

Menotomy Minutes



NEWSLETTER OF THE ARLINGTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

WINTER 2019



A circa 1910 panoramic view of Massachusetts Avenue, featuring the old Highland Fire Station building.

Pondering the origin of “Spy Ponders”

by *Richard A. Duffy*

Spy Ponders again has been the name of Arlington High School’s sports teams for 35 years now, after an interim bearing other, unoriginal names, such as the Trojans. As acclaimed Boston Globe sports writer Dan Shaughnessy wrote in 2005 about interscholastic competition in Greater Boston, “regardless of your allegiance, you’ve got to love a place called Spy Pond and a team called the Spy Ponders.”

As I delved into the history of the name Spy Ponders, I expected to trace it back as far as AHS hockey games played on the ice of the pond. That reference checked out, but there was much more to the tale, going back at least to May 10, 1867—just ten days after the town of West Cambridge had changed its name to Arlington. A columnist for the biweekly student art and literary magazine, *The Harvard Advocate*, writing under the pseudonym “Atom,” seems to

(Continued on page 5)



In This Issue

- ◆ Pondering the origin of “Spy Ponders”
- ◆ President’s Corner
- ◆ Volunteer Spotlight
- ◆ AHS Collections
- ◆ **Sara’s article**
- ◆ Remembering Dr. Ronald A. Schorn
- ◆ Upcoming Lectures
- ◆ Winter Wednesdays

The 1932-33 AHS Spy Ponders hockey team.

President's Corner

Winter has arrived, and although we haven't yet been hit with a big snowstorm as I write this there is no guarantee we will enjoy a mild winter. However, I can give you some unqualified good news. Thanks to the efforts of trustee George Parsons (SDL note, if he's included in the volunteer spotlight, direct to the sidebar on right) and board member Paul Fennelly, we have been given an unrestricted \$50,000 award from the Massachusetts Office of Travel and Tourism to fund maintenance and repairs around the Smith Museum. We are deeply grateful to State Representatives Sean Garballey and Dave Rogers as well as State Senator Cindy Friedman for their support in securing this funding.

This money comes at a good time □ the air conditioning system used in our archives broke down last year requiring us to install a new system at the cost of \$13,000. The state funds will cover this expense. We plan to use remaining funds to remodel the Smith Museum's bathrooms (which are old and dingy and need new fixtures). We will also make improvements to the museum entrance, including updating the door and installing a video security system.

The goal of this work is to improve the visitor experience at the Jason Russell House and the Smith Museum. Expect to see some changes around our buildings this coming spring.

My best regards,
Stuart Brorson
President

Volunteer Spotlight



George Parsons has served on the Society Board since 2008, but also volunteers in many capacities – and has been especially instrumental in fundraising efforts aiding our applications to the Massachusetts Historical Commission and our local Community Preservation Committee. George was also part of the committee to help get the Community Preservation Act passed in Arlington. He is especially interested in the ongoing care of the Jason Russell House, often visiting other historic sites throughout the region and reporting back on how they have dealt with their own aging buildings and structural issues. He has examined quite a few old cellars throughout the years! Our annual “Evening in Arlington” event in the fall was George’s original conception and a special project he has successfully led for three years. He has determined that it is time to step down from his role and is hoping to assist a replacement who can take on the event and give it new leadership and a fresh perspective. If you’re interested, please get in touch with the Society and we can put you in touch with him. ❖

Donate to the



Annual Fund

Our Annual Appeal is underway. With your help, we are able to continue our mission to educate the public about the history of Arlington. If you like and appreciate the work we do, please consider making a tax-deductible donation to the Society today. Donors will be recognized in the next issue of “Menotomy Minutes.”

- Jason Russell Circle (\$1,000+)
- Goldsmiths (\$500-\$999)
- Silversmiths (\$200-\$499)
- Pewtersmiths (\$100-\$199)
- Friends (\$50-\$99)
- Other (any amount accepted)

Gifts at the Friend level or higher will be listed by category in our publications, and in the lobby of the museum. You can donate by mail, securely online at arlingtonhistorical.org/contribute/ or by phone at 781-648-4300 (please call Tuesday through Friday 10 to 6).

