

Menotomy Minutes



NEWSLETTER OF THE ARLINGTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

SUMMER 2020



The Remarkable Fisher-Tappan Family

by *Richard A. Duffy*

The local origins of the Fisher-Tappan family are found in their Frost ancestors, who settled in Colonial-era Menotomy. A new branch of the family tree spouted following the arrival of David Fisher, an 1850 immigrant from Nova Scotia. And the last branch was added by Daniel Tappan, a descendant of early Colonial settlers of Newbury, who in 1875 was part of the massive “reverse-migration” to Massachusetts from northern New England.

David Fisher was 22 years old in 1850. He first worked as a farm laborer in West Cambridge (in the section later set-off to create Belmont). In 1859 Fisher married Elvira Anstes Frost, a sister of his business partner since 1858, Newell Frost. The newlyweds settled in Winchester, at the Fishers’ 20-acre corn farm where their daughter and only child, Ethel, was born in 1861.

Retaining the Winchester farm, the Fishers moved in 1864 to West Cambridge (Arlington), to a home and ten-acre market garden (see “Pairing Past & Present”). Following David’s untimely death at age 43 in 1871, his formidable widow continued the flourishing enterprise.

Daniel Langdon Tappan, born in Sandwich, N.H. in 1855, came to Arlington at age 20. In the Tappan-Toppan Genealogy he published in 1915, Tappan describes his early years in Massachusetts working for wholesale grocers, then as a traveling salesman for a series of food manufacturers. Oddly, he omits the

(Continued on page 4)



Arthur N. Tappan, about age 12, with a bicycle that appears to be brand new. Note the white rubber tires that were typical of the late 1890s.

President's Corner

Dear Society Members,

I write you in late May, shortly after the peak of COVID-19 in Massachusetts but still amid the global pandemic. Our Society has been closed to the public since March and we did not produce a newsletter this spring, both due to the sudden changes brought by the epidemic. I am glad that the Summer 2020 issue gives me another opportunity to communicate to you now.

This May marked the end of my presidency at the Society; this is my farewell column. A lot of things have happened at the Society over the last five years. Some things literally were small, like the miniature Jason Russell house in the acrylic box on the Jason Street walkway. Others were large, like the structural work performed on the Jason Russell House. Some were enhancements of old traditions, such as Menotomy Minutes published in full color, and the Patriot's Day re-enactments and tours. Others have become new traditions, such as hosting colonial spinning and clothes-

washing on our lawn on Town Day, and our annual fundraising party. We also expanded our internet activities, especially making our collection accessible online for the public to enjoy.

All these things are collaborative efforts, and I was truly fortunate to work with a team of people to make all these things happen. My thanks go to so many people at the Society, whom I will thank in person. But I would like to express here my gratitude to our director, Sara Lundberg, for her ideas and support during the last five years. My fortunate job as president was often to simply say, "good idea—go for it" to many of the ideas she proposed. Thank you, Sara!

Finally, I look forward to remain active in the Society—as first vice president on the board of directors, on the Tour Guide Committee, and I have a few ideas for newsletter articles, so perhaps you'll again see my byline in Menotomy Minutes before too long.

My best regards,
Stuart Brorson

IN MEMORIAM

Doris Powell, on March 24, at age 96. Always known by her diminutive nickname "dp," she served the Society as vice president - program from 2001 through 2004, bringing a new dimension to this vital aspect of the Society's mission with her deeply thoughtful approach and a marvelous sparkle in her eye.

John Flood, on April 22, at age 74. After retiring from the Town of Arlington, John lent his decades of expertise in facilities management as a member of staff at the Society, in charge of buildings and grounds. A true gentleman to any with the good fortune to have known him.

Jean Potter, on July 3 at age 89. Jean was active in the Society in many roles, including board member, Nominating Committee, and most recently, Collection Committee. She founded the Arlington Heights Nursery School, led today by her daughter, Margaret, and where the Society held its programs for several years. Jean's son-in-law, Wilbur Kim, served as a trustee for the Society. Thus, we are grateful for multiple generations of service to our organization as we fondly remember Jean.

FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

The spring issue of Menotomy Minutes is typically filled to almost overflowing with news about the many activities happening during peak season at the Society. Due to the abrupt suspension of the Society's public programming and access, the Spring 2020 issue had to be omitted. Our summer issue is always four pages, but we want to bring our readers an abundance of content in this medium, during a time when we still cannot gather in person. Thus, we have produced a special eight-page edition.

The focus of this issue is the Fisher-Tappan family, which we can enjoy thanks to an extraordinary collection of images that was donated to the Society in 2010 by Beryl Grant Tappan and Jourdan Moore Houston. Its quality and variety have allowed me to distinctly present three main themes: people, place, and profession. And to present a "summer double-header" of the "Pairing Past & Present" feature that is always so popular with the readers of Menotomy Minutes.

