

# Somerset Historical Society

274 High Street, Somerset, MA 02726

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W I N T E R / S P R I N G I S S U E

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## President's Message

First, I would like to thank all of our members for their support throughout the years. Whether you volunteer your time, attend meetings, or support us financially, your efforts are appreciated. We strive to provide information and relevant programs to our members, preserve Somerset history, and display artifacts representing Somerset's past. We are always willing to entertain suggestions for upcoming programs and exhibits.

We continue working to improve the museum, and have added a new display case in the Military Room. We can thank Richard Tinsley and Rick Shane for the new General Store exhibit. In addition, we are renovating the tool room exhibit, and

look forward to having it completed this year. I would like to thank Rick Shane, Sean Kennedy, Scott Daigle, Chris Shane, and Cole Sabourin for all the hard



Railroad Bridge—Somerset Junction

work they have put in to date. We are excited about the improvements, and will notify you when they are completed. We hope all of you will come see the new exhibit.

We are also working to complete our new website, and hope to have it up and running soon. I feel a vibrant website is essential to communicate our message in today's world. We are looking for volunteers to help provide content for the website. Please let us know if you would be interested.

Once again, thank you for your support and we look forward to a great year!

Thank you,  
N. John Larsen  
President

## Growing Up in Somerset's Village

by Richard Tinsley

My journey began in 1945, a time of transition from wartime to a long-awaited return of local veterans to be readjusted to the community. I was the child of parents who had moved to Somerset a few years earlier from Bridgewater. My father worked at Firestone as an accountant. My mother was home with three children when I arrived. We lived in a first floor apartment on South Street. It was great! The house was right near Pierce's Beach, Park Shellac, and historic homes on South and Main Streets. This was my early playground.

*(story continued on page 2)*

## Growing Up in Somerset's Village *(continued from page 1)*

We had no limitations to my memory, as we played everywhere in the local neighborhood; from abandoned houses on the corner of South and Main (Jerathmael Bowers), another on the corner of Dublin and South, the Park Shellac can dumping area, the beach, and all the areas in between. Neighbors were great. Everyone was there if we needed them, and as kids, we always needed a meal, first aid, or shelter when it rained.

In 1951-52, we moved from South Street to High Street less than a mile away, but we had different friends, different everything. This was a vintage home dating back to the 1700's, and at one time was owned by Captain Manchester. The house was amazing. It still had servant quarters upstairs, no cellar, and trap doors. The neighborhood also had similar types of houses. There were lots of kids to play with; we never had to worry about where to play, whom to watch out for, or food if hungry. Everyone was watching out for each other. Both of my parents were working now, but so many others were there to take over for them.

Our playground had expanded, and there were no limits as to where to go or who to stay away from. The playground included swimming at Pierce's Beach, diving and swimming off the old railroad bridge, exploring the hills at the bottom of Old Colony Avenue, playing baseball at Goff's Field at the top of Old Colony Avenue, and exploring the woods at the end of Davis Street that ran to County Street at St. Patrick's Cemetery. Again, if you needed help, there were very few closed doors to anyone in need.

My world from age 10 was the Dighton/Somerset line at Muddy Cove Bridge to Pierce's Beach and Charlie Fisher's vegetable stand. On occasion, there was a bike ride to the old Boy Scout Camp in Dighton or a big ride to Kid Chassy Market at Reed Street and Brayton Avenue. We had a corner store and barber shop next door (Somerset Food Mart) where we could stop in at any time, Red's Variety and the Green Front Grocery Store on Main Street. Other destinations were Donkey's Pond at the bottom of Old Colony Avenue and the Marsh on Dublin Street for ice skating, Pierce Field off Riverside Avenue, and St. Patrick's Fisher House on South Street.

One of the kids I hung around with had a wooden boat. We worked on it all winter one year and we went out on the water in the summer. No motor, just rowing across to Assonet or the Fall River Golf Course, or wherever. We played games like Jack Knife, Kick the Can, Pinball on the front porch, and Hide and Seek. The Masonic Temple on Old Colony Avenue had auctions, as did the Federated Church, which were fun. In my younger years, I walked with my mother to get eggs from the free range chickens at the Glendale Farm on Pleasant Street. Chickens laid eggs just about everywhere.



**“Red”  
McGuire’s—  
Main Street**

We all had paper routes or worked delivering papers in the neighborhood, mowed lawns, or shoveled snow for people who couldn't do it for themselves. We received no pay, but maybe a cookie or lemonade. We did not get a TV until around age 9, and it had limited stations and programming.

