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Needham History Center & Museum

1147 Central Avenue
Needham, MA 02492
781-455-8860
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.

CHRISTMAS BANNED

Bah, Humbug! In 1659, the Massachusetts Bay Colony banned the celebration of Christmas. Not 'discouraged' or 'frowned upon,' but *banned*, as in subject to criminal prosecution and a fine of five shillings (now, about \$8000).

In the Massachusetts colony, the established church of the 1600s was Puritan. The Puritans were seeking to reform and 'Purify' the church by purging it of the idolatry, the princely hierarchy, and the ceremonial excesses that they saw in both the Roman Catholic and Anglican churches. Most of the New England colonies outlawed non-Christian congregations – Rhode Island was an exception, and was therefore the home of the first Jewish congregation. Several colonies also banned Quakers, most banned Catholics (who settled in Mary-land). Our ideals of inclusion, and diversity, and the separation of church and state were completely meaningless to 17th-century people. They lived by the authority of the Bible, and their social, civic, and religious lives were intertwined. Town Meeting took place in the Meeting House, both because it was the largest space, and because in order to participate in civic life, a man (yes) also had to be an accepted member of the congregation.

So why did the Puritans ban Christmas? Christmas in Anglican/Catholic England was a rollicking time. The harvest was in, the beer had been brewed, and the meat had been salted. It came right at the start of winter – a long, dark, cold season. So, it was a time to celebrate before the gloom set in. All that feasting on boar's heads, dancing, wassailing, decking the halls, and resting-us-merry that the carols celebrate – that was Christmas before the 1600s.

In the 1640s, however, England underwent a revolution that drove King Charles I from his throne (and ultimately to the headsman's block) and established a Puritan Commonwealth. Among the rulings of the new Parliament was the decree in 1644 that December 25th would thereafter be a day of "fasting and humiliation" and that anyone caught celebrating or setting aside their labor would be charged with an offense and fined.

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The Puritan General Court of Massachusetts soon followed suit, outlawing the celebration of Christmas in 1659.

Puritans had two main objections – first, that a 12-day-long party was not a suitable expression of religious devotion, given that the event was intended to commemorate the birth of the Savior. People spent more time indulging in license and sin than they did in devotion and prayer – “Men dishonor Christ more in the 12 days of Christmas than in all the 12 months besides,” lamented one preacher. And second, there was no authority in the Bible for a December Nativity. The date had been co-opted by early Christians from pagan celebrations – the winter feasts of the Roman Saturnalia and Norse Yuletide – that marked the winter solstice.

The English monarchy was restored in 1660, but Puritans maintained their power in Massachusetts. The ban remained law until 1681, and continued in practice for many more years. Throughout the 1700s, December 25th was a regular day of work and school. It was not until 1856 that Christmas became a recognized legal holiday in Massachusetts.

So how did we get Christmas back? In part, because American society became more diverse in religion as Protestant denominations flourished. The church was “dis-established” in Massachusetts in 1834 and public life became a secular matter. The 1840s also saw a huge influx of Catholic immigrants, mostly Irish, for whom the festive celebration of Christmas was customary. And in part we owe it to Charles Dickens – “the Man Who Invented Christmas” – whose tale of the redemption of Ebenezer Scrooge was published in 1843, just as the public celebration of Christmas was being revived. To a nation struggling with expansion, industrialization, and the loss of established ties, *A Christmas Carol* provided sentiment, nostalgia, and an enduring image of Christmas “as it used to be.”



A Grant from the Middlesex Bank Charitable Foundation

We were very pleased to receive a generous grant of \$5200 from the Middlesex Bank Charitable Foundation to pursue a project in capacity-building. The Middlesex Bank makes grants to organizations that serve the towns in which they have branches. We thank the Bank for their grant, and for their ongoing support of our community's activities.



Support the 2017 Annual Fund!

Our 2017 Annual Fund appeal is up and running. Thanks to our generous donors thus far we are just shy of 50% of our annual goal. Every gift is important and here's why:

- **\$500** - Helps conserve objects like the Sunita Williams Space Flag
- **\$250** - Helps our children's programming grow (Story Hour, Craft-er-noon, and MORE!)
- **\$100** – Helps keep our archival supply closet stocked with all our staff needs to be good stewards of our historical documents and objects

You may send in a check made payable to Needham History Center & Museum or donate securely online at www.needhamhistory.org/donate.

