much needed repairs and system updates to our museum on the Village Green. In addition to a fresh coat of paint for the 1840 Norfolk Academy building, we plan to install an air system that will maintain a constant temperature and humidity within the building, thus helping to preserve the thousands of artifacts in our collection. With so many irreplaceable objects in our stewardship, it is a top priority for us to create an environment that will ensure their preservation.

A hearty thank you to all of the contributors who helped us meet the challenge of such an ambitious undertaking in these hard economic times. Donations came from about eighty members and friends of the Norfolk Historical Society along with an anonymous grant through the Community Foundation of Northwest Connecticut and a very generous grant from the AKC Fund. Again our sincerest thanks to all who helped us achieve our goal.

As with any project of this size, and given the age of the building, we knew there would be unforeseen surprises along the way. This winter, for example, we discovered that our front granite and marble steps had heaved to a point that they needed to be reset. Thanks to the expert work of Leo Groppo, they now look almost new. Who would know that they were once the steps used at the entrance to the Old Schoolhouse and Conference Room—a building that stood on the site of Battell Chapel—as we discovered in old newspaper clippings, and so have been in use by Norfolkiens since the early 1800's. With this in mind, we will continue our fundraising efforts with some fun and interesting historical-themed events that will be announced in the near future.

We hope to see you at the Museum this summer.

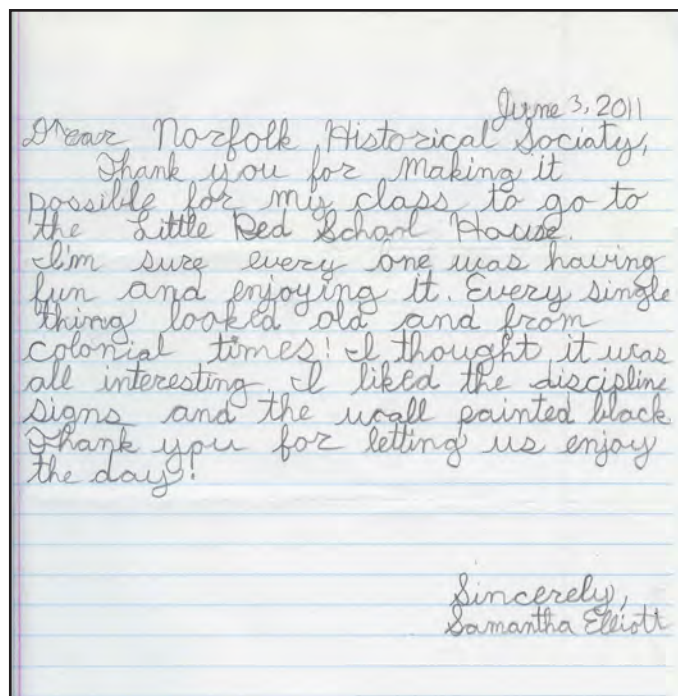
Barry Webber

Covenant & Community (Continued from page 1)

Benjamin Franklin's electrical kite experiment which led to his invention of the lightning rod in 1852 is well-known. But did you know that the use of lightning rods was at first considered controversial? Some felt that to draw electrical fire from the heavens was to interfere with the hand of God. With his observation of the positive and negative states of atmospheric electricity, Benjamin Franklin was able to answer his critics and quiet their superstitions: "Surely that thunder of Heaven is no more supernatural than the Rain, Hail or Sunshine of Heaven against the Inconvenience of which we guard by Roofs and Shades without Scruple. But I can now ease the gentlemen of this Apprehension; for by some late Experiments I find, that it is not lightning from the Clouds that strike the Earth, but Lightning from the Earth that Strikes the Clouds."



One of the original Battell Chapel chairs is featured in the exhibition.



A Zuihitsu for Norfolk's James Mars

When poet and professor Ravi Shankar was commissioned to write a poem about James Mars (a historic resident of Norfolk and one of the last slaves born and sold in Connecticut) for the International Festival of Arts & Ideas, he chose to use a format based on the ancient Chinese *zuihitsu*. Translated as “following the brush,” this kind of poem combines elements from many different sources—lists, letters, newspaper clippings, poems, and anecdotes—which Shankar used to evoke the spirit of the age and the character of the community in which James Mars lived.

