

Newsletter of the
NORFOLK HISTORICAL SOCIETY

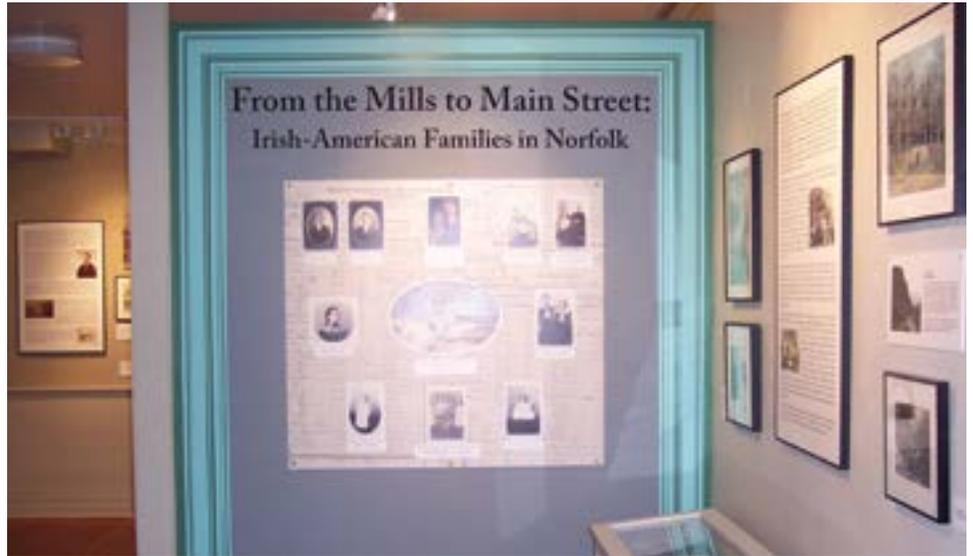
SUMMER 2014

NORFOLK, CONNECTICUT

***From the Mills to Main Street:
 Irish-American Families in Norfolk***

The nineteenth century saw the great tide of Irish immigration to the United States reach enormous proportions. For centuries the Irish had suffered under anti-Catholic penal laws, confiscation of lands, export embargoes, and deplorable living conditions. The Act of Union of 1800 exacerbated the situation, hastening an economic recession that forced many to leave their homeland in search of a better life. Following the 1845 potato blight and devastating famine, the Irish emigrated in droves. In the 1840s they comprised nearly half of all immigrants to this country. It is estimated that as many as 4.5 million Irish arrived in the United States between 1820 and 1930. Our exhibition this summer explores the lives of Irish-American families in Norfolk and their work on farms, in factories, in commerce, and in the building and service industries.

The Ryan brothers were the first Irish immigrants to settle in Norfolk. They arrived in the spring of 1836 and opened a woolen mill. J. & E. E. Ryan & Co. soon became the largest industry in town. While pre-famine immigrants were predominately male,



such as the Ryan brothers, in the aftermath of the potato blight entire families left Ireland. In the 1850 census records, Irish families begin to appear on farms in north Norfolk. By 1870 there were close to twenty farms in Norfolk operated by Irish-American farmers such as Thomas Barry, Richard Bresnahan, Patrick Connelly, Richard Curtiss, Timothy O'Brien, Patrick O'Connell, and John O'Connor.

The construction of the railroad through Norfolk in 1870 not only created jobs, drawing transient Irish

workers, but also provided income for Irish townsfolk who boarded workers. Irish-Americans counted for almost 20% of the Norfolk population at that time. Many found jobs in factories along the Blackberry River. The majority of workers in the axle factory in 1880 were of Irish descent, as were those in the hosiery and silk mills. Not all were unskilled laborers. John C. Shea took out a patent in 1891 for his method and die for making crank axles.

