

THE GEORGETOWN HISTORICAL SOCIETY



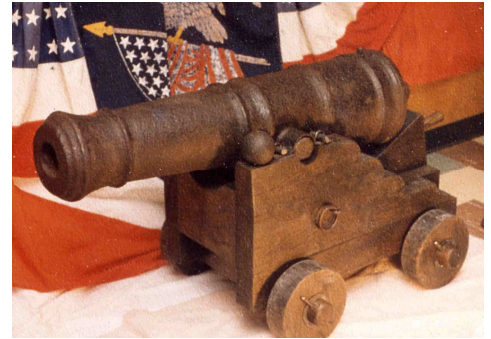
Preserving and promoting the history of Georgetown

Fall 2017 Newsletter

THE LEGEND OF “OLD NANCY”

There has been a long-standing dispute between Georgetown and Rowley over the ownership of a cannon known as “Old Nancy.” Both towns have a cannon that they claim is the original Old Nancy, but which is correct? Though it is a long story for our newsletter, we are pleased to present a condensed version of the events as reported in newspapers of the 1800s.

Soon after the War of 1812, the good people of Rowley decided they wanted a town cannon to fire in celebrations, etc., as many other neighboring towns did. Townsmen agreed they would purchase shares of the cannon, and Major Ebenezer Boynton traveled to Rockport to purchase a cannon from his brother, Eleazer. He purchased a British cannon from the era of the American Revolution, captured by an American privateer.



Major Boynton was never reimbursed by the people of Rowley, so he felt that he was still the legal owner of the cannon. It was stolen back and forth within the confines of the First Parish a number of times as the Boyntons and the townspeople disputed the ownership of the gun, and it was even dumped into the Rowley River at one point!

After being fired in celebration of the Fourth of July in 1835, the cannon was hidden and secured in the East Parish cow-yard of Captain John Perley. The next morning, Captain Perley was shocked to find that the cannon was missing. But where was it, and who took it?

On July 4, 1836, word reached Rowley East Parish that the West Parish Boyntons would be firing *their* cannon. Aha! Captain Perley now knew who the thieves were! He went to the West Parish, tried to have the cannon seized, and obtained a warrant for the arrest of Charles Boynton for the theft of a *six-pounder* cannon.

Appearing in court, Charles testified that he was the legal owner of the West Parish cannon. As evidence, he produced a cannon-ball of the type fired from his *four-pounder* cannon, along with a legal bill of sale for the cannon from his father, Ebenezer Boynton. Charges were dropped and the court declared Charles Boynton the rightful owner.



Many years passed, with the people of Rowley West Parish, later known as Georgetown, happily firing Boynton’s cannon on the Fourth of July and other special occasions.

But...as the Nation’s Centennial Celebration approached, the folks of Pumpkin Town, as Rowley was affectionately known, began to yearn for a cannon of their own again.

On July 3, 1876, learning that the cannon, which had been named Old Nancy, would be moved to Georgetown’s Winter Hill to be fired at the stroke of midnight, the Rowley pumpkin-heads decided to steal it back, but finding it heavily guarded, they thought better of it and returned home. Georgetown’s Centennial Celebration went on as planned, with Old Nancy being fired at midnight and again at sunset, then moved and safely stored in Charles Jewett’s basement on School Street.

Those Pumpkin Town boys were green with envy, and even after the fourth, they still wanted that cannon. They devised a new plan—they would bribe somebody from Georgetown to buy it for them, or if that failed, to steal it. They recruited a Georgetown man named Lewis Pickard, who was promised \$40 if he delivered the cannon. Late in the night of July 13, 1876, neighbors noticed suspicious activity in the sheds behind the Baptist Church on North Street, and, upon investigation, the plot was discovered. Unable to buy or steal Old Nancy, Mr. Pickard had to come up with a new plan in order to collect his \$40. A plot was hatched to sell Rowley another cannon and try to convince them that it was the real Nancy. Pickard, unable to find a matching cannon, purchased one from Andrew Gould of Topsfield on July 22, 1876, about the right size, but wrong design. Would the pumpkin-heads be fooled? On that same night, the cannon was delivered to Rowley. Mr. Pickard assured the Rowley conspirators that it was the original, they believed him and he received his \$40.

Proud of their sneaky acquisition, the “Pumpkin Town Cannon Club” arranged a celebratory dinner at Georgetown’s Pentucket House on July 27, 1876. They came on wagons decorated as if in a parade, boasting of their victory. Imagine their surprise when the people of Georgetown, standing in the road to welcome them, stepped aside to reveal the REAL Old Nancy and greeted them with a window-shattering blast!

After the good-natured dinner, a committee from each town was chosen to examine Georgetown’s cannon (Rowley left theirs at home, fearing Georgetown may steal it back again). Charles Boynton was present and, after close examination, declared it to be the same cannon that had been in his family since he was a boy. Mr. Boynton also claimed that several years earlier he offered to pay \$2 per share to any man or his legal heirs who could prove he paid a cent for the purchase of the old gun. Nobody came forward. Mr. Boynton then officially presented the old cannon to the people of Georgetown, as the new rightful owners. Still, the Rowley men were not convinced, and arranged to meet again the following year—with both cannons present—to settle the question.

