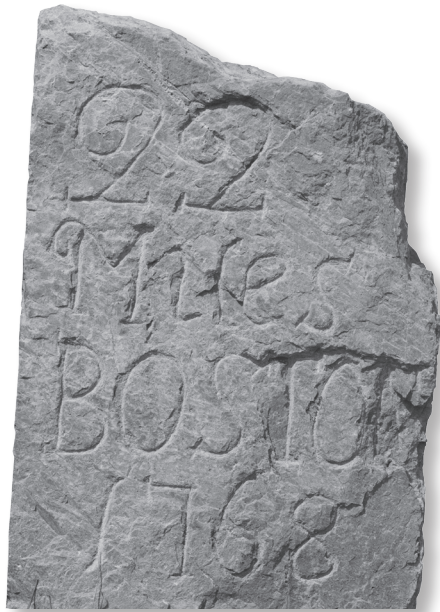




Milestones

Poems Inspired by the Framingham History Center



By James L. Parr

Historical Notes by Kevin A. Swope

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C ontents

Introduction	4
Arrowheads	6
Sarah Clays	8
In the Old Graveyard	10
Milestones	12
Thomas Nixon, Jr.	14
Statues	16
A Penny Saved	20
How to Make a Straw Hat	22
Frederick Augustus Billings III ..	24
Harmony Grove	26
Boneshaker	28
Tag Town	30
Two Bogie Book Poems	32
Camp Framingham, 1942	34
Shoppers World	36

I ntroduction

Through its collection of stories, historic buildings, and over 12,000 artifacts, the Framingham History Center provides a connection to local history that helps us understand our place in the community, state, and nation. Inspired by these collections, James Parr’s poems share Framingham’s rich history in a unique way. In just a few lines of poetry, Jim reveals the essence of specially chosen historic artifacts with wit and wisdom. He masterfully elicits stories, memories, emotions and most importantly questions from each object. These poems are a delight and they inspire the reader to find out more.

Annie Murphy

Executive Director
Framingham History Center





Arrowheads

How do we know who lived here before?

Who hunted the forests,

Who fished on the shore?

We know from the names of their sacred spaces:

Cochituate, Washaukum

And other local places.

How do we know what they did long ago?

How they lived off the land

Where the brooks and rivers flow?

We know from the artifacts buried underground

Ancient stone tools and arrowheads

That farmers often found.

Why do we care about these people from the past?

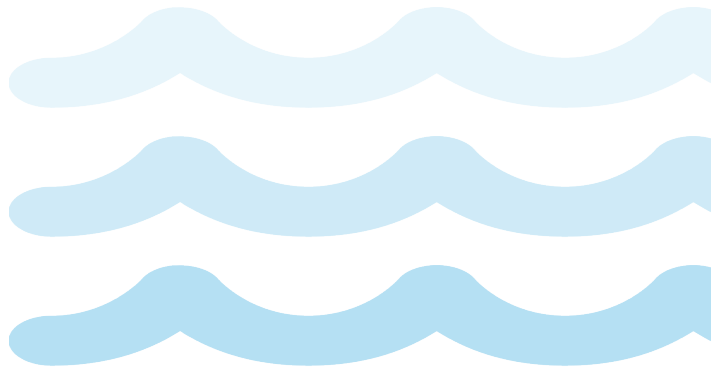
Why do we study them

In Social Studies class?

We study them to learn about a way of life that's gone,

To honor and respect a different

Culture from our own.





Native Americans lived in the Framingham area thousands of years ago. The most recent group to call this place home were the Nipmucs, who farmed, fished, and hunted by the shores and banks of the many lakes and streams that still bear the names given them so long ago. There are still Nipmuc people living in the area today.



Sarah Clayes

Accused
by neighbors of witchery.
Tried
and the verdict came back, “Guilty!”
Sentenced
to hang on Gallows Hill.
Jailed
for nine long months until,
Escaped
when the furor had died down.
Relocated
to our welcoming town.
Resided
for years in Salem End.
Remembered—
a courageous heroine.