In the early twentieth century Norfolk was in its heyday as a

continued on page 7

IN THIS ISSUE

Collections Corner	page 2	Remembering Cay	page 5
Norfolk Quilt.	page 3	Nepotism?	page 6
Civil War Hero	page 4	Upcoming Events	page 7



From the President

Documenting history is the main task of any historian. The research and culling process is akin to a scavenger hunt. You pull as many pieces together as you can and then try and fill in the missing parts. This year's exhibition was no exception to that rule. When our curator, Ann Havemeyer, started looking through our archives for information on the Irish-American families from Norfolk, she found a great deal of information on just a few families. Needing more information to fill in the gaps, we put out a call in *Norfolk Now* asking for any material that might help piece the story together. We would like to thank, with much appreciation, the descendants of the Curtiss, Dodd, Kelley, McCarthy, O'Connor, Ryan, and Shea families, who all contributed material and information that not only enhanced the story but added significant details, filling in many of the missing blanks.

This is very exciting for us, for every bit of information we add to our archives makes us a stronger and more viable institution in the business of preserving history. Please spend some time at the Museum this summer, and keep in mind that even the simplest or smallest of artifacts, photographs, or documents you might have tucked away just could be that missing piece of the puzzle.

Barry Webber

COLLECTIONS CORNER

When an unidentified medical ledger was donated to us this year, we had some sleuthing to do to discover which Norfolk doctor it belonged to. Dated 1885, the accounts payable suggested that these were patients who could not immediately afford to pay for treatment. A close look at some of the names provided clues.

John C. Shea was treated several times in the summer of 1885. Shea worked at the Hartford Axle Company factory in Norfolk in the late 19th century where

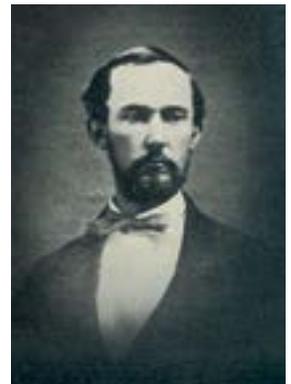


JOHN C. SHEA

he patented a method and die for making crank axles. Exhaustive research by Shea's great-grandson, a member of the Norfolk Historical Society, revealed that Shea had applied for military pension benefits for which he had to document his disability. He wrote in his application that he had been treated by Dr. Jonathan H. P. Stevens in the year 1885.

Mystery solved! Furthermore, Shea's great-grandson had uncovered the obituary of Dr. Stevens who tragically died at the untimely age of fifty-five. The obituary paid tribute to "as honest and noble a man as ever lived. 'In Dr. Stevens the poor people of Norfolk have lost a good friend' and 'Dr. Stevens never crowded a poor man for his pay' are the comments of those he befriended."

It was now clear that the account book was kept by Dr. Stevens (1830-1885), a member of one of the most prominent Protestant families in Norfolk. According to oral tradition, not every doctor would treat the poor, and some refused to treat Irish Catholics. Dr. Stevens clearly subscribed to "health care for all." Thanks to two of our members for donating the medical ledger and undertaking the research that has enabled us to identify it.



DR. JONATHAN H. P. STEVENS



LUCY ELIZA HART WILCOX

“The most splendid thing of the kind ever made in Norfolk”

Quilts and quilting were part of daily life in nineteenth-century New England. Scraps of material were saved until there were enough to be cut and pieced together into a pattern. Long hours were spent preparing a quilt to keep out winter’s cold or to give to a friend who was getting married or leaving town. Signature or album quilts were a favorite type made of squares inscribed with the names of family and friends, sometimes with dates and towns of residence, usually in pen. One such quilt—the Wilcox Album quilt—was made in Norfolk by the friends and family of Lucy Hart Wilcox, a missionary in Hawaii where the quilt is preserved today.