Shankar was one of several poets who were invited to participate in the International Festival's exploration of the Connecticut Freedom Trail through the poetic imagination. The Connecticut Freedom Trail was authorized by the State's General Assembly in 1995 to recognize the experiences and contributions of African Americans in their journeys toward emancipation, liberty, and self-determination. The Festival asked Elizabeth Alexander, author of the collection *American Sublime* and *Praise Song for the Day* composed for the inauguration of President Barack Obama, to invite these poets to write new works about sites on the Connecticut Freedom Trail as part of a pre-Festival exploration of the theme “Freedom's Journey: Poetic Reflections on African American Legacies.”

Each poet gave a reading at his or her chosen location prior to the Festival as well as at the Festival which was held in New Haven for two weeks in June. In addition to the poetry readings, the Festival included a series of performances, ideas discussions, and tours that addressed the African-American cultural heritage within the state of Connecticut. The centerpiece of the Festival was the performance of two works by the Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Dance Company which explored the progression of civil rights in the United States and in the state of Connecticut.

Ravi Shankar's pre-Festival poetry reading took place at the Museum on a Sunday in April. Yale graduate student Michael Amico introduced the program with a poetic/historical meditation on the gravesite of James Mars in which he examined the meaning of the integrated cemetery where James and Jupiter Mars are buried next to Norfolk's First Family, the Battells and Eldridges. As Mike said, “The most striking fact about this cemetery is that, in a time when all cemeteries,



Mike Amico and Ravi Shankar in front of the James Mars' exhibit at the Norfolk Historical Museum.

in colonies north and south, were racially segregated, Center Cemetery in Norfolk, Connecticut, was not. Whites and blacks pass among one another here. Most black people in antebellum America, enslaved and free, were not even buried in marked graves. They passed on, but their stories did not.” James Mars' story did pass on, and his 1864 Autobiography was reprinted in at least eleven editions. Excerpts from Shankar's *zuihitsu* are reproduced here on page 4, and the entire poem along with Amico's meditation may be read at the Norfolk Historical Museum.

The Norfolk Historical Society's participation in “Freedom's Journey” showcased and marked the closing of our path-breaking exhibition, *Of African and Princely Descent: Norfolk's Black History*.

In conjunction with that exhibition, the Upper Housatonic Valley African American Heritage Trail has awarded the Society a grant to produce a publication which will tell the stories of the Black families who lived in Norfolk, as documented through census, school, and cemetery records. Initially the booklet will be in the format of a pdf file on our website www.norfolkhistoricalsociety.org, although we hope to publish it in printed form in the near future.

Born and Sold in Connecticut: A Zuihitsu on the Life of James Mars

by Ravi Shankar

i.
Jupiter Mars. Some took my father's name as sign
of provident astrological grace but me? Figured it
for divine joke in which my family was punchline.
Plumb backwards. Should be Mars Jupiter Saturn.
That's the pattern hold us fixed in orbit together.
Instead fixed as property, then on the run near half
our lives, some of the last slaves born in Connecticut.
Priced alongside horses, harnesses, wagon & load.
Can you imagine? One of God's very own owned?
Don't mind a hard day sowing rye, chopping wood,
driving cattle, & raising June bug-sized calluses
between my fingers as living trace to what I lifted
& stacked in the woods in midday blaze or driving
rain. But don't press a bill of sale on me & call
me "bondman" or "boy." Don't let some parson
half my size & a third my wit up & threaten me
with a lash, because he suspects that I know
he has no real power, the secret that passes
in barbed silence between us while I'm helping
raise his children & plow his fields for harvest.
I should hate him. But I just feel sorry for him.
Sorrier for myself. Caught at the wrong juncture
of history under screwed up planetary alignment,
taken from my family time & again, terrified
by men in ruffs & doublets, hidden in leaf piles
& in moldering attics like a chest of drawers,
one of Cotton Mather's abominations, breaking
stones when I'd rather be reading or writing a book.
Born seven years later & I would have had four
years of freedom back, all thanks to the Gradual
Emancipation Act, which approached but evaded
the moral prerogative. Fair's fair so I fought
the law & won. Man needs no manumission,
because he is born & always will be divinely free.
My father fiddled for his own & others' amazement.
I voted in five Presidential elections, for Lincoln
twice & became a Deacon who counseled the joy
of temperance to returning soldiers with a flap
of skin sewn over the end of a sawn off stump.
I did alright. Put hog fat in the pot. Bought 23 acres
of land to farm on, though it's pure subsistence
around the Litchfield hills. You can't squeeze an ear
of corn from iron country. Sold the plot & moved
to Harford to do the Lord's work. Once shared
a few tankards with Noah Webster & told him
he wasn't a lexicographer worth his turnip diddle
if his compendium didn't include uh-huh & uh-uh
in it. That's Yoruba what one of my parishioners
told me. I grunted yes & we both understood.
Was written about in the Christian Freeman,
the Liberator in Boston, the Colored American
in New York City. Petitioned the state to vote.
Had eight children each free to choose their path—
back to Africa, enlistment, becoming a mother,
sailing the high seas—they did it all & I stayed
working the fields with a hand shearer, harvesting
grain with a sickle, carting lumber to the sawmill,
keeping up with young mules until I was near 74
& finally decided to stop. Still kept close contact
with family of folk who hid me when I was young.