Collections article

AHS Collections

In addition to our programs, the Arlington Historical Society is also a collecting institution. We house a significant collection of objects and archives, caring for over 13,000 items. We continue to catalog and digitize our collections and records so that they may be of use to scholars, researchers, and the public. If you would like to know more about our collections, visit our website at arlingtonhistorical.org.

Recent Gifts of Note

Elizabeth Brennan of Danvers donated letters to Josiah Russell from Noah Russell, Eunice Bemis Russell, and Thomas H. Teel. Also a document related to marriage of Josiah Russell and Mary Ann Kline.

Charles Allen of Lenox donated a stack of crepe paper decorations featuring soldiers from World War I. It came from the home of Grace L. Whittemore at 4 Water Street.

Maureen Jackson donated two related booklets from the 20th century: "If Nuclear War Comes to Arlington..." from 1983 and "Fallout Protection For... Homes with Basements" from 1967.

Richard Duffy donated an aerial photograph of east Arlington c. 1940, a photograph with pastel of Daisy Marvin, and a framed portrait of John Townsend Trowbridge.

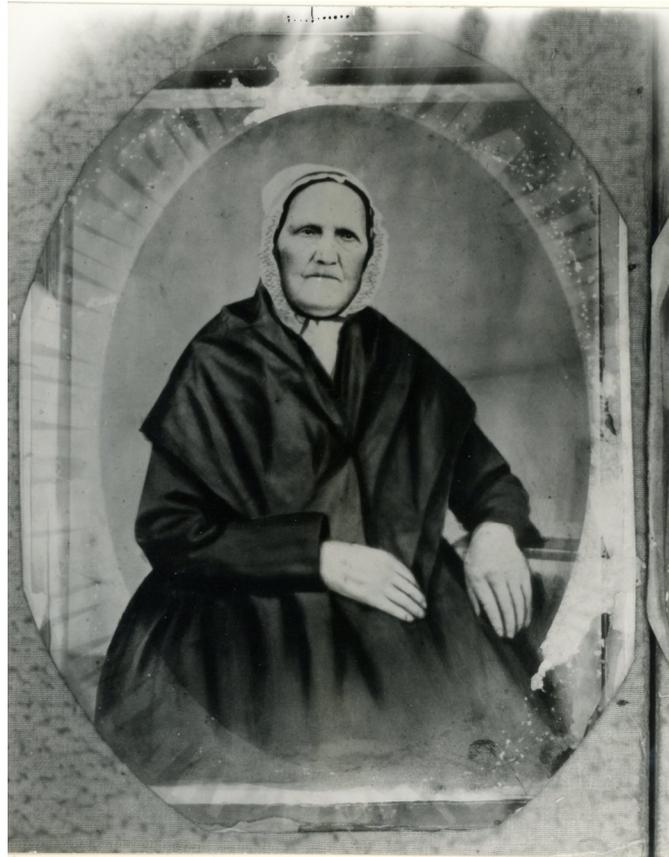


Image of Eunice Bemis Russell. This image is a photographic copy shot likely of an original daguerreotype. Eunice died in 1955, many years past the advent of this form of photography.

It's truly amazing what historic documents are still out there in people's attics and basements, as is shown by this fall 2018 acquisition of two 200-year old letters. The letters relate to the Jason Russell House and give us more insight into the Russell family and what happened to them at the dawn of the 19th century. One letter writer is Noah Russell who inherited the house and farm after his father's death on April 19, 1775. He writes to his son Josiah in New Jersey and speaks about his other children who had purchased farms in Connecticut. This western diaspora, as much as it seemed to dismay Noah Russell, is part of why we hear from so many Jason Russell descendants all over the country. This letter came to us from Liz Brennan, who grew up in New Jersey – the home of her Russell ancestor, Josiah, who moved there seeking opportunity. Liz received the documents from her mother, Alicia Lindsay Laird, whose mother was a Russell.