Lucy Eliza Hart was born in Cairo, New York, in 1814, and her youth was spent in Norfolk. As a young woman she taught school in Harwinton where she was introduced to Abner Wilcox. The sixth of twelve children of a Harwinton farming family, twenty-eight year old Abner taught at the central district school but had always aspired to be a preacher. Having decided “to offer myself as missionary Teacher among the Heathens,” Abner proposed a missionary trip to the Sandwich Islands. The American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions [ABCFM] in Boston encouraged its missionary candidates to be married before accepting their assignments. When mutual friends learned that Abner must take a wife before setting out on his proposed missionary pilgrimage, they introduced him to Lucy who offered her services as missionary to the Sandwich Islands.

Lucy and Abner were married in 1836 at the home of Deacon Norton in Norfolk and sailed from Boston less than a month later on the bark “Mary Frazier” with the Eighth Company of missionaries to the Sandwich

Islands. In anticipation of setting up a new home in an unknown land, a list of necessities was sent to each mission candidate by the ABCFM. The list included three bed quilts which would be useful as well during the nearly four and one-half month voyage ‘round the Horn’ to the Sandwich Islands, as is evident in Abner Wilcox’s journal entry of December 19:

MONDAY NOON – A RAINY DAY WITH A STRONG WIND. SOME OF THE CREW ARE RUNNING ABOUT ON DECK BAREFOOT. I HAVE FOR ONE OR TWO OF THE LAST NIGHTS SLEPT COMFORTABLY UNDER A SINGLE BED-QUILT. HAVE SAILED DURING THE LAST 24 HOURS, 190 MILES.

Abner and Lucy arrived in Honolulu the following April. In addition to bringing quilts with them from New England, the Wilcoxes received boxes of donations from New England missionary societies:

OUR BOXES, ONE FROM ATHOL, MASS. AND THE OTHER FROM NORFOLK, CAME SAFELY TO HAND AT THE SAME TIME. THE CONTENTS OF THE BOXES CONSISTED PRIMARILY OF BEDDING SUCH AS SHEETS, PILLOW-CASES AND QUILTS...

The first station the Wilcoxes were sent to was at Hilo on the island of Hawaii where Lucy taught sewing to the young Hawaiian girls. They remained at Hilo until 1845 when they were transferred to Waialua, Oahu. In 1846 they were sent to Hanalei on Kauai, and Abner was put in charge of the Select School for Hawaiian boys at Waioli Mission Station. They remained there for the next twenty-two years.

By the time Abner and Lucy were transferred to Hanalei, they had four young sons, and over the next

continued on page 6

A Civil War Hero

On display in the rear gallery this summer is a copy of First Lieutenant George Ryan's commission papers, signed by Abraham Lincoln on Sept. 17, 1861. Three years later, on May 8, 1864, Colonel George Ryan was killed leading his men in a charge during the Battle of the Wilderness at Spotsylvania in the War of the Rebellion. The story of young George's life and death in military service is documented in the extraordinary archive of Ryan family correspondence, comprised of 1200 letters dating from 1827 to 1951 now in the collection of The Catholic University in Washington DC. A synopsis written by Ryan descendant Jerome Goebel is available for research at the Museum and provides a window into the lives of this Irish-American family in Norfolk.

George Ryan was the oldest son of John and Johanna Boomer Ryan, Irish immigrants who came to Norfolk after George was born in 1836. A bright boy, George was educated at the Norfolk Academy (now the Norfolk Historical Museum), and in 1853 he was appointed through his father's political connections to the United States Military Academy at West Point. In the Ryan Papers synopsis, Goebel writes:

"George's clarity, wit and bravery give special life to the Ryan Papers. His first 79 contributions describe life at the Point between 1853 and 1857. He describes his fellow cadets, superintendents Robert E. Lee and Richard Delafield and West Point visitors such as Winfield Scott, Jerome Bonaparte II, and Jefferson Davis, among others.

