



THE ARROW

NEWSLETTER OF THE HISTORICAL, NATURAL HISTORY AND LIBRARY SOCIETY OF NATICK, MASSACHUSETTS VOL 40 No 2

SPRING/SUMMER 2018

UPCOMING EVENTS

Program details on page 5

Sunday, July 29
"OLDTOWN" WALK
OF SOUTH NATICK

Meet at Bacon Free Library

Tuesday, August 14
HISTORY BOOK CLUB

Natick Community-Senior Center
117 East Central Street

Saturday, September 8
NATICK DAYS

Natick Common

Tuesday, September 18
HISTORY BOOK CLUB

Natick Community-Senior Center
117 East Central Street

Wednesday, October 17
THE SHOE INDUSTRY IN
MASSACHUSETTS

Morse Institute Library

Sunday, October 21
OLD TOWN PHOTO SHOW

Eliot Memorial Hall
40 Eliot Street

Thursday, November 15
HENRY WILSON:
NATICK COBBLER TO
VICE PRESIDENT

Historical Society Museum
58 Eliot Street

Public Hours

Museum closed for transformation
Re-opening Autumn 2018

A HISTORIC SPACE REBORN

MIKE POJMAN, NHS PRESIDENT

If you are a regular subscriber to *The Arrow* (and a passionate follower of this column), you may be surprised to read once again that our beloved Museum will be fully renovated and ready for business... several months from now. Inevitable holdups have continued to delay the much-anticipated unveiling. It is now clear that the task was bigger than any of us had expected, the scope broader than we had originally planned, and our restoration schedule overly optimistic from the start. But the end is definitely in sight.

Imagine, metaphorically speaking, that you had set out to spruce up your kitchen by simply replacing the counters – only to discover that the dishwasher was on its last legs, the floors ran downhill, the cabinets were out of plumb, the wallpaper was hopelessly out of date, and the ceiling lights couldn't accommodate LEDs. Who wouldn't conclude that to do it right you had to do it all?

We expect to begin hosting our programs and presentations in the beautifully reimaged meeting space this fall, with a Grand Reopening celebration planned for sometime next spring – by which time our intrepid Curator and Director (with the assistance of a small army of volunteers) will have had time to reinstall exhibits and to plan and mount new ones. It's a Herculean task.

I won't go into the details of the beautifully rendered space – the improved lighting, the sanded floors, the restored cabinetry – because that would be like revealing the contents of a wrapped package before Christmas morning. Suffice it to say – and that's all I'm going to say – the wait will have been worth it. Just wait and see!

(**Society News** continued on page 2)



NHS President Mike Pojman puts his carpentry skills to work.

The Natick Historical Society • Natick, MA 01760 • 508-647.4841
Museum: 58 Eliot St • Research Library and Office: 207 Union St
www.natickhistoricalsociety.org director@natickhistoricalsociety.org
Memberships, maps and publications available at the Research Library and online

SOCIETY NEWS (*continued from page 1*)**Officers 2018-2019**

Mike Pojman, *President*
 Marg Balcom, *Vice President*
 Terri Evans, *Secretary*
 Bats Wheeler, *Treasurer*

Directors

Margarita M. Balcom
 Teresa Evans
 Stephen Evers
 Robert M. Gee
 Timothy Hinton
 Janice Parsons
 Michael Pojman
 Kenneth Soderholm
 Richard Subber
 Fran Weisse
 Bancroft Wheeler

Advisory Council

Bob Awkward
 Jay & Erica Ball
 Kathryn Bard
 Matthew Brenneman
 Joan Craig
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 Carol Gloff
 Elliot Goodman
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 Catha Hesse
 Joseph Keefe
 Carol & David Krentzman
 Rep. David Linsky
 John Moran
 David Parish
 Paul Spurling
 Mercy Wheeler
 Zadi Zokou

Terri Evans
Newsletter Editor

Staff

Niki Lefebvre
Director

Marya Van't Hul
Curator

Introducing our new Director

Some things are meant to be. Landing Niki Lefebvre as our new Director was meant to be. The timing was right, the fit was right, the connection with the Board, the staff, and the volunteers was immediate. The vibe has been all positive. In the short time that she has been with us, Niki has taken charge firmly but graciously, and with great tact. She is brimming with ideas, but she is also a thoughtful listener, a doer but also a skillful collaborator. I can't imagine anyone who would work harder to "get" us – even as she has embraced her mandate to get us going and move us forward.