Many of Jason Russell's children had moved to Mason, NH, likely due to a need for more farmland to establish their own households. Of Jason's six surviving children, only two stayed; Thomas and Noah. Of Noah's children, it appears his two daughters Lydia and Abigail were the only ones to remain. Lydia married Thomas Hall Teel in 1814 and lived in the Jason Russell House with her family. Abigail died at age 29 leaving two young children in her mother and sister's care.

The oldest letter is dated December 9, 1818 from Noah in West Cambridge, to his son Josiah in New Jersey:

My son I received your letter and am very glad to hear that you

(Continued on page 4)

are well. Though I am sick of a fever. But if I git well I shall Be in Stafford next april there I shall be very glad to see you and then you may expect to se your Brother Jason & his famally for I have Bought Mr. Webber's farm and they are going to move rite up. I was up at Stafford last November then I bought that farm and I saw Mr. hyde he sais he should be very glad to se you.

Squire Whittemor hais got Back from the South and for good and all his fammally I have no notion of going so far as to se Mr. Tompkins farm But I shall in list of your wrighting a few lines to me to let me no whether you will meet me at Stafford next april or come home before your mother and the rest of the fammally are as well as common and she wishes for to se you.

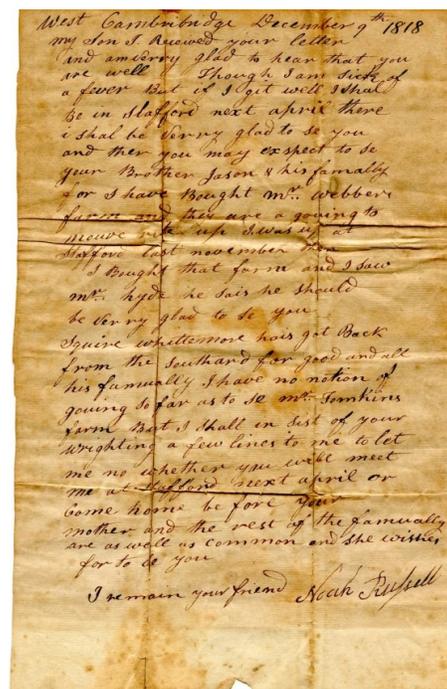
I remain your friend
Noah Russell

It appears that Noah purchased some land in Stafford, either to expand his farmland or to establish the household of his son Jason (b. 1785) who moved to the area around 1820 with his wife and four young children.

Then we have a letter from Eunice Bemis Russell to Josiah, dated November 6, 1821:

My Son Josiah Russell we received your letter and the one your wife sent you after you left home we are very glad to hear from you and your wife but we are sorry your health is poor I want you should write how you hold out home and what your complaints are. I am sorry you wrote . . . [unreadable] .. hard letter to . . . father . . . was very much displeased with it I want you should write whether you are have got into business or what you calculate to do My feelings are very great for you they are so great that they are beyond expression I think of you the last thing at night and the first in the morning.

*I want you should write what your mind is, your Father says he shall never send for you until you write a different letter from what you wrote last I should b every glad to have you and your wife in sted of strangers as we haf to hire all the time. I want you should write immediately. Your Brothers and Sisters all send their love to you and yours
This is from your Mother Eunice Russell*



Noah Russell's 1818 letter to his son Josiah

On the obverse is a postscript written by Josiah's brother-in-law Thomas H. Teel:

Dear Brother I was desireous to hear from you ever since you left West Cambridge and am verry sorry that you forgot to mention my name in your Last Letter as you promised that you would however I will forgive you if you will remember me in your next as hope you will and as soon as you receive this you remember what your father told you when you received a letter from Belleville that it was strange that you had all the letters and . . . [unreadable] . . .

I remain your Friend Thomas H. Teel

One can't help but wonder what was in that letter from Josiah to his father. It appears that Noah and Eunice are hoping for help on the Russell farm. Bear in mind that Noah's daughter Lydia was already living in the Jason Russell House with her husband and their growing family. Josiah had just married in 1821. Noah Russell dies aged 61 in 1824, hopefully having reconciled with his son. Josiah dies at age 38, leaving his wife and two small children who continued to live in New Jersey and hold onto these precious papers from their father and grandfather.