A year after graduation, George joined the 7th Infantry on its mission to occupy Utah. George vividly describes the trip west, life at Camp Floyd, the Mormons and the occupation politicians and judges. From Utah it was on to New Mexico in 1860, for duty against the Navajo. He was present at the 7th's inglorious surrender without a shot to the Confederates at San Augustin Springs in 1861. Paroled, George sat out the next year in posts along the St. Lawrence River. Exchanged in October 1862, George joined the Army of the Potomac.

In August 1863 he was appointed colonel of the 140th New York Infantry volunteers, succeeding another Irish-American of note, Patrick O'Rorke. George's poignant description of his return to the front after his last trip home, before Christmas 1863, strikes a chord with anyone who has ever experienced

loneliness and dread. His last letter home, to a younger brother, describes his exhaustion after surviving at the Wilderness. The next day he will die leading a charge at Laurel Hill at the beginning of the fighting at Spotsylvania. Correspondence that follows reveals the anguish of his family and friends."

In 1868, the town of Norfolk recognized its sons who gave their lives in service for their country by erecting a Civil War monument on the Village Green. Colonel George Ryan's name is not among those engraved on the monument. Was this omission an oversight? George's uncle Matthew Ryan still lived in Norfolk where he operated a store, so one would assume the town would have knowledge of George's sacrifice. Although his father John Ryan had moved with his family to Decatur, Illinois, after J. & E. E. Ryan & Co. failed in 1855, surely George would have been considered a son of Norfolk. It was likely not discrimination since there appear to be two other names of Irish pedigree listed on the monument. Nevertheless it is worth remembering that discrimination against Irish Catholics was rampant in this country and in Norfolk in the mid-nineteenth century.

George's father John Ryan experienced discrimination first-hand in June of 1843, when Samuel Gold of West Cornwall invited him to speak at a meeting of the Litchfield County Temperance Society in North Cornwall. Although John was an eloquent speaker, in demand at temperance rallies, Gold later had to rescind the invitation when it was made known that Ryan was a Roman Catholic. In an apologetic letter to Ryan, Gold stated his personal belief that *sectarianism is the offspring of bigotry and prejudice*, assuring Ryan that this was the act of only a few individuals in the community. However, when John was nominated for the office of State Senator from Norfolk in 1850, bigotry reared its head again, and opposition to his status as a *foreigner* and a Catholic led to his defeat. In 1869, a year after the Civil War monument was installed, George Ryan's uncle Mathew Ryan wrote to his brother John: *We do not belong to the popular class in Norfolk.*

While we do not know the reason for the omission of George's name—as a career military man it could simply be because he did not muster from Norfolk—Theron Crissey paid tribute to George by devoting a chapter to this Civil War hero in his *History of Norfolk* (1900).



COLONEL GEORGE RYAN

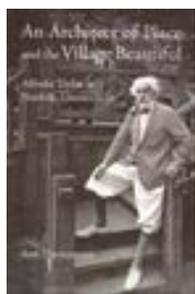
Remembering Cay



The Norfolk Historical Society lost a dear friend last summer when Cay Fields died on July 11, 2013. For many years Cay was the spark behind new ideas for the Museum, reaching out to the community of historical societies at large and engaging professionals to help raise the standards of collections care. Always inquisitive, Cay relished the opportunity to interact with colleagues in the history museum field, participating in programs as far a field as Washington DC where she was honored for her work in the Conservation Assessment Program administered by the Institute for Museum and Library Services. At that time she had been on the NHS Board for almost twenty years, serving as President for a decade. During her tenure, the Museum launched its annual interpretive exhibitions and won a Connecticut Humanities grant to undertake a Collections Assessment project. This enabled the collections to be documented and archivally housed, ensuring their preservation for the future. Cay was also instrumental in establishing the African-American Heritage Trail in Norfolk, which marks the grave of former slave James Mars in Center Cemetery.

