

Menotomy Minutes



NEWSLETTER OF THE ARLINGTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

SPRING/SUMMER 2021



Woman Suffrage & Representative Town Meeting Centennials

by Richard A. Duffy

The Nineteenth Amendment (Amendment XIX) to the United States Constitution was adopted in August 1920. It succinctly ended the long fight for full woman suffrage across the nation in under 40 words:

“The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex. Congress shall have power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation.”

The amendment came just in time for women to vote in the October 5 presidential primary election, where 92-year old S. Elizabeth Yerrinton “was given the privilege of depositing the first ballot.” There were 882 ballots cast by men and 442 by women. The Arlington Advocate editorialized: “we have only praise for the way Arlington women for the first time exercised this important duty of citizenship.” Despite this success, concern about the influx of new voters led the Board of Selectmen, through the Town Clerk, to advertise on page one of the Advocate for the November 2 presidential election: “Polls open in BOTH precincts from 5:45 A.M. till 5 o’clock P.M.,” adding “Women

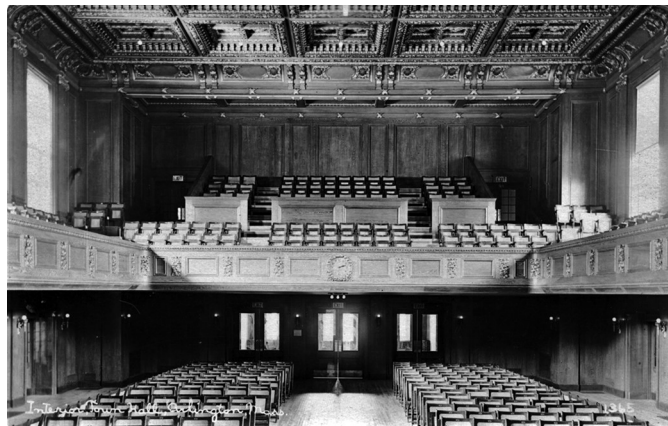
voters are requested, where they can do so, to vote between the hours of 10 A.M. and 4 P.M.”

Prior to the Nineteenth Amendment, women in Massachusetts had an abridged right to vote in elections for local school committees (known as “school suffrage”), starting in 1879. The first woman to hold elected office in Arlington was Georgianna Peatfield, who won a seat on the Arlington School Committee in 1896.

The movement grew in subsequent years to end separate “male ballots” and “female ballots” (as these were officially called) in town elections, to say nothing of universal suffrage at all levels of government. By 1915, Arlington had both an Equal Suffrage League as well as a women-led Anti-Suffrage League, whose emblem was the red rose. The latter were nicknamed the “Antis,” and

many wore buttons that proclaimed “Anti.” There were both women and men who believed that a woman’s place in government should be consistent with traditional “feminine” concerns, such as education and public welfare. Budgets, taxation, infrastructure, executive action, and other aspects of

Prior to Annual Town Meeting of 1921,



*women had to be seated in the balcony,
as they were not eligible to vote.*

President's Corner: A Poignant Spring Memorial



About dusk on April 18, 2021, a breezy and damp early spring day, a group assembled at the Old North Bridge in Concord to read the names of the fallen of April 19, 1775—the first day of the American Revolution. As president of the Arlington Historical Society, I was honored to read the names of the dead from Arlington, then known as Menotomy. Others in the group included BJ Dunn, superintendent, Minute Man National Historical Park; Jim Malloy, Lexington town manager; Col. Katrina Stephens, commander, Hanscom Air Force Base; Tom Putnam, executive director, Concord Museum; Patrice Todisco, executive director, Freedom's Way National Heritage Area; and Lt. Colonel Bob Falotico and Colonel Paul O'Shaughnessy, both of the British 10th Regiment of Foot, local reenactors (www.redcoat.org) who read the names of the British dead.

We began with a solemn procession across the Old North Bridge from the side where the Minute Men had mustered to meet the British troops that had marched from Charlestown to Concord. Each of us carried a lantern with a lit candle. As it was just about sunset, the procession was a fitting prelude to the reading of the names. The superintendent of the Minute Man National Park introduced the readings. A reenactor clergyman, Henry Cooke, playing the part of Reverend William Emerson, read a passage from the Old Testament appropriate for the event. A poem was read by Judy Cataldo, also in colonial dress, commenting on the events in very human terms of a brother, husband, or son who perished on that day.