Thank you to everyone who has donated so far!

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David Weiner & Cynthia Landau	(as of 11/7/2017)

Children's Story Hour

December 8, Friday, 10am - Join Officer Shawn from the Needham Fire Department for a read-a-loud, craft and a snack. This program is free and open to children ages 0-6.

Gift Shop Holiday Sale!

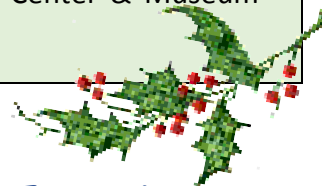
Don't miss out on our own Heirloom & Gift Shop Holiday Sale!

Come to the History Center's Gift Shop to find unique Needham gifts for everyone on your list - ornaments, cards, books, DVDs – or a charming heirloom piece perfect for any hostess or holiday gift.

Saturday, December 9, 11am – 3 pm

Sunday, December 10, 1 – 3 pm

Proceeds from the Heirloom & Gift Shop Holiday Sale benefit the Needham History Center & Museum – *your community museum.*



Upcoming Events

December 14, Thursday, 7 pm. Creepy Christmas! *Jeff Belanger, author and lecturer.* There are many Yuletide monsters and legends that have almost been lost to the ages. Explore the history of these ghostly holiday traditions, some dating back more than two thousand years – Krampus, the Belsnickel, Tomtens. And of course, Charles Dickens' "A Christmas Carol"! *This program may not be suitable for young children.*

February 3, Saturday, 7 – 11 pm. Sock Hop!

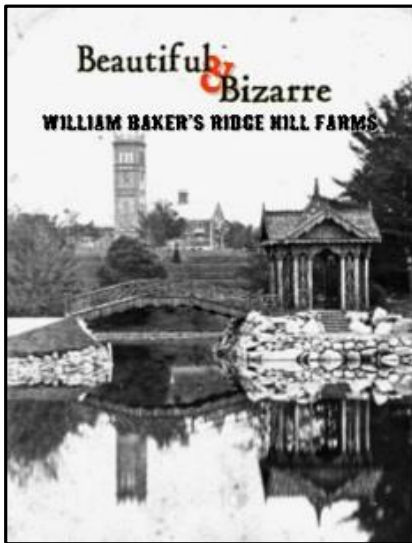
Our annual fundraising celebration – grab your best guy or girl and dance to some old tunes! Tickets / information will be available in December.

March 18, Sunday, 2 pm. Talk and Craft Beer Tasting, with Lauren Clark, author of *Crafty Bastards: Beer in New England from the Mayflower to Modern Day.* Brewing in New England goes back four centuries, to the Pilgrims who dropped anchor in Plymouth because their supply of beer was running low. Toast the inimitable Yankee spirit that allows us to produce some of the best beers in the nation. **A craft beer tasting will follow the lecture.**

All programs take place at the Needham History Center, 1147 Central Avenue, Needham, and are free and open to the public. See our website for details, www.needhamhistory.org.

Unique Needham Gifts for the Holidays

Something different – Something special – Something for everyone on your list!
Purchase at the History Center, or online at www.needhamhistory.org/shop



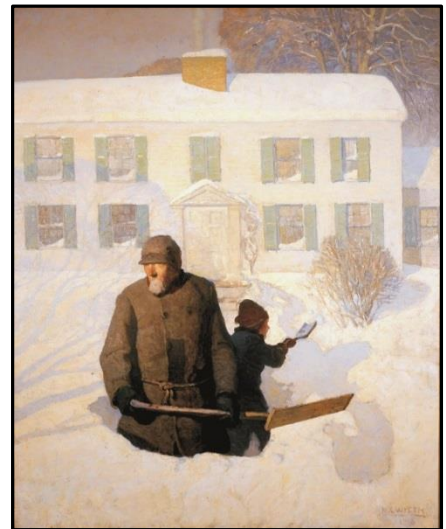
DVDs

Beautiful & Bizarre (the Baker Estate)
Big Little Town (History of Needham)
Return to Norumbega



Ornaments

Town Hall – The Blue Tree – Pansies
Memorial Park – The Historical Society
Needham High School – Town Seal



Notes & Cards

NC Wyeth Holiday Cards
Fuller Bird Note Cards
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Shop our Holiday Sale! ❄️ Details inside.



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