Amid all these accomplishments, Cay probably had the most fun celebrating milestones, such as the 25th birthday of the Norfolk Historical Society in 1986, and introducing people to Norfolk's rich history. Bill Hosley, a cultural resource specialist and former Executive Director of the New Haven Museum and Connecticut Landmarks, writes: "I loved Cay. She was always popping over to Hartford - she loved the Colt exhibition and came in from Norfolk to go on walking tours. She supported others and when I got to Landmarks and had this vision for in-state bus tours to cool places, she helped me put together the debut tour which was to Norfolk—that melted paint off the wall it was so extraordinary: getting inside Whitehouse (which I'd never seen), a restoration in progress of what became Infinity Hall, whipping up a buffet for lunch amidst the Tiffany windows in their church, a visit to the Historical Society and a wine and cheese reception at a fabulous private Arts & Crafts camp on Doolittle pond. Folks were dazzled and that was Cay. She spent the day with us—showing off a place she knew deeply and loved." We will all miss Cay's bright smile and her enthusiastic response to any sort of unexpected obstacle: "Carry on nobly."

An Architect of Place and the Village Beautiful



In 1902 when architect Alfredo Taylor arrived in Norfolk, Connecticut, the cultural landscape was in the process of being transformed into a Village Beautiful by the town's leading families, the Battells and Eldridges. With the moral premise of City Beautiful ideology, the Village Beautiful placed architecture in the service of shaping an identity

in a time of socio-economic change. Taylor's creation of an artistic village center in the first decade of the twentieth century provided Norfolk with a romanticized image, while developing the Village Beautiful in a way that affirmed beauty, framed the attitudes and activities of townfolk, and helped mediate social change. At a time when many small towns in New England faced an uncertain future, the Village Beautiful strengthened Norfolk's place-bound identity.

Written as a doctoral dissertation, *An Architect of Place and the Village Beautiful: Alfredo Taylor in Norfolk, Connecticut* by Ann Havemeyer is full of interesting facts and new discoveries about Norfolk's history and Taylor's role in creating a strong identity for the town, one which it maintains today. The book is now available at the Norfolk Historical Museum (www.norfolkhistoricalsociety.org) or at www.lulu.com.

Upstairs Downstairs

In the early twentieth century, Norfolk was in its heyday as a summer resort, and jobs in the service industry were plentiful. As "cottagers" arrived to spend the summer in the northwest hills, they often brought with them their maids, cooks, butlers, and chauffeurs. Local hired help might include gardeners, laundresses, or seamstresses. Who were these people and what were their lives like? While the census provides names, ages, birthplace, and occupation, voices from the back stairs generally have not been heard.

On Sunday, September 21, Jennifer Pustz will provide some answers in an illustrated talk on the lives of domestic servants in nineteenth and twentieth century New England. Jen will focus on three Historic New England properties to illustrate the diversity of domestic service. Period domestic manuals, ephemera, and other general material will also shed light on the lives of servants and relationships with their employers. This joint program with the Norfolk Library is part of the Connecticut at Work series, sponsored by CT Humanities, and will take place at the Library.

Jennifer Pustz is the museum historian at Historic New England. She holds a Ph.D. in American studies from the University of Iowa and M.A. and B.A. degrees in art history. She is the author of *Voices from the Back Stairs: Interpreting Servants' Lives at Historic House Museums* (Northern Illinois University Press, 2010).

Can Nepotism Go Further?

This amusing editorial appeared in the *Winsted Herald* on November 22, 1872, shortly after the railroad was constructed. The route took trains from Winsted to Norfolk through the small hamlet of Grantville near the intersection of Grantville, Beckley and Schoolhouse Roads. Trains stopped there primarily to pick up milk cans from farms in the neighborhood such as that belonging to Harry Grant. Bear in mind that the Grants were probably not related to President Ulysses S. Grant, who was President of the United States at the time the editorial was written.