Much of eastern Massachusetts answered the call that day, reflected in the origins of the men who fell. Ten men

from Lexington died, as did three from Acton, three from Sudbury, one from Bedford, one from Beverly, two from Woburn, six from Menotomy, including Jason Russell, one from Brookline, seven from Danvers (including Peabody), four from Lynn (including Lynnfield and Swampscott), one from Salem, two from Charlestown, one from Dedham, two from Medford, five from Needham, and one from Watertown, for a total of 49. The British suffered an even larger number of casualties. The names of seventeen known British dead were read and it was noted that an additional 56 were killed and 26 were wounded in action. Additional Redcoats who went missing may have decided that their futures would be brighter here in Massachusetts.

April 19, 1775, marked only the beginning of the conflict that would continue for another eight years and cost the Americans a total of 6,800 killed in action and 6,100 wounded in action. It is estimated that the British casualties in that war totaled 24,000. This was the fifth vigil since its inception. Previous gatherings had attracted as many as 350 onlookers. Due to the pandemic, the 2021 proceedings were held without spectators, but were filmed and can viewed on YouTube by searching "Patriot Vigil 2021."

- George H. Parsons

EDITOR'S NOTE

In the Winter 2020 tribute to Sally Rogers it was stated that Creative Playmates, the original name of the Rogers-Pierce Children's Center, was founded in 1970. Creative Playmates was established in 1968 as a nursery school, and in 1970 it expanded its scope to include daycare for younger children.

Thanks to Our Generous Supporters!

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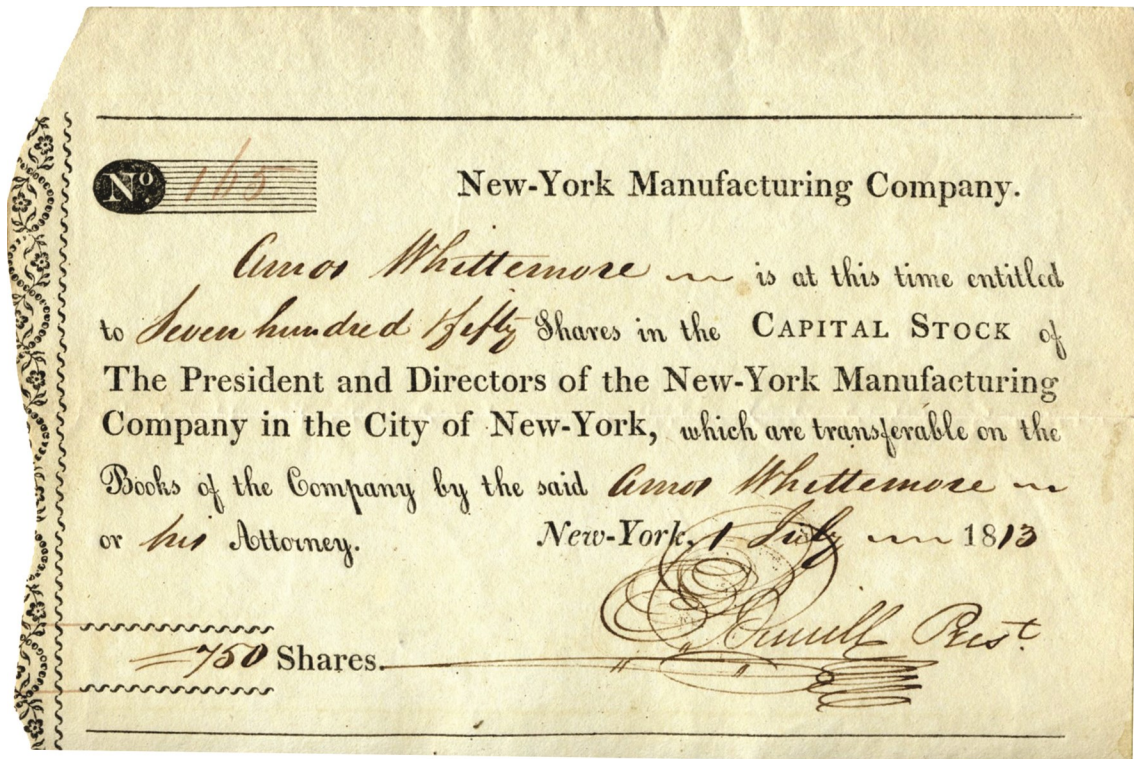
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From the Collection:

Recent Acquisitions



Amos Whittemore (1759-1828) invented a machine to manufacture pin-cards to comb cotton and wool for textiles. The business headed by his brother, William, operated a factory from 1779 to 1812, in the area now occupied by the carriage house and cottage to the rear of the Whittemore-Robbins House. The business was acquired and moved to New York. This stock share certificate documents that Whittemore retained a financial interest. Gift of Charles Allen.



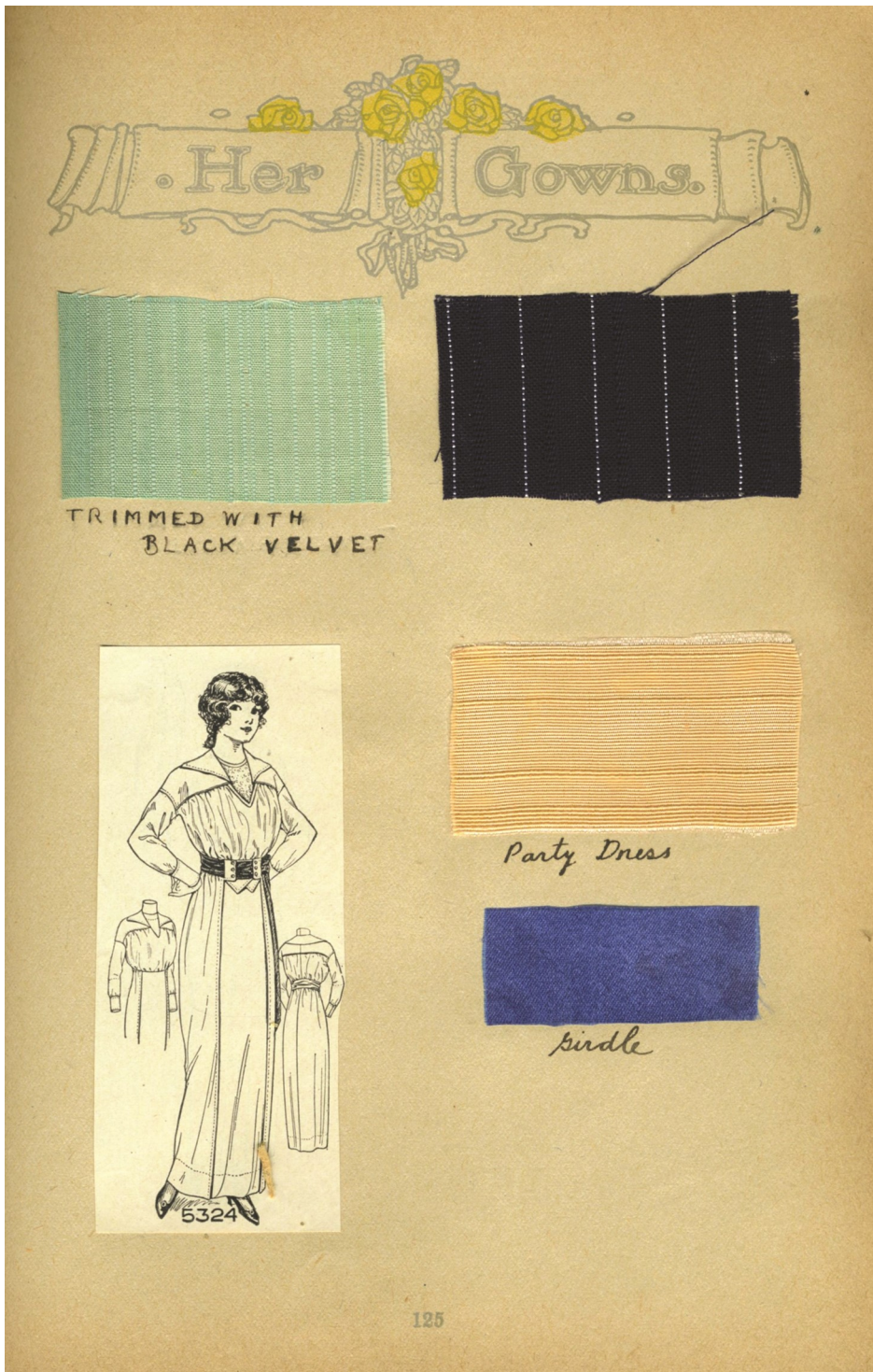
A circa 1875 ice-plow manufactured in Arlington at the William T. Wood Co. ice-tool factory, on Massachusetts Avenue east of Pond Lane. This was a hand-plow typically used for family use, rather than large-scale commercial purposes, for which horse-drawn plows were used. The objective was to cut down two-thirds of the thickness of the ice, before using other tools to continue the operation. Gift of William H. Mahoney.