Our Autumn 2020 issue is scheduled for release in mid-October. Please let us know the kinds of features you would like to see in Menotomy Minutes, and please consider proposing the write-up of a subject that interests you and that up until now you haven't had the chance to work on. We have much talent among our membership, and this is a great place in which to share it.

CORRIGENDUM In "Fiercest Fighting was in Menotomy," by Howard B. Winkler (Winter 2020 issue), it was Lt. Col. Francis Smith who led the British Regulars to Lexington on April 19, 1775, and not Lt. Col. Francis Leslie. There was a Lt. Col. Alexander Leslie who was sent to Salem on February 26, 1775 with 240 troops.

Pairing Past and Present

by Richard A. Duffy



The home on the left stood on the site of 285 Massachusetts Ave. It was built in 1826 by Ephraim Tufts, a former distiller who became one of the first farmers of the town to grow vegetables for the Boston produce market. After Tufts died in 1853, his heirs cut-through Tufts Street on the western boundary of his land. The dwelling's Federal-style origins are visible despite the modernized windows and ornamentation that likely followed its purchase by David Fisher in 1864. After Fisher's death in 1871, his widow and young daughter remained at the home, later joined by his son-in-law, Daniel Tappan, and grandson, Arthur. The extended Fisher-Tappan family moved next door around 1895 to the Second Empire-style house at 269 Massachusetts Ave. (pictured at right, with Daniel and Arthur Tappan in the horse carriage). It had been built circa 1868 for farmer Walter Russell. The Fisher-Tappans retained ownership of 285 Massachusetts Ave. and rented it to a series of tenants, starting with their farm manager, Charles Learned. They sold the homes and land for \$100,000 to the Boston Elevated Railway Co. (a predecessor of today's MBTA) in 1922, but the transit system's plan to build a trolley car service yard were denied by the town. Thus, the Tappans unexpectedly lived for the rest of their lives at 269 Massachusetts Ave., which suffered a fire in 1934 and was razed shortly thereafter.



The present-day views include the distinctive Art Moderne apartment building at 287 Massachusetts Ave., on the corner of Tufts Street. It was erected in 1938 on what had been the left-side yard of the Fisher homestead. The Fisher home at 285 Massachusetts Avenue was replaced in 1950 by a utilitarian six-story, red brick apartment block, on the corner of Bates Road, which had been cut-through in 1936 on an alignment to connect River Street and Massachusetts Avenue. On the site of Daniel Tappan's 269 Massachusetts Ave. home (now bearing number 271) a four-story apartment building with professional offices on the ground floor was built in 1970. ❖



Left: A circa 1865 carte de visite seated portrait of David Fisher.
Right: A circa 1890 tintype of Elvira Frost Fisher, against a seaside resort photographer's backdrop.

The Remarkable Fisher-Tappan Family (continued from page 1)

period around 1880 when he was a worker in a grain mill, possibly Samuel Fowle's of "Arlington Wheat Meal" fame.

Tappan married Ethel Fisher on December 22, 1884. The next year they welcomed their son and only child, Arthur Newell Tappan. Tappan assumed management of the Fisher farm in 1887, henceforth locally referred to as "Dan Tappan's place," even though still owned by his mother-in-law.

Tappan focused on marketing produce, while foreman John A. Lindsay superintended cultivation of over 50 acres. Tappan leased adjacent fields through which run sections of Harlow, Everett, Grafton, and Oxford streets today. Other farmlands were scattered in Belmont and Winchester, as well as in Arlington Heights, where Fisher Street memorializes Elvira Fisher's ownership.

When matriarch Elvira died in 1919 at age 92, the farm she had arrived at 55 years earlier was surrounded by the dwellings of a booming streetcar suburb. Just three years later, Ethel Fisher Tappan died at age 61.

Arthur Tappan did not become a market gardener. After Arlington High School, he attended Bryant & Stratton Business College and worked for retail merchants, except for a brief interval on the farm around 1920. Arthur never married and died in 1933 at age 48. His deeply grieving father followed him the very next year. ❖



Ethel Eugenia Fisher graduated from Arlington's public Cotting High School in 1879. She was in the first class of four women to receive degrees from Radcliffe College in 1883. As Mrs. Daniel Tappan, she was active in the Arlington Woman's Club, a prestigious civic and educational organization.

Married.
Tappan, Ethel E. Fisher.
Mrs. Daniel S. Tappan
At Home
after January fifth, 1885.
Arlington Ave. cor. Tufts St.
Arlington, Mass.



Dan Tappan was a keen horseman, shown here with a real-life black beauty.



On their honeymoon to the Washington, D.C. area, Dan and Ethel Tappan posed for this studio portrait in Richmond, Virginia. The gilt-edged card announced their marriage and let friends know that they would be receiving guests "At Home" as from January 5, 1885.