CAN NEPOTISM GO FURTHER? PRESIDENT GRANT, NOT CONTENT WITH CREATING A POST-OFFICE AT THE MILK STATION NEAR THE HARRY GRANT PLACE IN NORFOLK, AND NAMING IT "GRANTVILLE" AND APPOINTING HIS 40-LEVENTH COUSIN, MOSES F. GRANT, TO BE POSTMASTER, HAS BEEN EMBOLDENED TO PROCEED TO FURTHER HIGH-HANDED MEASURES SINCE HIS REELECTION AND HAS INSTRUCTED HIS SUBSERVIENT TOOLS – THE CONN. WESTERN DIRECTORS – TO BUILD A NEW DEPOT, 20 BY 32, AT THAT REMOTE AND OBSCURE POINT, UNDER THE PREPOSTEROUS PRETENSE THAT THERE IS, PRESENT AND PROSPECTIVE, BUSINESS ENOUGH THERE TO REQUIRE IT. WHERE ARE OUR LIBERTIES?

Just how *remote* and *obscure* is Grantville today? Residents of Bruey and Winchester Roads know that it is convenient to drive through Grantville to get to the Danbury Quarter Road and Winsted or to the Norfolk Transfer Station via Beckley Road. Others may have discovered Grantville when hiking the old railroad bed up to Pine Mountain on trails maintained by the Norfolk Land Trust. But for residents of this small hamlet still comprised of the three original farmhouses, the neighborhood remains happily remote and obscure. ❧

Waiting for the train at the Grantville Station

Quilt ... continued from page 3

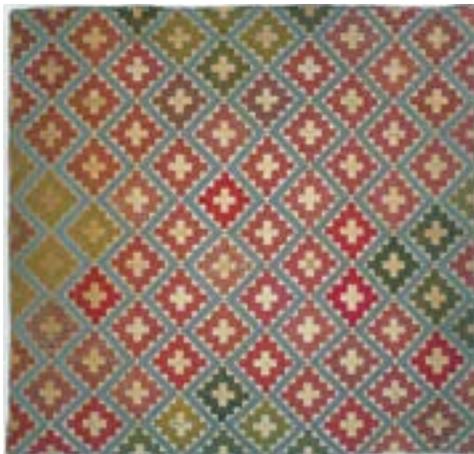
dozen years four more boys were born. The large young family filled the two-story frame mission house at Waioli, built in 1836. Their fourth son was born with clubfeet so in 1850 Abner took six-year old Alfred to Boston for the necessary surgery. While there they visited family and close friends in Connecticut, causing great excitement about their missionary lives in Hawaii.

Abner wrote to Lucy:

LOUISA [HART SPAULDING, LUCY'S SISTER] IS QUITE BUSY WITH A VERY CURIOUS BED-QUILT FOR YOU. AUGUSTA IS HELPING HER. MADE UP OF SQUARES GIVEN BY ONE AND ANOTHER WITH THEIR NAMES ON THEM. YOU ARE NOT FORGOTTEN, YOU MAY DEPEND ...

In a later journal entry Abner again refers to the quilt:

JULY 25TH ... I TODAY GOT A LETTER FROM LOUISA. SHE WRITES THAT SHE HAS GOT OUR ALBUM QUILT ON THE FRAME, THE ONE WHICH OUR SISTERS IN NORFOLK AND THE LADIES WERE PREPARING TO SEND YOU. ONE AND ANOTHER FURNISHED A SQUARE WITH THE NAME AND SOMETIMES A SENTIMENT WRITTEN IN THE



SQUARE. LOUISA I BELIEVE IS TAKING THE BRUNT OF THE WORK, WHICH IS TOO MUCH FOR HER, I FEAR. SHE SAYS THAT SOME CALL IT THE MOST SPLENDID THING OF THE KIND EVER MADE IN NORFOLK...

After the successful operation on Albert's feet, the prized album quilt was brought back to Waioli. In the early 1860s the American Board transferred the Sandwich

Islands Mission to the Hawaiian Evangelical Association, and mission lands, including those at Hanalei, were divided among the remaining missionaries as part of the pensions paid to them. The Waioli home was deeded to Abner Wilcox.