NHS Director
 Niki Lefebvre

Niki's leadership has been energizing and inspirational, to say the least. Most heartening, perhaps, has been her instant bond with our very able Curator, Marya Van't Hul; they are productive collaborators, and they complement (and maybe also compliment) each other naturally. They work together comfortably and with a shared mission to manage and augment our eclectic collection and, in due course, to display our most compelling artifacts effectively and coherently in the newly renovated Museum.

Niki comes to us most recently from the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, where she held the Morton L. Mandel Presidential Fellowship. She earned her Ph.D. in American Studies from Boston University and her M.A. in Public History from the University of Massachusetts Amherst. She has developed and led tours and programs at numerous historic sites, including the National Park Service, Historic New England, the Trustees of Reservations, and Historic Deerfield. Clearly, her background and experience will serve us well as we imagine new programming and expand our community outreach in the months ahead.

Am I enthusiastic? You bet. Am I excited for the Society and for the Natick community? You can bet on that, too. Most of all, I am grateful for the opportunity to work with our talented and engaging new Director – we all are. Although Niki has only been with us since early May, she already fits like a favorite slipper (an irresistible comparison given Natick's history as a shoe town).

I can't wait for you to meet her!

Mike Pojman

New and returning
members

Dorothy Campbell
 Paula & John Moran
 Mysore & Judith Ravindra
 Gwen Stanley
 Jackee Stigliano
 Lynn Tinney

Annual Meeting reviews achievements, opportunities

At the Annual Meeting in February, President Mike Pojman spoke to the Society's ambitious plans and its goals for the year ahead, which include completing the Museum transformation and office move; expanding program offerings; developing a more diverse audience mix; engaging with Natick schools; heightening the Society's profile in the community; collaborating with the Bacon Free Library; and developing a strategic plan. Members elected officers to one-year terms: Mike Pojman (president); Marg Balcom (vice president); Bats Wheeler (treasurer); and Terri Evans (secretary). Bob Gee, Jan Parsons, and Fran Weisse were elected to three-year terms as directors.

A Note from the Director

Since joining the Natick Historical Society in May, I have received the warmest of welcomes from our board, volunteers, members, and the larger community. I have already had the opportunity to attend several community events, including Natick Nights, our own Natick Historical Society/Bacon Free Library History Book Club, a ceremony run by the Natick Cultural Council event for grant recipients, and the annual Fourth of July Parade. In all of my conversations with local residents and community leaders, I have been impressed with the strong sense of pride everyone feels in their hometown. Whether people have moved here recently or have lived here all their lives, their pride in Natick shines through. Even after only two months, I feel proud that I, too, am now part of the Natick community.

I had been searching for the right opportunity to get back into public history for some time when I learned that Natick Historical Society was looking for a new director. While I loved the research and writing I did to earn my doctorate in American

Studies at Boston University, I also missed the opportunity to “do history” with communities beyond campus, as I had done many years before while giving tours at historic sites across Massachusetts. From my first interviews with members of the Board of Directors, I knew that the Natick Historical Society was the right opportunity to get back into public history. With each day, I grow more enthusiastic about the opportunities our Society has to build community in Natick and inspire closer connections to our hometown’s storied past.

This fall will be an exciting time for members of the Natick Historical Society. We are hard at work preparing the Museum and planning programs. I am looking forward to getting to know many more of you, and I encourage you to keep an eye out for more news from us soon. We know you will share our excitement about the possibilities that lie ahead.