Arthur N. Tappan and his father both belonged to the same fraternal organizations. Arthur is seen here, circa 1915, wearing the fez of the Aleppo Shriners. Arthur and Dan were also members of the Hiram Masonic Lodge of Arlington.

Background design: The gold-and-cream patterned endpaper of Daniel Tappan's "cabinet card" photograph album.

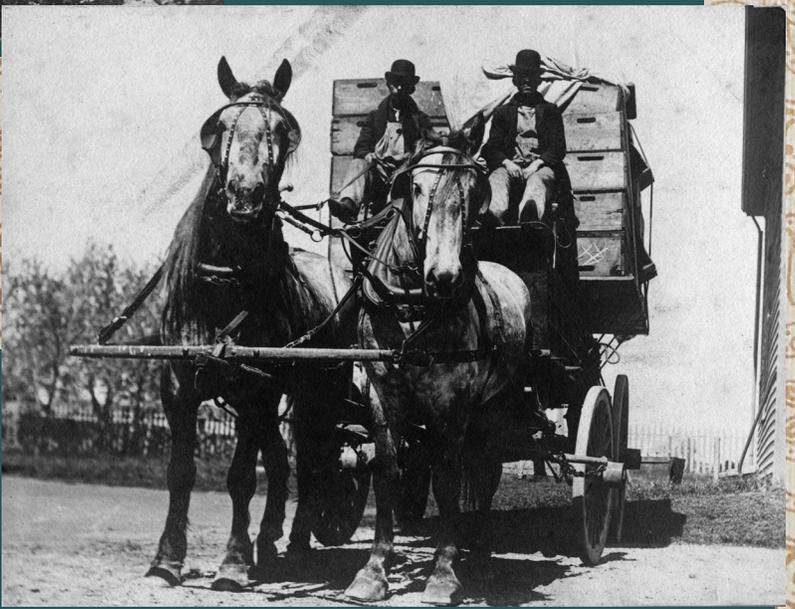
“Dan Tappan’s Place”

The Litchfield Studio of Arlington posed this unusual scene of workers spreading fresh manure, the ideal organic soil amendment that helped to ensure the productivity of suburban market gardens.



Ploughing-in the manure before planting had to be performed at the right time and in the correct manner so that the nutrients would not be so concentrated as to burn tender young plants. Tappan’s principal field crops were onions (six thousand bushels annually) and celery (35 acres cultivated), in addition to greenhouse-grown early-season vegetables.

The four “drivers and handlers” on the Tappan farm were considered top-skilled laborers. In addition to safely getting produce to market, a regular duty was to drive the heavy-duty wagon to the Boston City Stables to transport high-quality, inexpensive manure. With over 50 acres to fertilize, this was an essential job for any well-run farm, and a public service to relieve the city of its accumulated street wastes.



AHS Collections Recent Gifts of Note

Shirley Kerr of Cornelius, North Carolina, donated an autographed photograph of General Nelson Monroe. It was purchased by her brother, a resident of Beverly in the 1970s, as part of a large estate sale.

Charles Allen of Port Charlotte, FL donated two boxes of materials from the Whittemore family. It includes letters and the diary of Grace Langdon Whittemore, quotidian documents of Amos & Henry Whittemore, an 1850 account of the story of Amos Whittemore on April 18-19, 1775, a painted and printed portrait of Helen G. Whittemore, photographs of the family, including a homestead venture in Florida during the 1880s.



Joel Bohy of Bolton donated a bookshelf made from wood reclaimed from the Jason Russell House.

Sidney Slobodkin donated three aerial photographs and two maps.

Sandra McAlister donated five postcards that formerly belonged to Margaret "Markie" Smith of 33 Gray Street.

William Mahoney of Champaign, IL donated a collection of miscellaneous documents and ephemera including a quitclaim deed of Vittoria Dallin, a political ribbon for Governor J.Q.A. Brackett, and a catalog of William Wood Ice Tools.

Our thanks to the following generous supporters

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2020-2021 AHS Election

For the first time in its 123-year history, the Society held its annual May election remotely, due to the restrictions of the COVID-19 pandemic. Sincere appreciation is offered for the board service of Pamela Meister, our former president who most recently has served as first vice president, as she moves to the Nominating Committee.

Thanks to our talented elected leaders who are continuing to serve in their previous positions. And congratulations to those taking on new roles: George Parsons as president, Stuart Brorson (immediate past president) as first vice president, Paul Fennelly as membership director, and

Robert Brazile, who is new to the board as a director-at-large.

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Vice President – Stuart Brorson
Vice President – Patsy Kraemer
Treasurer – Alan Jones
Clerk – Christine Cronin-Tocci
Membership Director – Paul Fennelly

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Robert Brazile • Linda Cohn
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Menotomy Minutes

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Detail of an embossed leather cover of a Victorian-era photograph album.



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