“Guilty”



Sarah Clayes (1638-1703), along with her two older sisters Rebecca Nurse and Mary Esty, was convicted in the Salem Witch Trials of 1692. While both her sisters were hanged, Sarah was eventually freed. Afterwards, Sarah and her family settled in Framingham, which was known as Danforth's Farms at the time. Many of Rebecca and Mary's children came to Framingham, too, and built houses along Salem End Road, named in their honor.



In the Old Graveyard

Above
winged skulls and angels fly,
Below
forgotten people lie.
Upon
these stones a story's found
About
those sleeping underground.
Between
the rows I walk alone,
Before
each grave I read each stone.
After
a while I leave this space,
Inside
my heart says *Rest in Peace*.

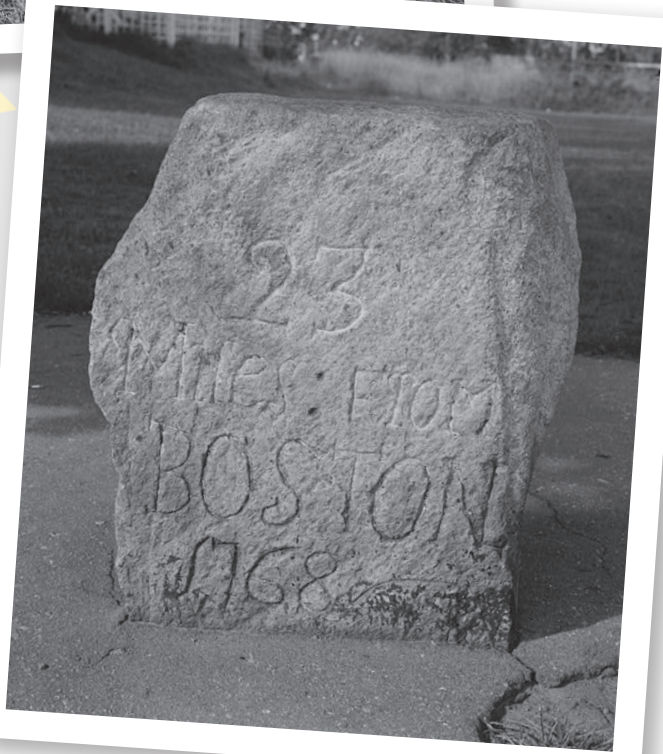
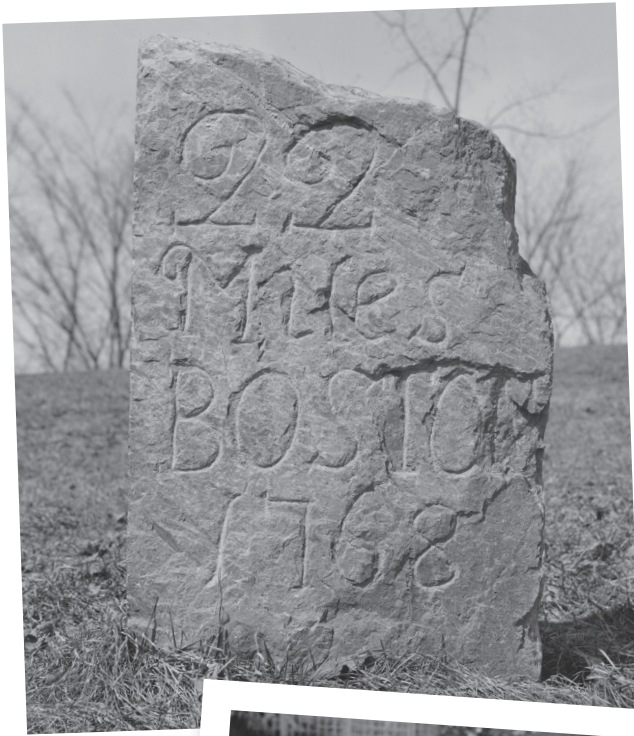
A skull with wings is one symbol often found on old gravestones. Others include a weeping willow, an urn with plants in it, or even a picture of a hand pointing straight up to heaven.

