

Two disastrous fires occurred in 1872 in South Natick and in 1874 in Natick Center. Businesses quickly rebuilt and the population increased rapidly. After World War II there was another tremendous population increase, the Massachusetts Turnpike was built through the northern section of the town and there was a spurt in commercial development and demand for housing. Commercial development along Route 9 has been extensive.

While the causes were by no means universally supported, Natick was home to many abolitionists, women's rights advocates, and social reformers. The tunnel connecting the old Walcott Mansion to the railroad tracks was believed to have been part of the Underground Railroad. After the raid on Harper's Ferry, many leading citizens in Natick signed the "Natick Resolution" protesting the execution of John Brown. Augusta Cheney never ceased in her efforts to get the vote for women in school committee elections. She was rejected repeatedly until the state made it mandatory. And the Natick Woman's Club, established in 1895, offered a Community Kindergarten, education and English language classes for new immigrants, and a class in Mothercraft



The 1891 Champion Fire Company

which became a model for Home Economics classes in the public schools.

In the 1950's Natick became the first town to sponsor Fair Housing legislation to eliminate discrimination against minorities in renting and purchasing property.

Natick has a remarkable sports legacy starting in 1891 when the fire department won a ladder-raising contest and earned us the title "Home of Champions". Natick is home to Harwood baseballs, record-breaking runners like Jack Snow in 1905, and sprinters Pooch and Piper Donovan. Pooch went on to coach track and football at Harvard in the 1900's and 1910's. The "Dean of the American League Umpires" Thomas H. Connolly, and, of course, Doug Flutie are all from Natick.



Henry Wilson

Natick also boasts several historic figures. Henry Wilson began life as an indentured servant. At 21 he relocated to Natick and established himself in the shoe business. Wilson went into politics, serving as an abolitionist Senator during the Civil War. He was elected Vice-President under Ulysses S. Grant.

Harriet Beecher Stowe, the author of "Old Town Folks" and "Uncle Tom's Cabin", and many other books, married preacher Calvin Stowe, a native of the town. Alexander Wheelock Thayer was Consul to Trieste and the author of the definitive biography of Ludwig von Beethoven. Horatio Alger, Jr. minister and author of children's books with a "rags to riches" theme often visited his parents and sister in South Natick.

Families from all over the world have come to call Natick home. The Nipmuc were already here when the Praying Indians settled. Settlers from England came next and with the growth of the shoe industry, Natick become home to Irish, Italian, Albanian, German, Scots, French Canadian, Swede and other groups. A band of gypsies camped on Lake Cochituate every summer from the late 1800s into the 1930s. And new families continue to arrive each month seeking peace and opportunity. Welcome to the Home of Champions!

*Compiled by Anne K. Shaller from material at the Natick Historical Society and from Crawford's History of Natick, 1976, and with special thanks to Dorothy Deslongchamps and Jennifer Hance.*

#### Museum Hours:

Tuesday: 2:00pm - 8:30pm  
 Wednesday: 2:00pm - 4:30pm  
 Saturday 10:00am - 12:30pm  
 (closed Saturdays in summer)

# NATICK'S EXTRAORDINARY HISTORY



## Natick Historical Society



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