Collection Committee News

The Collection Committee has been meeting via Zoom throughout the COVID-19 shutdown, to continue the important work of evaluating proposed new gifts and purchases of images and objects to thoughtfully grow the holdings of the Society. It also has recently undertaken review of the current collection policy and emergency response plan. The current members of the Collection Committee are Elizabeth Andrew, Robert Brazile, Richard Duffy, Pamela Meister (chair), and George Parsons (ex-officio as president of the Society), and Doreen Stevens. Museum Director Sara Lundberg and Museum Assistant Melinda Howard serve as key staff participants in the committee's work.

The Collection Committee members are also serving on the team of the formal Museum Assessment Program of American Alliance of Museums, joined by museum volunteer Linda Cohn.

The Online Collection of the Society has been enjoying greatly increased visits during the pandemic and items are digitized and added frequently to this vital database and educational tool. Due to the suspension of in-person programs, the inaugural lecture of the fund established in memory of Louise Ruma Ivers has been postponed; however, the fund underwrites the expenses for hosting the Society's collection online by Past Perfect. Visit the Society's website and explore what's both old and new from the comfort of home.



"The Girl Graduate: Her Own Book" is a bound volume with blank pages to create a focused scrapbook. This belonged to Amy Esther Schwamb (1896-1979) of 33 Academy St., a 1914 graduate of Arlington High School. She included portraits of her classmates, items for various social events, clippings, etc. Especially engaging are pages with designs and fabric swatches of the dresses she made or had made for her. Gift of Richard A. Duffy.

local government were viewed by Antis as unrelated to a woman's proper role in the home. Some suggested that universal suffrage would lead to divorces due to the disruptive influence of political disagreement on marital harmony.

The Annual Town Meeting of 1921 was historic not just because women could attend and vote but also because Arlington's legislative body changed from open town meeting to representative (also referred to as "limited") town meeting. It had been accepted wisdom that the many new female voters could overwhelm town meeting and was behind the decision to move away from open town meeting. In fact, representative town meeting had been proposed as early as 1897 in Massachusetts, and Brookline in 1915 was first to adopt it. Inconsistency of attendance at open town meeting—ranging from a lack of quorum to overflow crowds, depending on the article up for consideration—led to reform designed to have a better informed and dedicated group of members, formally distributed across town. Arlington's bordering towns of Belmont, Lexington, and Winchester all followed suit by the end of the 1920s.

In 1921 the number of precincts increased from two to seven, with 36 members each, for a total of 252 town meeting members (TMMs). More precincts were created over the years until the crafting 50 years ago (under the leadership of the League of Women Voters of Arlington) of the present 21 population-based precincts with 12 TMMs each, to comply with the representative concept of "one person, one vote."

When Annual Town Meeting opened on March 31, 1921, 39 out of a total of 46 women who ran were sworn-in as elected members. Some were TMM married couples, such as Mabel and George Winn, and Laura and Charles Hardy. Among the

women elected who were prominent in civic life in Arlington were Vittoria C. Dallin (Mrs. Cyrus), Winifred K. Rugg (Mrs. George), Dr. Barbara Ring, and Mina Tewksbury (Mrs. George), and Dr. Julia Tolman. Interestingly, Mrs. True Worthy White

(born Martha Davis), final president of the Arlington Equal Suffrage League, did not stand for election to office.