Framingham's old graveyard is on Main Street near the center of town. Many important people from Framingham's early history are buried there.

Milestones

For two hundred years they have stood,
weathered stones by the side of the road.
Passing drivers will pay them no heed,
speeding by much too quickly to read
fading numbers not easy to see,
twenty-five, twenty-four, twenty-three,
A countdown to Boston in miles,
carved in a colonial style.
I bet no one would ever have guessed
the colonists had G.P.S!

In the old days, there were no road signs. If one had to travel, the best thing to do was stop often and ask for directions. The first signs were stone mile markers, erected by Benjamin Franklin when he was Postmaster General of the American Colonies before the Revolution. He mapped out the postal routes between major cities such as Boston, New York, and Philadelphia, and had a stone marker placed every mile with the distance to the nearest major city carved on it. One of these routes passed right through Framingham. There are four milestones along Framingham's roads, three of them dating back to 1768!





Thomas Nixon, Jr.

To stand upon a battlefield
Without a weapon or a shield
Is a most courageous thing to do.
Though just a boy when war broke out,
Young Thomas Nixon had no doubt
That he could somehow help the effort too.
Carrying his fife in hand,
Brave Thomas joined the Patriot band,
And marched the battle road to Lexington.
As war dragged on and he grew older
Thomas became a proper soldier,
And traded his recorder for a gun.

Thomas Nixon, Jr. was 13 years old when the American Revolution began. Too young to be a regular soldier at first, he became a fifer. The Framingham History Center has his recorder and tunebook he used when traveling with the Army during the war.

Statues

A poem for two voices

I am a rebel soldier,
I fought against the crown.

The strains of Yankee Doodle
were heard on marches long.

I answered the call in Concord,
just miles from my door.

Led by Captain Edgell,
A brave commander he,

Together under fire,
we faced the enemy.

Our victory brought us freedom,
a new nation was born.

I represent the Union,
we put the rebels down.

Glory, Glory Hallelujah
was our battle song.

In a bloody field in Maryland,
I first encountered war.

Led by General Gordon,
A brave commander he,

Together under fire,
we faced the enemy.

We stopped the Southern uprising
and repaired a country torn.



Surrender down at
Yorktown

Brought an end
to this long war.

I came home to my family
And prayed there'd be no more.



Surrender down at
Appomattox

Brought an end
to this long war.

I came home to my family.
And prayed there'd be no more.

These two statues of soldiers honor the men from Framingham who served in two different wars almost 100 years apart. The Minuteman statue in Buckminster Square commemorates members of the Framingham militia who marched to fight the redcoats at the Battle of Lexington and Concord in 1775 at the beginning of the American Revolution. They were led by Captain Simon Edgell.

The soldier with the mustache stands in front of the Edgell Memorial Library in Framingham Centre, and stands as a symbol of all the Union soldiers from Framingham who fought in the Civil War from 1861 to 1865. General George Gordon grew up in Framingham and went on to fight in many battles during the Civil War.



General George Gordon





A Penny Saved

Here is a tale quite strange

How a pocketful of change

Brought Lothrop Wight such luck

When the enemy bullet struck.

Good fortune won't come to many

In the form of a humble penny.

In July 1864, Lothrop Wight from Framingham was serving on a Union Navy boat on the James River in Virginia during the Civil War. Suddenly he was shot by a Confederate soldier from the shore, but the bullet was stopped by a penny, saving his life. He went on to live another fifty years, and his family later gave the lucky penny to the Framingham History Center.