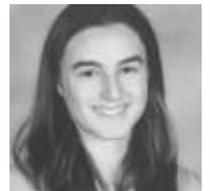
All best,

Niki



NHS Scholarship awarded

Congratulations to **Elizabeth Lewis**, Natick High School '18, who was selected to receive this year's Natick Historical Society scholarship, which was presented to her at Class Night in May.



Elizabeth will attend Mount Holyoke College to study history this fall. She is a member of National Honor Society, Director of Artistic Design for the Natick High School Stage Crew, founder and head of a local youth ACLU chapter, and captain of the Natick High School Varsity Sailing Team.

She is the third recipient of the scholarship, which was first presented in 2016.

(Left) To make our publications accessible to the visually impaired, the Society worked with the Perkins School to record our recent books ("Have You Ever Wondered" and "The Stories We Tell") in audio format. In April, NHS member Joe Weisse, who spearheaded the project, presented Morse Institute Library Director Linda Stetson with a copy of the audio book for the library's collections.

FROM THE COLLECTIONS by *Marya Van't Hul, NHS Curator*

New Homes for Natural History Objects

When the Natick Historical Society was founded nearly 150 years ago, natural science was part of our mission--and part of our name. Natick residents formed "The Historical, Natural History and Library Society of South Natick" in 1870. The Society's early collecting emphasized specimens from nature: rocks and minerals; shells and coral; botanical specimens; and birds, reptiles, and mammals whose pelts were converted into taxidermy mounts, some by local ornithologist A. L. Babcock. Many of these objects remained on display in our museum throughout the twentieth century.

But museums change over time, and so must their collections. The Society's mission now focuses on local history, not science. Recent renovations at our museum brought a growing storage crisis to a head. Additionally, we found that some taxidermy had attracted carpet beetles. It was time to find new homes for many of the natural history objects in our collections.

Board member Jan Parsons, chair of our collections committee, came to the rescue. With her help, several deaccessioned taxidermy mounts found a new home this summer at the Fairbanks Museum & Planetarium in Vermont, an institution with a large natural history collection and room for more. An array of shells and coral also went to the Fairbanks.

Jan turned next to several boxes of nineteenth-century horticultural books, many in Latin, formerly part of our library. She approached the Massachusetts Horticultural Society--conveniently headquartered at Elm Bank in Wellesley, just up the road from our museum. Founded in 1829, the Massachusetts Horticultural Library is the oldest horticultural library in the United States. To our delight, Katherine Macdonald, president of "Mass Hort.," welcomed all our books into the library's large collection.

We are grateful to Jan Parsons, the Fairbanks Museum, and the Massachusetts Horticultural Society for bringing portions of our former collections to new audiences.

"As a Museum educator and Board member of the Natick Historical Society, I find it helpful to reflect on the passions, vision and ambitions of the founding men and women of the organization, then called the Historical, Natural History and Library Society of South Natick, gathered from early meeting minutes. They built a wide-ranging collection of artifacts and books that was unrivaled in the area, and provided valuable examples of botany, zoology, geology and more, in an era before television, movies or ecologically themed travel.

As we reduce this aspect of our collection, it has been very satisfying to find institutions, such as the Fairbanks Museum in Vermont and our neighbor, the Massachusetts Horticultural Society, whose values align with our original mission, and who will appreciate, preserve, and share our artifacts and volumes with their members and the public. Our founders would be pleased."

*Jan Parsons
Collections Committee
NHS Board member*

Visit:

The Fairbanks Museum & Planetarium

St. Johnsbury, VT

www.fairbanksmuseum.org

Open daily, 9:00 am - 5:00 pm

Massachusetts Horticultural Society

The Gardens at Elm Bank

Wellesley, MA

www.masshort.org

Open May 1 - Oct 8, Tue-Sun 10:00 am - 4:00 pm

Curator's Wish List

As we begin exhibition planning at the restored museum, we are in need of a working steam iron, a few large towels, and many old cotton sheets to protect objects from light and dust. Please call us at 617.647.4841 or email curator@natickhistoricalsociety.org if you can donate any of these items. Thank you!