Mary Ann Kline Russell, wife of Josiah. She died on 11 December 1865 in Newark, New Jersey

Written by Sara Lundberg
Thank you to Linda Cohn for genealogical research

have coined the term Spy Ponders to refer generally to the inhabitants of Arlington:

The great day has come and West Cambridge is no more. The Spy Ponders are no longer to be reminded of their ignominious origin, and are henceforth forever Arlingtonians. Strange to say it costs no more to go from Boston to Arlington, via Arlington Avenue than it once did to reach West Cambridge by North Avenue. We understand that East Cambridge is to be changed to Clarendon, and that euphonious Bolingbroke is to be substituted for the "Port."

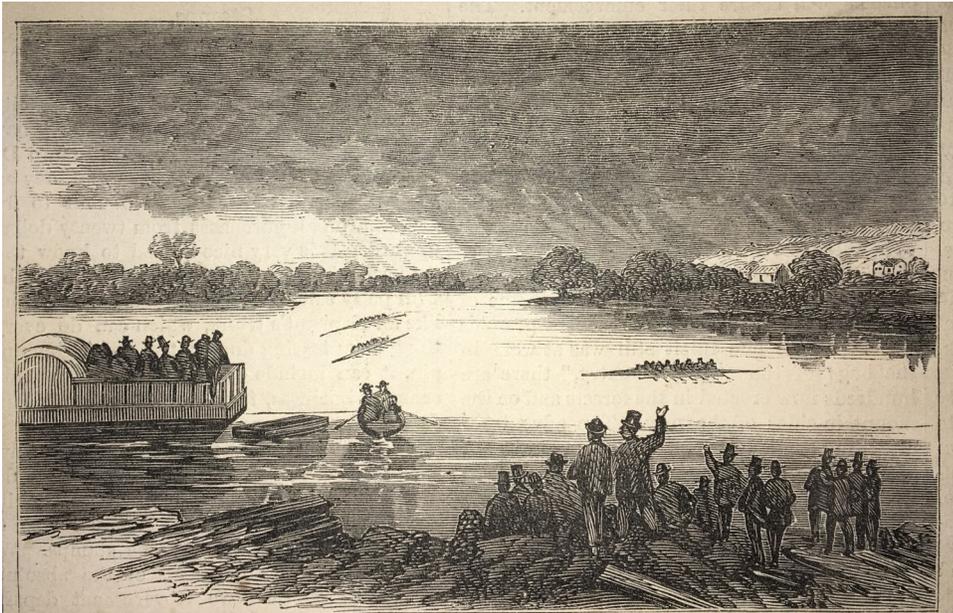
The arrogance of privileged youth and the overwrought prose of the Victorian era mask the elements of truth and satire in this short commentary. There were no plans to rename the neighborhoods of Cambridge proper cited; that was just a device to mock the supposed pretentiousness of what the author clearly felt were the country folk ("Spy Ponders") of West Cambridge "which they magnificently named Arlington," a fellow staffer of The Harvard Advocate later chimed in.

It might seem surprising that "Atom" would bother noticing a suburb's decision to change its name, but the fact of the matter passed daily before his eyes on the side of the horse-drawn street railway cars traveling through Harvard Square on their route between Bowdoin Square in Boston and the Academy Street terminus at West Cambridge. But "Atom" didn't take pains to get at facts. The section of present-day Massachusetts Avenue in Arlington was not a continuation of North Avenue in Cambridge. It became Main Street at the West Cambridge town line, and was the street baptized as Arlington Avenue in 1867.

"Spy Pond" was emblazoned on the side of the horse railroad cars as a key destination. The Spy Pond House and its picnic grove had been a draw for city dwellers (including Harvard collegians) for several years, and Spy Pond's ice industry was renowned. "Atom" smugly dismissed the townspeople as "Spy Ponders," but somehow overlooked that in their burst of civic pride, the name of Spy Pond was changed to Arlington Lake. Simultaneously, Pond Street was renamed Lake Street. The new street name stuck, but Spy Pond proved too iconic to be called anything else for long.