How to Make a Straw Hat

After harvesting the rye,
Leave it in the sun to dry.
Bundle it and trim the strands,
It's sharp, be careful of your hands!
With nimble fingers and a firm grip,
Braid, or plait it into strips.
With practice your straw braids can get
Quite beautiful and intricate.
When you've braided your last row,
Grab a needle, it's time to sew.
The strips will form the crown and brim,
Stitch these together, then add some trim.
Put a fancy ribbon on it,
Now you have a stylish bonnet!

The making of straw hats was the first big business in Framingham. At first, farmer's wives, mothers, and daughters would pick grasses, dry them and braid them to make hats during the long winters. As more and more people wanted hats, businessmen built factories in downtown Framingham in the early 1800s. After the Civil War, fashions changed and people no longer wanted straw hats, so the factories were replaced by other industries.





Frederick Augustus Billings III

Frederick Augustus Billings the Third

is wearing an outfit that's quite absurd.

It must be said

that little Fred

in his day would have been styling.

But I have a guess

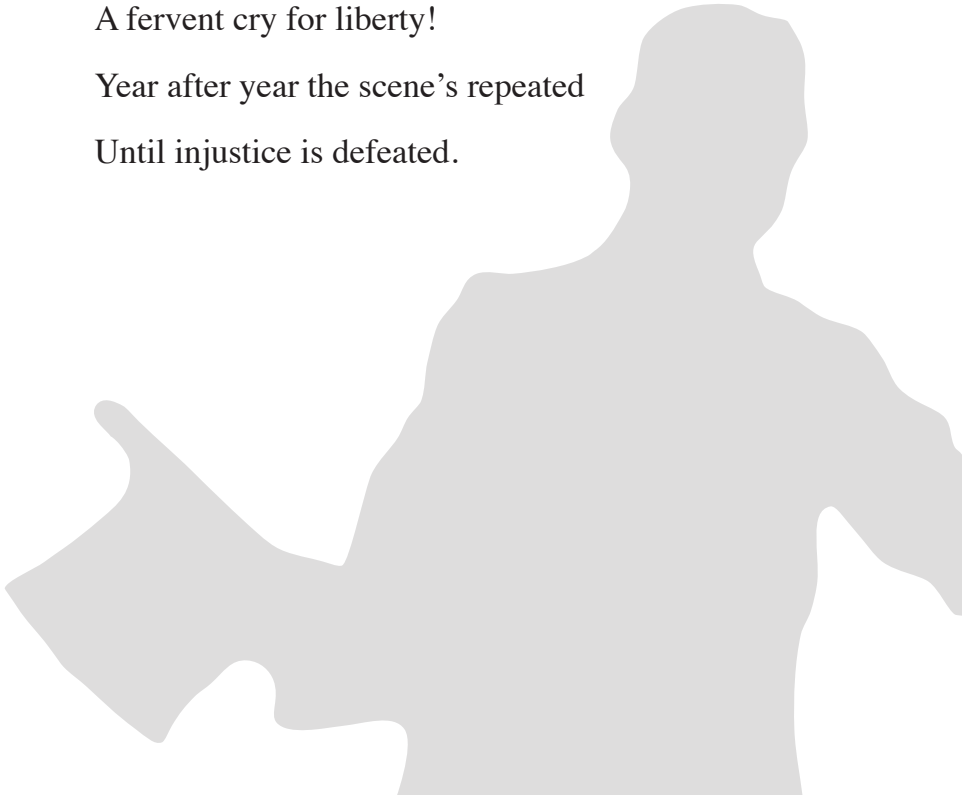
that saucy red dress

is the reason that Freddie's not smiling.

In the 1800s, it was often the custom for mothers to dress both boy and girl infants and toddlers in dresses, and sometimes to tie their hair in ribbons and curls. Once they got a little older boys and girls dressed differently. Frederick Augustus Billings III was born in 1836 in Framingham. He graduated from Amherst College in 1859 and lived in Grafton, Massachusetts, and Mississippi before returning home to Framingham for good in 1881. This portrait was painted when he was about three years old.