PROGRAMS & EVENTS

Join us for one of our upcoming events! All are welcome



Sunday, July 29, 2018, 1:00pm
"Oldtown" walk of South Natick

Meet at Bacon Free Library entrance, 58 Eliot Street

Join a Natick Historical Society guide for this 45-minute walk through the heart of South Natick, following the footsteps of the Praying Indians and of the "Oldtown Folks" – the characters in Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel inspired by real-life personalities in early 19th century Natick.



Tuesday, August 14, 1:00 pm

History Book Club: *Huck Out West* by Robert Coover

Natick Community-Senior Center, 117 East Central Street

Join us for discussions of historical fiction and non-fiction books, led by the Natick Historical Society and Bacon Free Library. Copies of the books are on hold at the Bacon Free Library and are available as downloads on Minuteman Library Overdrive.



Saturday, September 8, 10:00 am - 3:00 pm
Natick Days

Natick Common

Stop by our booth on the Natick Common! We'll have something for everyone: historic maps, books on local history, magnets, and games and stickers for kids. Look for us and join in the fun.

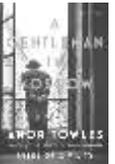


Tuesday, September 18, 1:00 pm

History Book Club: *A Gentleman in Moscow* by Amor Towles

Natick Community-Senior Center, 117 East Central Street

Join us for discussions of historical fiction and non-fiction books, led by the Natick Historical Society and Bacon Free Library. Copies of the books are on hold at the Bacon Free Library and are available as downloads on Minuteman Library Overdrive.



Wednesday, October 17, 7:00 pm

Best Foot Forward: The Shoe Industry in Massachusetts

Morse Institute Library, 14 East Central Street

At the end of the 19th century, more than half of all factory workers living in Natick were making shoes. Massachusetts was once the heart of the American shoemaking industry. By the end of the First World War, our state was producing more than forty percent of the nation's shoes! Join **Anna Fahey-Flynn** of Boston Public Library for a talk on the history of the shoe industry in Massachusetts with a special focus on our hometown.



Mark your calendars for more events this fall:

Sunday, October 21

Oldtown Photo Show

Thursday, November 15

Henry Wilson: Natick Cobbler to Vice President

FEATURED EXHIBITIONS

At the Museum:

Re-opening Late 2018

Traveling Kiosk:

Explore, Imagine, Investigate, Discover

Natick Town Hall

At the Morse Institute Library:

Good Times and Bad: The Baldwin Photos & 1930s Natick

FEATURE

Remembering a Natick Hero:
Frank Balzarini and the Cocoanut Grove Fire

Terri Evans

November 28, 2017, marked the 75th anniversary of one of the greatest disasters in Boston history: the Cocoanut Grove fire, which left 492 people dead and scores of others seriously injured. There were stories of heroism and courage that night as well, none more compelling in Natick's memory than that of Frank Balzarini, Natick High School Class of 1926.

Frank Balzarini gave his life in the fast-moving fire, repeatedly re-entering the club to rescue as many people as possible before he perished in the fire. Frank, who was 37, was the headwaiter at the Grove and acting maître d' that night, filling in for maître d' Angelo Lippi, who was ill.

When fire broke out, he shouted to the wine steward to supervise an orderly exit at the revolving doors on Piedmont Street that served as the club's principal entrance and directed panicked patrons to a pair of Venetian doors facing Shawmut Street that staff struggled to open. According to contemporary reports in the Boston press, the press of the crowd propelled Frank out of the door onto the street. He turned around and went back in not once, but seven times. His courage is detailed in an article entitled "Waiter Who Saved Many Dies a Hero."

According to waiter Fred Guarneri, "After I got outside I saw Frank on the street... I was so glad to see him alive. My joy was soon turned to horror as I saw him deliberately dash back into the flames. A few minutes later he reappeared, again leading people to the street. [We] ran over to Frank just as we saw he was going back into the club a third time. We grabbed him and tried to hold him back, but he brushed us aside and kept saying the names of patrons whom we knew well. He said they were still inside and he was going back for them. We were amazed when we saw him come out again with more people. This was repeated with him dashing back into the flames after leading people outside and us trying to stop him each time until, when he had gone back inside for the seventh time, he failed to return."

