



## *In This Issue* Fall 2018

### Swimming in Needham, Part 1

#### Plus –

- \* The Phantom...?
- \* Suffrage Banner
- \* 2018-2019 Calendar
- \* Holiday Gifts (yes...)
- \* Champagne &  
Chocolate is ... *back!*



## Needham History Center & Museum

1147 Central Avenue  
Needham, MA 02492  
781-455-8860  
[www.needhamhistory.org](http://www.needhamhistory.org)



### Hours

Tuesday – Thursday,  
10:00 am – 3:00 pm  
or by Appointment.

## Research, Events & Rentals

781-455-8860  
or see our Website.

Appointments required  
for Research & Archives.



## Swimming in Needham (Part 1) – Before the Pool(s), there was the River – then the Lake

– By Steve Sauter

In August, Needham's new and improved swimming pool facility at Rosemary Lake opened for us. True, the season was short this year; and although summer is now over, let's regale about Needham's outdoor swimming in the old days. That of course would include Rosemary Lake. And while there's interesting history of that bit of land back to the 1600s, let's start in 1830, when Lemuel Lyon, Jr. (former American ambassador to Japan) bought the land and the water rights from the McIntosh family. Lyon soon had land and gravel pushed into the northeast corner to dam the water, creating Rosemary Lake. Before then, it was Rosemary Meadow, with wild rosemary plants surrounding a small stream fed by two brooks – one from springs south of May Street, the other from present day Sportsman's Pond – that flowed into present day Wellesley. Eventually it became a major source for ice; the ice was stored in the ice house under sawdust and distributed it to Needham customers.

### The Old Swimming Hole

Needham's first official swimming place was on the Charles River, not Rosemary Lake. In 1912, the town established Charles River Park, a "beach" on the river at the intersection of South Street and Dedham Avenue. It had a lifeguard (said to be very vigilant due to "danger that is always present owing to the rapid current in the river"), a six room bathhouse, and a large raft anchored in a bend. Swimming was boys only or girls only on alternating days (no "mixed bathing"!)

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### "A Beauty Spot... Centrally Located"

Even with the new Charles River Beach, the push was on for Rosemary Lake, touted in 1917 by the Park Commissioners as "centrally located and... well adapted to bathing purposes. It is a beauty spot and should be controlled by the town... A bath house located on that property would serve the whole town and make a safe place from which to bathe, as well as to encourage other water and land sports." Another article noted a proposal to purchase "21 acres, large enough for all kind of sports and athletic fields." Nothing came of it. In 1921, "Rosemary Brook" was almost completely choked with vegetation and required clearing out from Rosemary Lake all the way to Wellesley; this would be an ongoing challenge, not only for the brook but for the lake itself.

### A Depression Era Project: "Put it Over with a Bang!"

In 1930, Benjamin Mills, Jr. proposed that the town build a swimming pool on the reservoir lands between Harris Ave and Dedham Ave. But after opposition by neighbors and questions of priorities during the tough times of the Great Depression, former Representative James M. McCracken proposed use of Rosemary Lake, which was "fed by springs and clear brooks, free of currents," and "almost at the geographic center of town." The favored part of the lake was actually the southern side, but proximity to residents in the (now) Lake Street area changed the focus to the section closest to Rosemary Street at the foot of Hillside Avenue. It took three years, but in 1933 the project forged ahead, when the Needham Board of Trade (predecessor to the Needham Business Association) purchased the property from William Carter (owner since 1881) for \$1 plus remittance of taxes, and through a combination of town monies and fundraising, launched the project. With the Great Depression in full swing, "it is realized that just now no one can be as generous as they would like to be... Any amount at all will be appreciatively received." "Let's make this a Needham community project" said the Board of Trade, "and put it over with a bang." And so they did; they lowered the lake, cleared the bottom, pulled out stakes from Carter's long-gone swan enclosure, cleared debris, demolished the ice house (a task credited to "the horse shoe club"), rebuilt the shore line, and deposited gravel and sand to create a 300 foot wide beach extending 30 feet into the water.