Took to publish a book about my life as written by myself. Sold out thirteen editions. Told Crissey everything I knew about the life of colored folk

around these parts, how they worked in the cheese box factories & in the silk mills but saved enough glory to light up the pews with psalms each Sabbath.

Guess we were happy that we were no longer slaves, but we didn't fit in either, except for with each other & in the eye of God. By the time my bones longed

for a blanket woven of earth, strangers had begun to saunter around our woods saying how our air was so "restorative." I could see the next century

might be freer but wasn't going to be a horsehair easier than the one I just finished laboring through. I sat at the deathbed of both my former master

& his daughter, shutting their eyes at their request. Glad now to have joined them, lying next to father, still amazed. Righting the influence of the spheres.



Norfolk Roadshow

Our own version of Antiques Roadshow has come to Norfolk. The first in a series of historical show-and-tells drew an enthusiastic crowd to the Norfolk Library in June. In addition to offering our historical expertise on Norfolk artifacts brought in by members of the audience, we also showcased a few of the Museum's treasures, such as the Elizabeth Cone 1826 sampler featured on page 7 of this newsletter, and 19th century diaries and daybooks which are not usually displayed in NHS exhibitions. Letters from Nathaniel Hawthorne and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, which had been part of an autograph collection, intrigued the audience as we puzzled over the context in which they were written. Stay tuned for future installments of the Norfolk Roadshow.

A Walk Through History

Join us on October 2 at 2:00 as we rediscover the history of the Norfolk Village Green from its beginnings in the 18th century when it was a shared utilitarian space "a commons" on which the meetinghouse, schoolhouse, stocks, and horse sheds stood, to its transformation in the late 19th century into a public park, planted with beautiful trees and ringed with impressive buildings. Although there is no written description of what the original meetinghouse Green looked like, we will uncover layers of history through a variety of sources such as Town Meeting records, newspaper notices, and old diaries. In 1806, for instance, the town voted "to allow swine to run at large from April 1 to Dec. 1 in the commons that have a ring in their nose and pigs under two months old without a ring." By 1853 the Green had been enclosed with a fence for cultivation, as Thomas Robbins reported in his diary, and the crop of hay was sold by the town at public auction. These and other fun facts allow us to step back into time as we survey the evolution of a cultural landscape. This Walk through History is part of the Housatonic Heritage Walks program which will be held on the weekends of Sept. 17th & 18th and Oct. 1st & 2nd (www.upperhousatonicheritage.org).

Machinists in the Museum

Last October the Norfolk Historical Museum was the fortunate beneficiary of the spirit of Alcoa volunteerism when a team of four employees from the Alcoa Howmet plant in Winsted spent the day at the Museum, washing windows, and cleaning and organizing a back porch storage area. The community volunteer program was part of the Alcoa Foundation's fifth annual October Month of Service during which more than 29,000 Alcoa employees across 24 countries volunteered their time, talents, and energy in supporting local educational, environmental, and non-profit

organizations. Activities included planting trees, improving literacy, repairing infrastructure, serving meals, and promoting environmental sustainability to meet the needs of neighboring communities.

Alcoa is the world's leading producer of primary and fabricated aluminum. The company operates in 31 countries across the world. Alcoa Howmet in Winsted manufactures precision-machined turbine airfoils for aerospace and industrial gas turbine markets. A very hearty thank you to our new friends at Alcoa!



