

# THE FOXBOROUGH HISTORICAL SOCIETY

MAY 2016 47th Year Issue #8

## The Straw Hat Era in Foxborough



With many small straw shops operating in town, owners decided to join in forming one large operation, the Union Straw Works, and soon they were dominating the industry. The factory was on Wall Street, site of the present Post Office.  
(Foxborough Historical Commission photo)

At its final meeting of the season on Tuesday evening, May 24, the Foxborough Historical Society will examine the town's straw hat industry – which put Foxborough on the map.

The straw hat industry in America started with a young girl admiring an imported bonnet in a store window. She could not afford to purchase it, so she made one of her own, later documented to be the first straw hat made in America.

She had friends in Foxborough and shared her skills. The rest is history. Foxborough was soon on its way to becoming the “Straw Hat Capital of the World.”

Town Historian Jack Authelet will share the story of the straw shops in Foxborough, the “cottage industry” of women braiding straw at home, and the enormous factories that one day would rise as many women came to town, some from abroad, others from nearby states, for the “pretty work” offered by the factories.

It brought Foxborough its most robust economy since incorporation, gave rise to many civic improvements, and employment to thousands. “It was the American Dream for many,” notes our town historian, “but it was so much more than just making hats. It was the emergence of women as a social, political and economic force within the community.”

The local industry had a humble beginning of straw hats fashioned by the hands of children. It ended 200 years later in the hands of yet another young lady who finally had to close the last shop operated by three generations of her family making hats in Foxborough.

The fascinating and abundantly illustrated story of the local straw hat industry will be shared at the Foxborough Historical Society on Tuesday, May 24, at 7:30 pm, in the first floor meeting room of the Boyden Library at the corner of Bird and Baker Streets in Foxborough center.

This presentation marks the final official appearance at the historical society of Foxborough Town Historian Jack Authelet. Former editor of the Foxboro Reporter and published historian, Authelet has made important contributions to the history of Foxborough through his abundant original research. He has spoken at the historical society twice each season.

**Please join us, before the meeting begins, at 6:30 p.m. in the Community Room of the Boyden Library for light refreshments and help us celebrate Jack’s accomplishments.**

There is parking under the library, around Foxboro common and on nearby streets. Do not park in the Aubuchon lot.

Events of the Foxborough Historical Society are free and all are welcome. Those interested in joining should ask for an application form at the meeting. The annual fee is \$8 for individuals, \$10 for families.

**Memorial Hall** is open every Wednesday evening, 7 pm to 9 pm  
and on the second Saturday of each month from 9 am to noon

### **FOUNDERS DAY is JUNE 11**

**The Commission & Society will be at the Booth Playground again this year after the parade and could use some help. If you can volunteer an hour of your time, call one of the officers to let them know.**



We are saddened to inform the membership that Ralph Guimond, long time member, passed away May 6, 2016. He served as Treasurer for 4 years and was a Board member for 8 years. As well as being a member of the Historical Society, Ralph sang with the Serenading Seniors, was a member of the Boomchuckers, volunteered at the Discretionary Farm Stand in Foxborough and was also a volunteer at LaSalette's Festival of Lights in Attleboro during the Christmas season. Ralph was very active. We extend our condolences to the family.

### **50 YEARS AGO IN FOXBOROUGH**

[extracted from Foxboro Reporter newspapers]

May 1966

Swimming registration announced, fees are set.  
Selectmen of two towns ponder sewerage system.  
Claude Croney artist inspiration to others, moves to Westport.  
"Better than ever" were comments heard from crowds that attended  
Holiday Minstrels.  
Charles G. Taylor dies.  
PFC Gerald Metcalf is killed in action.

June 1966

Miss UMass, Boston now Miss Foxboro, 1966.  
Neil Kaiser joins Army signal corp.  
FHS presents 140 diplomas on Tuesday June 14.  
First baby is born in the Fire Dept. ambulance.  
Red Fox dedicated to Principal John J. Ahern.  
10<sup>th</sup> annual Art Show to be held Saturday June 25.  
Dedication, flag raising at Cocasset River Park.  
Army recruiter cites need for 500 Army nurses.  
Joseph Cook, Michael Davis and Patrick McNamara join Marine corps.

July 1966

Thousands cool off at new park in heat wave.  
Water use up, cooperation of people asked.  
Earth movers gouging path for Route 495.  
Flag down that bus and travel to Cape Cod from the Common.  
An old story – a weekend of thieves and vandals.  
Outdoor science classroom seen for high school.

**Websites** for Foxborough History & Historical Society

[foxboroughhistoricalsociety.org](http://foxboroughhistoricalsociety.org)

[Facebook.com/foxborohistory](https://www.facebook.com/foxborohistory)

[Twitter.com/foxboroughhistory](https://twitter.com/foxboroughhistory)

**Foxborough Historical Society Officers & Board Members 2015 - 2016**

President: Joan Stafford 543-6292 Vice President: Raymond Toomey 543-4388

Clerk: Ann Childs 543-2245 Treasurer: Mary Anne Baker 543-8945

Board Members: Past President Charles Clifford, \*\*\*Ralph Guimond

Margaret Boldrighini, Janet Haynes, Lauren Bitar

Program: Patrick Lyons 543-3728 Membership: Emelie Bonin 543-6160

Newsletter: Paul Godin 543-7945 Social Media: Lauren Bitar 847-1857

\*\*\* Deceased May 6, 2016



This hand-drawn lithograph, a story in itself, shows the many hat styles sold wholesale by the Union Straw Works which were then ornamented by local manufactures for retail sales. (Foxborough Historical Commission photo)