***(story conclusion on page 3)***

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## Growing up in Somerset's Village (concluded)

Looking back, I think about the fantastic group of role models we had; hard-working parents and great neighbors willing to help and share with everyone. To mention all of them would be impossible, but people like Oliver Perry, our mailman who later ran the Somerset Credit Union is memorable. Oliver brought ice and food to us, and was always around to help anyone. Sid Hathaway, who started The Spectator, lived in our area until I was about 10. I watched my first TV show at his house. I was Mary Martin as "Peter Pan", and I was thrilled. Bobby Souza, our local sports star, ran Village Recreation while I was in High School, and was a role model for all the kids. Arlene Sampson, one of Somerset's early teachers, was elderly, but tutored me at her home, and always had a cookie for all the kids. Others, like Ed Sonion (Somerset Food Mart), Al Almond the barber, Charlie Fisher, Warren Goff, and Leon Doyle all were role models for me. Two farm field workers for Charlie Fisher known as Backie and Poncho were the first people of color I knew, and they were great. They umpired our little league games every night after working in the fields all day. Bill Nolan, the Police Chief at the time, lived around the corner from us. He was "The Chief" in uniform, but "Bill" every other time out of uniform. My teachers were local ladies who I saw in and out of school. I'll always remember Mrs. Dudley and Mrs. Lynch. Local police officer Herbie Menzes was always involved with the kids and sports, driving us to gyms, and always available if needed.

*"Bill Nolan, the Police Chief..., lived around the corner from us."*

Growing up in Somerset taught me community values and the value of friendship. No matter what happened, no matter who you were, no matter where you were in town, there was always someone to help. It was a community where the old taught the young, the young respected the old, and there was always a feeling of family and safety. I'm proud and honored to have grown up and raise my family here. Thank you Somerset.

## Somerset's Cemeteries Have Stories to Tell

by Betty Marsden

I grew up in Little Compton, in a house with cemeteries on two sides of me. I learned at an early age to roam amongst the graves, read their information, and imagine the people buried there and their lives. Later, I began a fascination with genealogy and family history back in the day when you had to roam an entire cemetery to find a grave. There were no lists, no cemetery offices, no Find A Grave resource.

Last year, I read of Diane Goodwin's desire to have people help and photograph the gravestones in certain local graveyards, some very old and overgrown...I was onboard! At first I simply went to the cemetery and photographed as best as I could, submitted the pictures, and went on my way. Then I started doing my own neighborhood cemetery, Hathaway-Chace, on Marble Street. I travelled by it almost daily, and the Highway Department had recently cut down all of the brush and brambles so the whole area was exposed. It became my favorite cemetery for a number of reasons—newer stones at the front, older and very old toward the back, woodchuck holes and a variety of animals and birds...I even found lost/stolen property once and called the police to retrieve it. I started with apparent family plots and branched out to determine the relationships between the different families. When I could not read stones, I looked to Find A Grave, which does contain some of the burials, Ancestry.com for family tree information, and vital records found on genealogy websites. The hardest part is the drawing and identifying to scale...the most frustrating is the inability to read the inscriptions...still, I chip away a bit at a time and sometimes have to report only an incomplete record of a grave.



**A view of a Chace family plot**

I have also made a card for each gravestone, each person's name and all the facts I have found about them. Vital records of the town and state, and the history of the town (when Somerset was part of Swansea), all have to be taken into consideration. My biggest hurdle is my lack of savvy in technology—I can get the facts, take pictures, and make the detailed drawings, but when it comes time to transmit the data via smart phone, email, etc., I wish I was back in the old days where you wrote it down and hand-delivered it...I do have a lot in common with the olden days and the people who were alive during that simpler time.



**Tombstone dating back to 1864**



## Memories of Pottersville... (continued from page 4)

On the land where the VFW is located once stood the old school house. One room 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grades, second room 7<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> grades. There was a desk, one old pump organ, rows of small seats and a desk, and a pot belly stove. The floor boards were wide and the cracks were wide also. Seated near the stove it was too warm and near the window you froze. The small entry took care of four coats, it also held an iron sink, a pail of fresh well water and a dipper. Does anyone know what became of the bell in the tower?