A sign of the times: In a reference to the Great Depression, one article noted, "One of the smaller contractors, whose business, like all others, has suffered materially during the past year, nevertheless cheerfully offered his truck and his own services, 'I can't give you any money, I wish I could... but my children are going to use the beach and I want to do my part.'" And as work continued, the public was informed, "The view is naturally not one to arouse any great degree of enthusiasm" and therefore to "remember that even Needham's beautiful high school building, in its early stages, was a rather hopeless thing to look at."

*( To Be Continued... )*

*(Steve Sauter has kindly taken up the mantle as featured story writer of The Gazette. Will they put it over with a bang? Stay tuned!)*

# WHAT'S NEXT?

The annual Program Calendar is enclosed. Join us for our **Annual Meeting and Dinner** on November 14 (Special Guest – **the Phantom Gourmet!**) and for all of the events we have planned for you this year.



Tickets for this event are \$50, on our website at [needhamhistory.org/Tickets](http://needhamhistory.org/Tickets), or by mail to Needham History Center & Museum, 1147 Central Avenue, Needham, MA 02492. Call us at 781-455-8860 for more information.

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## ~ The Membership year has started ~

If you have not yet renewed your membership, **now is the time!** We look forward to seeing you at many more lectures, author talks and outings this coming year. Don't miss a single thing – you can renew your membership today online at [www.needhamhistory.org/memberships](http://www.needhamhistory.org/memberships)

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## It's Never too Soon to Plan for the Holidays...

I know it's barely past Labor Day, and Halloween is still on the horizon, but....

The Needham History Center has a large variety of Needham-themed gifts for everyone on your list, including DVDs, ornaments, and books – not to mention the treasures of the **Heirloom Shoppe**.

We are in the process of creating a new Gift Shop space, to open in time for the holiday shopping season. Join us for our first-ever Holiday Shopping Day and reception to celebrate the Grand Opening of our new shop – **Sunday, December 9, from 12-5pm**. See what we have in store!

**HEIRLOOM SHOPPE**

Also online! [www.needhamhistory.org/Shop](http://www.needhamhistory.org/Shop)

# Save the Date!

**Champagne & Chocolate is back!**  
**February 9, Saturday, 7 – 11 pm.**

**Champagne & Chocolate: a Fundraiser to Benefit the History Center's Schoolhouse Programs**

Come join us at this special evening that features live music from the Tom Nutile Band, hearty hors d'oeuvre, good food and decadent chocolate desserts, and of course – bubbly champagne!

Tickets will go on sale starting in November at



[www.needhamhistory.org/Tickets](http://www.needhamhistory.org/Tickets). For information about the event or about Sponsorship, please call Gloria or Suzanne at 781-455-8860.

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## The Banner is Back!

Our 1873 Needham Woman Suffrage Club banner – “Progress & Equality” – is back on display in the **History of Needham in 100 Objects** exhibit.

The banner was cleaned, repaired, and reframed over the summer. We expect it to feature frequently in the upcoming celebrations of the 100th anniversary of the ratification of women's suffrage in 2020. Needham had an active women's suffrage organization, and we look forward to sharing that history.

Many thanks to the Needham Women's Club, who provided the primary funding for this project, as well as the Needham League of Women Voters for their generous support.



## Program Calendar Sneak Peek!

- The Return of Champagne & Chocolate
- Dinner with the Phantom Gourmet
- A new holiday shopping experience
- Whiskeys and Distilleries
- Unsolved Mysteries of New England
- And (of course!) More...

## Program Bonus!

My Wellesley Historical Society colleague, Amanda Fisher, and I are trying out a **Bag-Lunch Lecture Series**. We have organized two so far, and if successful we will do more -

1. **Gloria Greis** (Executive Director, Needham History Center) – “Mr Baker’s Fairyland.” Nov. 5 @ 1:00pm. Waterstone at Wellesley, 27 Washington Street.
2. **Alden Ludlow** (Wellesley Historical Society) – “Postcards of Wellesley and Needham.” Dec. 4 @ 12:00 pm. Needham History Center, 1147 Central Avenue.

**The final details and information will be on our website in October.**



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