Born in Philadelphia to Italian immigrant parents on June 1, 1905, as a young child Frank moved with his family to Allston, Massachusetts, where they lived for several years. With Boston in the grip of the flu pandemic in 1918, Frank's parents moved the family to Natick, where they bought a



A contemporary newspaper account (left) speaks to Frank Balzarini's heroism at the Cocoanut Grove fire. In the undated photo, he poses with his mother and an unnamed friend (courtesy Maria Balzarini)

house at 50 Connecticut Ave. Frank was a champion cyclist and a talented singer, as his entry in the 1926 NHS yearbook attests: "His tongue was framed to music and his hand was armed with skill." He played baseball and football at Natick High and was active in the Glee Club and Dramatic Club.

Frank Balzarini was survived by his parents, Ernest and Mary (Maria), and two younger brothers, Victor (NHS '29) and Richard (NHS '32). His funeral was held at St Patrick's on December 2, 1942.

He is buried in the family plot at St Patrick's Cemetery, beneath a stone inscribed with the Bible verse (John 15:13) that reads "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends."

SOCIETY NEWS *(continued from page 2)*

Henry Wilson discussed at Boston conference
 NHS member **Joe Weisse** presented “Henry Wilson: from Natick cobbler to Vice President” at History Camp Boston 2018 in July. Joe will be telling Henry Wilson’s story at an NHS program in November.

Out and about

The museum may not be open yet, but that’s not slowing us down. We’ve been seeing many of you at our programs this spring. In April, Natick native and major league batting coach **Walt Hriniak** joined us for **Herb Crehan’s** talk on the Boston Red Sox and Natick’s connections to major league ball. In May, the Society, Bacon Free Library, and Eliot Church co-hosted a talk by Boston author and historian **Stephen Puleo** at Eliot Church.

Thanks to everyone who stopped by to see us for stickers and stories at the Natick Community Organic Farm’s “Maple Magic” pancake breakfast at Memorial School this spring. See you at Natick Days!

New Bacon Free Library director

Welcome to **Lauren Pfindner**, the new director of the Bacon Free Library. We look forward to building on our strong relationship with the library and the many interests we share, from our historic home to our collaborative programs.



Artists at work: children color Natick landmarks at the Natick Historical Society table at Natick Nights on June 14.



Interested in knowing more about the Natick Historical Society and its collections? Be sure to visit our website, facebook page, and blog:

www.natickhistoricalsociety.org
www.facebook.com/natickhistoricalsociety
www.natickhistoricalsociety.blogspot.com



A typewriter with its own story to tell

Have you ever used a manual typewriter? If you’re under fifty, the answer may be “no.” But visitors to the Natick Museum will soon have a chance to give one a try.

The 1930s L. C. Smith typewriter pictured here is a recent donation from Natick resident Richard Hanna. Mr. Hanna’s mother, Eileen Hanna, who lived nearby at 71 Eliot Street, worked for many years at Cooper’s Pharmacy (later the South Natick Pharmacy; in the building that now houses the Charles River Coffee House), where the typewriter used to stand.

We hope you’ll visit the Natick Museum this fall to try your hand at typing in the style of generations past.

In the meantime, if you have a memory or photo of Cooper’s Pharmacy to share, please reach out to us. We will look forward to hearing from you!

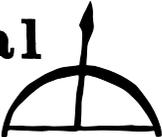


OUR MISSION

Through our collections, programs and outreach, the mission of the Natick Historical Society is to conserve, interpret, and share the historic elements of our past that are central to the development and ongoing life of the Natick community.

Q. Most residents know that the headstone of Rev. Daniel Takawambpait is now located on the grounds of the Eliot Church, the site of the first meetinghouse. Where can his footstone (pictured at left) be found?

The answer will be posted on our Facebook page in late July and will appear in the next issue of The Arrow.

**Natick
Historical
Society** 

207 Union Street, Natick, Massachusetts 01760
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