The beautiful Church of Our Savior on County Street was started in early 1901 or 1902. The services were held in a stable on Riverside Avenue across from the store I mentioned before. It is a cottage today. It also held the first fire engine until a place was built on Riverside Avenue. The Rev. Benedick of Christ Church, Swansea, and a few concerned people to mention a few: Mr. and Mrs. John Radcliff, Mr. and Mrs. Valentine Lawton, Mr. and Mrs. Rueben Ramsay, Mr. and Mrs. George Butcher, Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Bridge, Mr. and Mrs. Charles Brightly, Miss Lottie Willis and Miss Annie Buckley. After Capt. Pratt's death, his estate was sold and the members voted to buy land on Pratt Ave. in 1907. This was the site of the Mission of Our Savior.

I will leave Pottersville to the ages and go back to Somerset as a whole. How many remember Happy Joe with his horse drawn cart and its tinkling bell? Or yet Roland Crowell with his meat wagon wearing his white coat? Somewhere there is an old picture of a cottage on the corner of Riverside Avenue and facing Read Street and in the picture is a long, low building (now torn down) and on the sign it reads Somerset Tripe Works and also seated in a surrey a Mr. and Mrs. Steve Majors the owners. I don't know the first thing about tripe works or whether they slaughtered animals there or not, but I do know my folks bought some polished wooden plaques with steer horns mounted on them. This is all I can tell you about the Somerset Tripe Works, but I do know the Majors went to live in Maine.

What do I remember most about Somerset? Riding in an open trolley car after a day in the city, air, fresh country air. Crossing the old Slade's Ferry Bridge, stopping briefly at the first switch, then more along passing through the open land of the Slade's Farm. What is sweeter than new mowed hay in the late summer? We would stop again at the second switch where the Montaup is today. Here the Johnson Street children picked their blueberries to sell from door to door, here also grew the fragrant "Creeping Jenney" that grew in abundance. *(story conclusion on page 6)*

### **MEMBERSHIP FEES for 2017 are now DUE**

**Don't forget to renew your membership or join to support your town's Museum and History!**

**Please fill out the section below and return your dues and/or donation to:**

**Somerset Historical Society**

**PO Box 53**

**Somerset, MA 02726**

Name:

Telephone:

Address:

Email:

Membership Categories:

Individual \$10

Family \$15

Individual Lifetime \$100

Student \$5

Corporate Sponsorship (call 508-675-9010 for details)

Donation for Museum Renovations:

Check or Cash

This Membership is a gift for: \_\_\_\_\_

## Memories of Pottersville...(concluded)

I miss the open land and the trees, the wooded areas, the blue of the river and the white caps during a storm. I like to pick up a Baldwin apple from an orchard after a wind storm and eat its cold sweetness, the grapes too after the first frost.

Buffy's lots, as they were called in those days, were nature's paradise. The bogs and winding brook where the long stemmed violets grew, the blue flag and countless other wild flowers, they were there just for the picking. One spot where a spring bubbled up from the earth clear and cold with the fringe of watercress. Even the night time and early morning hours had their own sounds. The clop, clop of the horses' hoofs on the macadam road, the farmers going to town with their crops. Mr. King the milkman delivering the morning milk and the clop, clop, fading away. From the east window, you could see the red sun coming up from behind the golf links across the river, the reflection on the water made me think of a rose garden.

*"The clop, clop of the horses' hoofs on the macadam road..."*

This past summer, I took a walk down to the river, and looking over the seawall, I had hoped to see some minnows and fiddler crabs. The tide was coming in and what looked to me like thick brown sludge covering the shoreline. With a tear in my eye, I walked away.

### 2017 Upcoming Events at the Historical Society

- Sunday, April 2nd 2:00 p.m.: Genealogy Workshop with Speaker Kathleen Rubano
- Sunday, May 7th 2:00 p.m.: Actress Linda Myers Portrays Abigail Adams (this program is partially funded with a grant from the Somerset Cultural Council)
- May—date TBA: tour of Main Street and Museum by North Elementary 3rd Graders
- Monday, June 5th 7:00 p.m.: Annual Meeting and Elections
- Saturday, June 24th 9:00 a.m.: Walking Tour of Palmer Street Cemetery
- Thursday, September 14th (time TBA): Annual Veteran's Hall Wine and Cheese Club Fundraiser
- Friday, September 15th (time TBA): Lobster Dinner Co-hosted with the Lion's Club
- Saturday, September 16th 7:00 p.m.: Walking Tour of Old Main Street
- Saturday, September date TBA: Bus Trip to Historic Deerfield, MA
- Friday, December 1st 6:00 p.m.: Winter Greens Workshop
- Sunday, December 3rd 1-4:00 p.m.: Holiday Open House
- Tuesday, December 5th 6:00 p.m.: Annual Members Christmas Party

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