Perhaps ironically, among prominent Antis to win election in 1921 were two of the "Robbins Sisters." Ida F. Robbins, who had previously served on the school committee, was elected as a town meeting member. Caira Robbins became the first woman to serve on a town board besides school committee, when she won in an unopposed election a seat on the Arlington Planning Board. This was a critical role, because in 1921, Arlington had grown nearly 70% over the previous decade to a population of approximately 20,000.

While women had made an impressive showing in their bids to become TMMs in 1921, and soon would win elected seats as library trustees and as town clerk,

they remained absent from other formerly elected boards such as public works. For the top office in town as a member of the board of selectmen, it would not be until 1973 that the first woman to serve by appointment was Ann Mahon Powers, followed by Margaret H. Spengler as the first woman to be elected to serve. In 2005, for the first time in history, women made up a majority on the board of selectmen. In 2018, nearly a century after women were eligible for election to the town's executive board, its name was changed by Town Meeting from the board of selectmen to the select board—and in a year that just happened to have only one woman out of five members serving. It could be argued that in both fact and name, gender-neutrality had become firmly established in Arlington's electoral landscape, in the lead-up to the centennial of woman suffrage. ❖



Ida (left) and Caira Robbins were well-known anti-suffragists, but both ran for election when first eligible to vote for all offices and both won their seats.

— RE-OPENING NEWS —

The Society is closely following evolving guidance in order to resume in-person visits and programming. The Jason Russell House will offer free outdoor tours on Sundays from 1:00 to 4:00 starting June 20. Tours are offered on a walk-in basis and will be cancelled if weather is inclement. For more information: visit arlingtonhistorical.org/visit/ or call 781-648-4300.

The grounds of the Jason Russell House are looking especially nice, with the colonial herb garden maintained by the Arlington Garden Club, the restored-to-1975 appearance of the Massachusetts Tercentenary sign for the Jason Russell House, and benches to enjoy simply viewing the house and the

battlefield.

“Chairful Where You Sit,” a unique event of the Arlington Center for the Arts, will take place outdoors at the Jason Russell House on Saturday, August 21, from noon to 5:00 p.m. Free and open to the public.

Lastly, the Society is proud to launch a new event venue in Arlington, the newly renovated Smith Museum! It will serve as a beautiful space for smaller gatherings, such as showers, anniversary celebrations, rehearsal dinners, luncheons, etc. For booking information contact Patsy Kraemer at 781-858-869 or Sara Lundberg at the Society office.



In 1907 "divided back" post cards were authorized by the U.S. Post Office, enabling senders to write a message in addition to the address on a picture card. This fueled the era of the "post card craze" and publishers rushed to fill the racks with their products. In its apparent haste, the Hugh C. Leighton Co. of Portland, Maine, mislabeled the location of Spy Pond as Arlington Heights. This view card is a tinted half-tone photograph and was lithographed in Germany, which had perfected the economical

manufacturing process for this type of color printing. To add interest, the boating party has been painted-in, as well as the leaves on what would have been bare trees (and perhaps adding a tree here or there where there was none), in addition to creating an imaginary perspective of the roadway and grassy lakeshore. An idealized view resulted, but one with enough authenticity to allow us to recognize many of the fine homes in the background that are still standing today.

2021-2022 AHS Election

For the second consecutive year, the annual election was conducted remotely.

We are grateful for the officers, directors, and trustees who continue to serve the Society. We welcome Joe Curro as a newly elected director of the board. Robert Brazile steps up from director-at-large into the first vice president role.

On the trustees, we thank Al Stevens for his years of service, and welcome Stuart Brorson, a past president of the Society, who comes over from the Board of Directors.

On the Nominating Committee, Doris Birmingham was elected to a three-year term. The Society thanks

Elisabeth Carr-Jones for her service on the committee.

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George Parsons

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Caira Robbins was the first woman elected to Arlington Planning Board in 1921.



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