In 1869 at the suggestion of their sons, Abner and Lucy returned for the first time together to New England. Crossing the mainland by the new transcontinental railroad, they both contracted malarial fever and lived only a few days after reaching Connecticut. They are both

buried in Colebrook. Their sons kept the Waioli house as a summer home. (Adapted from *The Wilcox Quilts in Hawaii* by Robert J. Schleck, 1986.)

Upcoming Events

SONGS OF THE IRISH-AMERICANS

Save the date for an entertaining and enlightening musical journey by Rick Spencer, "Creating a National Identity: Songs of the Irish-Americans." This program will take place at Klauer Hall behind the Catholic Church on Sunday, August 10, at 3:00. "Irish Family Folklore: Fact or Fiction, a Memory Event" will follow. Please plan to share your memories of Norfolk's Irish-American heritage. Refreshments will be served. Free and open to the public.

STAINED GLASS WINDOW TOUR IN NORFOLK

Join us on Saturday, October 4, at 1:00 for a tour of Norfolk's memorial stained glass windows. The walking tour will begin at Battell Chapel featuring extraordinary Tiffany stained glass windows depicting the four seasons and continue up Maple Avenue to the Episcopal Church of the Transfiguration with the Clemens memorial window. The walk will conclude at the Church of the Immaculate Conception where the architect Alfredo Taylor designed ten different window types to accommodate memorial windows given by Catholic families in Norfolk. The walk is part of the 13th annual Housatonic Heritage Walks program.



Artifacts from the J. W. Dillon store

Irish ... continued from page 1

summer resort. The next generation children of Irish immigrants were by then well-established in town. Curtiss, McCarthy, Mulville, O'Connor, and Torrant are a few of the names of the contractors, masons, carpenters, teamsters, and landscapers who constructed many of the summer residences and buildings at that time. Stores on Main Street were operated by Irish-Americans William O'Connor, James Scott, Patrick and Dennis Holleran, and Joseph Carroll. The Maloney's and Whalen's established liverys, and Martin Dodd owned a successful automobile dealership. Jobs in the service industry were plentiful, and Irish women found work as maids, cooks, laundresses, and housekeepers; and the men as butlers, coachmen, gardeners, and chauffeurs.

The history of Norfolk's Irish-American families can be documented only in part through the names and numbers found in census, church, and cemetery records. The impact of their lives and work in Norfolk is written largely on the landscape we see today.

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, 2014 to May 31 2015

- Family & Friends \$10-1\$25
- Supporting \$50-75
- Donor \$100-\$300
- Patron \$500
- Benefactor \$1000

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

Calendar of Events

- Saturday, July 12 ***The Village Beautiful: Sweeping History Under the Rug.***
An illustrated lecture and book signing by Ann Havemeyer at the Norfolk Library. 4:30 P.M.
- Sunday, Aug. 10 ***Creating a National Identity: Songs of the Irish-Americans.***
Rick Spencer at Klauer Hall. 3:00 P.M.
Followed by Irish Family Folklore: Fact or Fiction, a Memory Event.
- Sunday, Aug. 31 ***A Walk through Norfolk's Industrial Past with Richard Byrne.***
Meet at Battell Chapel to carpool to the

- remains of the factory district along the Blackberry River. 1:00 P.M.
- Sunday, Sept. 21 ***Voices from the Back Stairs: Domestic Servants in 19th and 20th Century New England.***
An illustrated lecture by Dr. Jennifer Pustz at the Norfolk Library. 3:00 P.M.
- Saturday, Oct. 4 ***Stained Glass Window Tour in Norfolk.***
Meet at Battell Chapel on the Village Green. 1:00 P.M.
- Sunday, Dec. 7 ***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.

Ann Havemeyer, *Editor and Curator*
Illustration of Norfolk Historical Museum by Mary Beth Whalen

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