As part of the official celebration of changing the town's name to Arlington, on June 17, 1867, Harvard was invited to hold a rowing regatta on Arlington Lake, with two crews in shells, and two crews in lapstreaks. After the races, "T.L.S." of The Harvard Advocate reported: "The festivities were . . . enlivened by the belles of Arlington, who rewarded the fortunate victors with smiles and glances far more precious than the silver cups."

The connection between Arlington High School athletics and Spy Pond begins in the mid-1890s when the team played interscholastic ice polo on its surface, eventually following the "fad" for "Canadian hockey" that would come to replace it entirely. The nickname "Spy Ponders" was applied across



THE REGATTA ON ARLINGTON LAKE, MASS., BETWEEN THE JUNIOR AND FRESHMEN CREWS OF HARVARD COLLEGE, JUNE 17TH.

A woodcut from the front page of Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper of July 6, 1867, as part of its extensive coverage of the celebrations connected to the renaming of West Cambridge as Arlington.

AHS sports teams when Spy Pond Field was received as a gift from Henry and Hattie Hornblower and placed under the authority of the school department in 1910. The athletics facility was conveniently close to AHS when it was at Academy and Maple streets, and it would continue to serve the high school for many years after its move in 1915 to its present site because mill ponds stood where today are the stadium and fields. Atop the Spy Pond grandstand, the admonition "Play Fair" literally was cast in stone and was no small dimension of "Ponder Pride" in track and field, baseball, football, and girls' field hockey.

Long after other high schools abandoned distinctive nicknames relating to their localities, such as the Quincy Quarrymen or the Brockton Shoemakers, the Arlington Spy Ponders name was revived and it seems unthinkable to replace it again. Go ponder. Go Ponders! ❖

Remembering Dr. Ronald A. Schorn

by David Baldwin



Ronald Schorn as President of the Society in 1988. The back reads, "Fixin' Grub in the Jason Russell House." Note that Mr. Schorn is using the JRH fireplace and collections materials to cook!

Ron and Marcia arrived in Arlington in early 1981 from Texas. He had been recruited to be the technical editor of the astronomy journal, *Sky & Telescope*, headquartered in Cambridge. He prided himself in walking to work most days from their home in Arlington Center to his office in Fresh Pond.

Marcia and Ron immediately and enthusiastically joined the Arlington Historical Society and offered to volunteer. Ron was steadfast and helped moving items and hefting loads. Our work sessions were always productive and filled with his stories; he had several for any topic. As a volunteer, he never said no to any request big or small and quickly became the "go to guy" to get work done. When a position opened on the Board of Directors in 1983, Ron was a natural choice. He was responsible for the society's programs; his efforts brought in then-record crowds. The director of the JFK library and personal aide to President Kennedy, David Powers, spoke on the twentieth anniversary of the assassination. It was a very moving evening.

Ron was president of the Arlington Historical Society from 1987 to 1991. The society thrived under his leadership. Like so many of us, he was dedicated to Mrs. Capes, long-time caretaker and tour guide at the Jason Russell House. When her tenure living in the Russell house exceeded that of Jason Russell, Ron was instrumental in her designation as "Mrs. Jason Russell." She was thrilled by the title and by the hand-carved plaque that Ron made for her.

Ron was also active in the Menotomy Minutemen and worked to enhance the relationship between the two organizations. He worked to bring new activities to the joint historical society/minutemen celebration on Town Day. It continues to this day.

Ron Schorn was an inspiration to many. He was willing to join in, actively participate, and rise to leadership when asked. He led by example and will be missed by many. ❖

Upcoming Lectures

Except where noted, our regular Tuesday 7:30 p.m. programs will be the Masonic Temple, 19 Academy Street (disabled access is at rear)



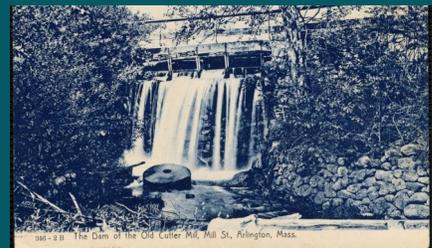
Sunday, January 27 at 2:00 p.m.