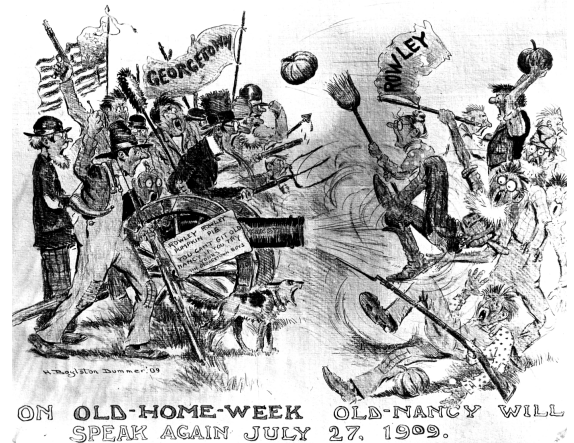
Exactly one year later, on July 27, 1877, thousands of people gathered from near and far to participate in “Cannon Day” in Rowley, which included a great parade featuring both disputed cannons.



However, Stephen Osgood and some other Georgetown men were wary of bringing their treasured cannon to Rowley, lest there be a dastardly plot to steal her back again. So, unbeknownst to most of their fellow townies, they devised a plan. A fake Nancy, looking exactly like the original, was fashioned out of wood and taken to the celebration, while the real Nancy remained safely hidden in Georgetown. Unfortunately, the ruse was discovered when a suspicious Rowley man stuck his knife in the replica and loudly declared, “Theirs is made of wood!” Naturally, this led Rowley to believe that they truly did have the original Old Nancy. While the Rowley cannon blasted away in victory, the people of Georgetown left in humiliation. That wooden replica wasn’t such a great idea after all, but Georgetown still had the REAL Old Nancy!

On July 27, 1909, Old Nancy was taken out of its hiding place once again to be paraded about and fired during Georgetown’s “Old Home Week,” then again in celebration of Georgetown’s Centennial Celebration in 1938.

In March of 1980, Old Nancy was put on permanent public display in Georgetown’s Town Hall. The wooden replica from 1877 (above left) is on display in the Georgetown Peabody Library.



HALLOWEEN CEMETERY TOURS



Join GHS President Chris Comiskey and the Grim Reaper on **October 28th and 29th at 2:00 pm** for a glimpse at the macabre side of Georgetown's history. Hear the legends of the bewitched meal chest and the ghost of Moses Nelson; ponder the mysterious deaths of suspected witch Elizabeth Cloughlin and her black cat, Jumper; plus hear stories of ghastly deaths, including a murder and a most surprising murderer! Tours take place in Georgetown's historic Union Cemetery on East Main Street. Cost of admission is \$5 per person.

MEAD TASTING AT GHS ANNUAL MEETING!

We are very pleased to announce that our Annual Meeting speaker this year will be Dan Clapp of the 1634 Meadery in Ipswich. Dan will discuss the history and making of the ancient honey-based alcoholic beverage known as Mead. And here's the best part—there will be a TASTE TESTING! We will also be raffling off some great items.

The Georgetown Historical Society Annual Meeting will be held on **Wednesday, December 6th at 7 p.m.** in the Georgetown Peabody Library meeting room. The event is free and open to the public, so please invite your friends and neighbors.



TRAILS & SAILS 2017



We had two wonderful weekends for our Brocklebank Museum Open House and Union Cemetery Scavenger Hunt as part of "Trails & Sails 2017." People from all over Essex County and beyond visited. Congratulations to Kai Stillman of Ipswich and Joshua Boyd of Amesbury, who were the winners of our Scavenger Hunt prize drawing. We extend a big THANK YOU to Nunan's Garden Golf and Kallie's Kones, and Jeff and Maria's for their donations of gift cards for our drawing.

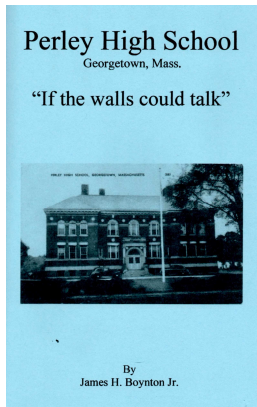
We wish to thank all our wonderful volunteers who helped clean and prepare the museum, grounds and schoolhouse, and those who welcomed our guests and kept an eye on things: GHS members Susan Oleszko-Szuts, Carol and Wayne Snow, Gloria Swanbon and Joanne Laut, GHS Board members Lew Harrold, Mary Saunders, Joe Corcoran, Rick Detwiller, Jeff Lamoureux and Chris Comiskey; and GHS volunteer and multi-media artist Siobhan Landry, who put together a special exhibit, "ALMIRA," about the abolitionist movement and a Georgetown woman who bravely took a stand against slavery.