Norfolk resident, Alcoa volunteer, and expert locksmith Jake Maendel cleans and polishes the front door lock at the Museum.



How Many Josephs and Sarahs?

Come by the Historical Museum this summer to learn about Norfolk's first family, the magnificent Battells who are featured in an exhibition in the rear gallery. The history of the Battell family is a mirror of Norfolk town history, and the exhibition celebrates their extraordinary legacy. It was an auspicious moment in 1805 when Norfolk's first town pastor Ammi Robbins' daughter, Sarah, married the merchant Joseph Battell. In all, four generations of the family—Robbins, Battell, Eldridge, and Stoeckel—created the "village beautiful" that gives our town its sophisticated rural charm. The Battell story is an amazing tale, and you will discover that the

family's sensitive hand can be felt in nearly every important town institution, from the church and library to the music shed and town hall. Everyone who lives in Norfolk, or visits even for a day, is the recipient of the Battell family's spectacular largess. An oversize family chart will spell out clearly for you the names and relationships of the many members of this family and leave you with a (slightly) better grasp of the many Josephs and Sarahs—Joseph Battell, Sarah Robbins Battell, Sarah Battell Eldridge, Joseph Eldridge, Sarah Eldridge, Joseph Battell Eldridge, to name a few—who people the family tree.

Collections Corner

It may have taken a century and a half, but a Norfolk object has finally found its way home. Early this spring we received an email from some folks in Michigan who were cleaning out a family homestead in Newport, New Hampshire. Among the items they found was a small needlework sampler with an old piece of paper attached to the back on which was written "Norfolk, Conn 1826."

The sampler was part of the Eaton Jones Estate and was worked by a young girl whose name appeared in needlework on the front: Elizabeth Jones Sampler, Age 10. Although Eaton Jones had lived in Litchfield, our correspondents wondered if we had any record of an Elizabeth Jones in Norfolk. We searched town records but could find no such name. Shortly thereafter, we had an opportunity to examine the sampler and noticed that the letter J was really a letter C, and the sampler in fact was signed "Elizabeth Cone's Sampler." Elizabeth Cone, born in 1816, was listed in the church baptismal records, and would have been 10 years old in 1826. She was the daughter of Laura (Jones) and Warren Cone and the granddaughter of Joseph Jones, whose house still stands on the Village Green next to our Museum. The Cones built their house on the corner of Westside Road and Rt. 44. Warren Cone and his brother Samuel, both deacons of the church, owned and operated a scythe shop near Buttermilk Falls and played a role in local and state government.

Elizabeth Cone married Payne Kenyon Kilbourn, and the couple resided in Norfolk until the 1860's when they relocated to Litchfield. Payne Kilbourn was a well known author who wrote about prominent citizens of Litchfield County. The Kilbourns' granddaughter Mary Braman married George Eaton Jones of Litchfield, and the family moved to Newport, New Hampshire in the 1900's.

This small sampler, returning to its home, has brought to light another wonderful piece of the interesting fabric that is our Norfolk history.



MEMBERSHIP FORM

The Norfolk Historical Society cordially invites your support through membership. You will receive our newsletter, notices of 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, 2011 to May 31, 2012

Family & Friends \$10- \$25 Supporting \$50 - \$75 Donor \$100 - \$300 Patron \$500

PLEASE MAKE CHECK PAYABLE TO: *Norfolk Historical Society, PO Box 288, Norfolk , CT 06058*

Calendar of Events

- Sunday, June 26 Norfolk Road Show, featuring treasures in the NHS collection. Bring your own Norfolk treasures to the Library to find out more about their history. 4:00 P.M.
- Sunday, Oct. 2 A Walk Around the Village Green. Meet Richard Byrne and Ann Havemeyer at the Museum at 2:00 P.M. for a walk back through time.
- Friday, Oct. 14 "The Battell-Stoeckel Family: Patrons of the Musical Arts."
Presentation by Ann Havemeyer at the Fall Meeting of the New England Music Library Association. Battell House, time TBA.
- Saturday, Dec. 3 Annual Membership 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 the first Thursday of each month from 1:00 to 5:00 P.M. October through April. The Museum is also open by appointment, 860-542-5761.

EDITOR: ANN HAVEMEYER

LOGO: MARY BETH WHALEN