SPECIAL AFTERNOON AT THE SMITH MUSEUM

Sara Lundberg, Kate Potter, Robert Gross

Enjoy a pop-up exhibition of objects and images from our collection inspired by or made from the natural world. Learn about the connections between fashion and conservation and how mass production often emulated natural materials.

The afternoon will feature a special discussion with acclaimed historian Robert Gross, author of the book *Minutemen and Their World*. Robert has been serving as consulting scholar for our upcoming exhibition on April 19, 1775 in Arlington and will share some of what our research has taught us so far.



Tuesday, February ??

A BROOK RUNS THROUGH IT: ARLINGTON'S MILL BROOK, MILLERS & MANUFACTORIES THROUGH TIME

Ed Gordon, Ann LeRoy, Doreen
Stevens & Dermot Whittaker

The engaging "companion program" to the historical exhibit at the Old Schwamb Mill.

Winter Wednesdays—February 2019

Wednesdays 10 am at the Smith Museum of the Arlington Historical Society*

Welcome to our ninth year of Arlington Historical Society members gathering to hear interesting talks and enjoy refreshments on mid-winter mornings!

* Note: Please check our website the morning of the scheduled talk for postponements or cancellations in event of inclement weather.
www.arlingtonhistorical.org

Doris Birmingham – Portrayals of Women in the Art of Thomas Eakins, John Singer Sargent, and Winslow Homer

February 6th

In a period of rapid social change, it is interesting to explore the images of women produced by three of America's greatest 19th century painters. What if anything do their paintings have in common? How do they differ? To what degree do they reflect the values of American society in this period? This is also the era of the emergence of the "New Woman" in the popular media. Can we find any hints of that idea in the work of these three men? Finally, how do women artists, especially Boston women artists, portray their female subjects at this time?



Captain Al Sharpe – A History of Arlington's Fire Dept

February 13th

Arlington first purchased tools for firefighting in 1818 and purchased its first hand engine in 1825. Eureka I that is on display at Fire HQ was purchased in 1852 and sits alongside Tower I that was purchased in 2018. Over time numerous volunteer agencies have combined to create the current professional AFD of today. Stations and equipment have evolved over time and reflect the town's desire for state of the art service. Please come and learn about the years of history that have created your Arlington Fire Department.



Sara Lundberg – How Portrait Photography Reflected the Face of Arlington

February 20th

Photographs are ubiquitous in our digital world, with the ability to capture and distribute them right in our own pockets. More and more people than ever use cameras to record events or respond to experiences, but it wasn't always so. At its invention in the mid-19th century, portrait photography was the great democratizer. Prior to this time, the painted portrait was the privilege of only the very wealthy. Photography made it inexpensive enough that the average person could afford it but also expensive enough to make an event of the experience. Having your picture made meant that you might dress in your finest clothes, and often bring memorabilia that helped to convey more about yourself than just your face. This lecture will consist of a brief history of photographic portraiture using images from the Society collection which illustrate the relevant human story that immortalized in each image.



Rosemarie Smurzynski – The Mount Auburn Cemetery

February 27th

Join Mount Auburn Cemetery docent, Rosemarie Smurzynski, for a virtual tour of the cemetery with stops to visit Arlington residents buried there. Mount Auburn was founded in 1831. It is the first rural cemetery in America. Many followed, including the famed Greenwood Cemetery in Brooklyn, New York.



SPY POND FIELD, ARLINGTON, MASS.



Circa 1925 postcard of featuring AHS Spy Ponders baseball team practice.

The Arlington Historical Society is a 501(c) 3 non-profit organization. Contributions are deductible to the extent allowed by law.

Contact Us

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Tues-Thurs 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

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www.arlingtonhistorical.org

AHS Newsletter team: Sara Lundberg, Elisabeth Carr-Jones, Carolyn Parsons, Doris Birmingham, Richard Duffy, and Stuart Brorson.

The Society welcomes submissions to Menotomy Minutes. If you wish to submit an article, please contact the Society to discuss your piece prior to submission. We cannot guarantee when or if your article will be published. All articles are edited for publication.

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