Harmony Grove

The speeches are now underway
On this hot Independence Day.
Voices carry across the throng
Gathered here beside the pond.
Fiery words that stir the crowd
Spoken bravely, spoken loud:
We demand an end to slavery!
We won't be quiet until all are free!
Banners tell the same story,
A fervent cry for liberty!
Year after year the scene's repeated
Until injustice is defeated.





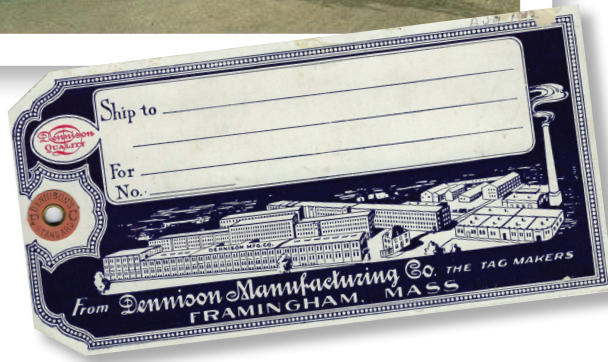
Harmony Grove was a natural amphitheater along the shore of Farm Pond in Framingham. In the 1800s, people would go there for picnics, family reunions, and to hear speeches. Every summer from 1846 to 1865, the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society would hold an event there where people would rally to support an end to slavery. At the end of the Civil War, slavery was banned in the United States and the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society was no longer needed.

B oneshaker

Imagine riding
This contraption
Through the dusty streets of town.
Your foremost fear
As you try to steer,
Is when, not if, you'll fall down.
You'll find it's true
There's quite a view
From high up in your perch.
Pedaling fast,
You quickly pass
Town Hall, the bank, the church.
You end your ride
At riverside,
Thinking back on the trip you just took.
'Twas easy you say,
Though your nerves have been frayed,
And your bones have been
Thoroughly shook!



The first bicycles known as “boneshakers” had wooden wheels and iron tires, so you can see why your bones would shake while riding! The bicycle from the Framingham collection (pictured here) was called a Ha’penny Farthing (because the wheels looked like a big coin and a little coin) and was a little more comfortable than a boneshaker. They were very challenging to ride! In the early 1900s, the “safety bicycle” became more popular, with two wheels that were the same size and pedals attached by a chain to the rear wheel, so the front wheel no longer had to be so large.



Framingham's biggest industry for almost 100 years was the Dennison Manufacturing Company, which first opened in downtown Framingham in 1897. The company made all sorts of paper products for use in offices, stores, and at home. But they were most famous for paper tags attached by string. Families would earn money by attaching the strings to hundreds of tags themselves at home and then bringing them back to the factory the next day. The smokestack on the factory had a big sign on it saying "Tag Town," so that became Framingham's nickname. The Dennison operated in Framingham until the 1990s; the former factory buildings are now homes, offices, and businesses.

Tag Town

Tags, tags, tags, tags,
Bags and bags and bags of tags!
After work my dad will bring 'em,
Through the night we sit and string 'em.
String, string, string, string,
To knot is not a difficult thing.
Take the string and then you knot it
Through the hole and then you've got it!
More, more, more, more
String and tags come through the door.
We're not done yet, I am afraid,
The more we do, the more we're paid.
Knot, knot, knot, knot,
I'm sure by now we've done a lot.
I welcome sleep, no dreams for me,
For tags and strings are all I see!



Two Bogie Book Poems

Cabbage Night

Yank a cabbage from the ground,
Note if it is squat or round.
Decide the color of its skin,
And if the roots are thick or thin.
Somehow this veggie's quality
Foretells how future loves will be.
As for the cabbage, when you're done,
Throw it at a door—then run!