RED SOX RAFFLE WINNER

Just days after his birthday, GHS member Tom Howland got another gift – two tickets to the August 25th Red Sox vs. Orioles game at Fenway Park! Tom was the winner of our GHS Red Sox ticket raffle. The weather couldn't have been nicer on the 25th, and Tom and his wife, Nancy, had a fun night despite the Sox losing the game. Congratulations, Tom!



PERLEY HIGH SCHOOL – “IF THE WALLS COULD TALK”



In our last GHS newsletter, we announced the latest book by James Boynton, Jr., *Looking back, Growing up in Georgetown in the Fifties*. We are happy to announce that Jim has been busy writing again. His latest book is about Perley High School, *If the Walls Could Talk*.

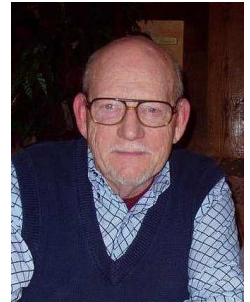
The book focuses on the school during the long career of Jim's father, Perley School teacher, coach and principal James Boynton, Sr., including amusing anecdotes about student shenanigans. Jim says, "This information came from my father's archives, conversations with him or personal knowledge."

The book is for sale through GHS for \$5. The books can be ordered by e-mailing us at info@georgetownhistoricalsociety.com and will be available for sale at our Halloween cemetery tours and Annual Meeting.

HELLOS AND GOOD-BYES

GHS extends a warm welcome to our newest members, Laurie Brown and Erick Lynch. Both are owners of historic homes in Georgetown and received free house histories.

We were deeply saddened to learn of the passing of long-time GHS member Earl Johnston, husband of GHS Vice President Sylvia Johnston. Earl was actively involved in the community and was also a member of the First Congregational Church of Georgetown, Proprietors of Harmony Cemetery and past President and Secretary of the Georgetown Kiwanis Club. He will be greatly missed. We extend our condolences to Sylvia and the rest of the family.



Earl Johnston



With Christmas shopping season fast approaching, we would like to remind you that you can help the Georgetown Historical Society just by shopping online at Amazon through their "Amazon Smile" program. Now even easier than before, you can go directly to Georgetown Historical Society's unique link, <http://smile.amazon.com/ch/01-0359121>. It doesn't cost you any more money, and Amazon donates a small percentage of your sale amount to GHS. Check out: <http://smile.amazon.com/> for more information on their program. THANK YOU to all GHS members and friends who have already designated GHS as their charity of choice through the Amazon Smile program.

HELP SPREAD THE WORD!

Please share our newsletter with family, friends and neighbors who share your interest in preserving local history, and encourage them to join GHS. Those who live in historic homes in Georgetown can request a free house history with their membership.

We depend upon the generous support of our members and friends, through memberships, donations, merchandise sales, and fundraisers, to keep GHS going and to keep the Brocklebank Museum open. Help us continue to grow—spread the word!



Georgetown Historical Society, Inc.
P.O. Box 376, Georgetown, MA 01833

Membership Form

Name(s) included in membership _____

Address _____

Phone number (optional) _____

E-mail _____

I would like to help GHS “go green” *and* save money. Please send my newsletter by e-mail. ☐ Yes ☐ No

Membership Levels:

- | | | | |
|--------------------------------|----------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$200 | BENEFACTOR(S) | <input type="checkbox"/> \$300 | LIFE (One-time payment) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$100 | SUSTAINER(S) | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$ 50 | CONTRIBUTOR(S) | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$ 30 | MEMBER(S) | | |

Optional:

- ☐ I would like to make a donation to Georgetown Historical Society’s Homer Tapin Memorial Scholarship Fund in the amount of \$_____

Your membership fee and scholarship donations are tax-deductible. Please make all checks payable to: Georgetown Historical Society.

Optional:

I would like to help as a GHS volunteer (check area(s) of interest)

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Museum tour guide | <input type="checkbox"/> Fundraising/Merchandise sales |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Newsletter | <input type="checkbox"/> Executive Board member |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Special events | <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____ |



Georgetown Historical Society
P.O. Box 376
Georgetown, MA 01833

Georgetown Historical Society



OFFICERS

President

Christine Comiskey

1st Vice President

Sylvia Johnston

2nd Vice President

Ralph Chouinard

Secretary

Lew Harrold

Treasurer

Michelle Cook

Curator

Karen Brockelbank

DIRECTORS

Joe Corcoran, Mary Saunders,

Rick Detwiller, Jeff Lamoureaux,

NEWSLETTER EDITOR *Christine Comiskey*

- JOIN US ON FACEBOOK! Search Groups: "Georgetown Historical Society."
- VISIT OUR WEBSITE: www.georgetownhistoricalsociety.com to see more information about GHS, upcoming events and Newsletter Archives
- E-MAIL US AT: info@georgetownhistoricalsociety.com