Dennison made many holiday decorations over the years. One way the company promoted its Halloween products was by publishing a party booklet called a “Bogie Book.” A bogie was thought to be a mischievous spirit.

The Bogie Book included ideas for games and activities for Halloween parties. Many of these activities were old traditions that people thought could help them see into their future, including looking at the shapes of cabbage roots and apple peels to determine if they would be happily married or not.

In Framingham and neighboring towns, the night before Halloween was known as “Cabbage Night.” Teenagers would walk the streets causing all kinds of mischief, much like a bogie spirit.

Apple Peels

It’s said that strips of apple peel

When thrown upon the floor reveal

Initials of the one who loves you best.

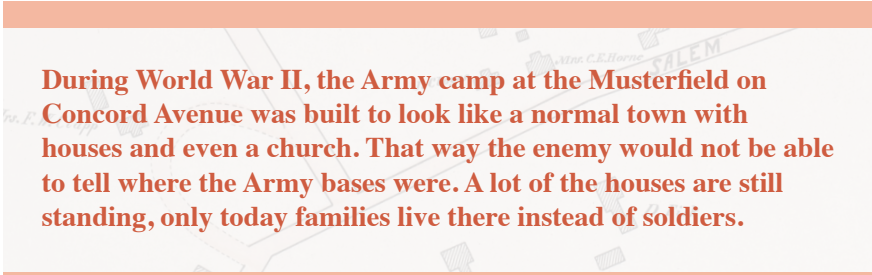
Soon, young romantics who believe

Will gather on All Hallow’s Eve

With hope, they’ll put the apples to the test.

Camp Framingham, 1942

They're cleaning up the Musterfield,
Why don't we take a visit?
That fine new building over there
Looks like a church, or is it?
This home looks pretty comfortable,
The yard is full of flowers.
But when I peeked in the garage
I'm sure that I saw...showers?
A town hall with no offices,
A school that's not a school?
What secrets are they hiding there?
Who are they trying to fool?
Here's the answer to the puzzle
Of this topsy-turvy town—
It looks just like a neighborhood
From an airplane gazing down.



During World War II, the Army camp at the Musterfield on Concord Avenue was built to look like a normal town with houses and even a church. That way the enemy would not be able to tell where the Army bases were. A lot of the houses are still standing, only today families live there instead of soldiers.





In the 1950s, the first shopping mall in New England was built in Framingham. Before that, everyone went downtown to shop or had to go into Boston. (Can you imagine Route 9 with no stores on it?) Many families went there not only to shop, but to enjoy all the fun events and attractions, like a petting zoo, a carousel and a fancy fountain. The original Shoppers World was torn down in the early 1990s, but the name is still there.

Shoppers World

Hey moms, hey dads, hey, boys and girls
Head on out to Shoppers World!
In Framingham right on Route Nine,
A little past the Natick line.
Avoid the crowded streets downtown,
So convenient, come on down!
There are restaurants and shops galore,
A cinema, but wait, there's more!
Parking for six thousand cars,
Meet your favorite TV stars!
Put the kiddies on a ride
While you and Grandma shop inside!
At holidays the place looks grand,
We decorate to beat the band!
Come and see on winter nights
Santa's reindeer! Christmas lights!
Be sure to shop under the dome
And take some tasty muffins home!
Forgive us for this little boast—
We're the first mall on the Eastern coast!
For years to come this place will be
Where shoppers gather happily!



About the Author

James L. Parr has taught in the Framingham Public Schools for over 20 years. As a volunteer for the Framingham History Center, he created the Haunted Halloween Trolley Tour and has been a part of the popular Halloween graveyard walks. Jim is the author of two poetry collections; *My Name is James* and *Lost and Found*, both published by Damianos Publishing, as well as two history volumes; *Dedham, Historic and Heroic Tales from Shiretown and Framingham Legends and Lore* (with Kevin A. Swope), both published by History Press.



