



THE NURSE HOMESTEAD

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A game of darts like you've never seen

by Glenn Mairo

Almost 10 years ago, I attended a rather unique workshop in Vermont. At this workshop I made an atlatl and three 6 foot long darts. The atlatl (Aztec word) is a spear throwing device, first developed in Europe, that is over 16,000 years old. It enabled early man to cast a spear with much greater velocity and impact than before. The bow and arrow, by comparison, are brand new inventions in North America; dating back about 1500 years. After attending the workshop, I threw my atlatl and darts occasionally in my back yard.

The genesis for this event was that four years ago I heard that a new employee at the R. S. Peabody Museum of Archaeology at Phillips Academy had found an atlatl and darts and was using them with students for fun. I contacted Donny Slater from the museum and got involved with his efforts to instruct his students. I thought that some sort of a contest or formal field day would be great not only for Phillips Academy but for the region. After much deliberation, I came to the obvious conclusion that the Rebecca Nurse Homestead was the best place in Massachusetts to put on such an event! After all, we have found dart points on the grounds that date back over 4,000 years! The grounds of the Homestead were hunted by early Essex County inhabitants right up through the contact period of the early 17th century. I got the enthusiastic go-ahead from the membership of the Danvers Alarm List Company and started planning my first event in 2003.

We set up the main target range in the fenced in corral area in front of the Salem Village Meetinghouse. Targets of 10, 15, and 20 meters made of 12 bales of hay were carefully set up. A distance range overlooking the field leading to



the Homestead Graveyard (darts can easily travel 50 to 100 meters!) was set up with markers looking like a golf driving range. In the almost impossible event that a dart reaches the area of the Graveyard; we let throwers know that we have a special Salem Village prize for those who can reach the Graveyard – Eternal Damnation! So far – no one has even come close!!!

The R.S. Peabody Museum of Archaeology, and the Massachusetts Archaeological Society-Northeast Chapter are the co-sponsors of the “Annual Massachusetts Atlatl Field Day and I.S.A.C.” The Nurse Homestead is paid a usage fee. This event costs each participating organization nothing. All costs are paid for by the writer of this article. The first two events were rewarding and fun but nothing like what happened on September 24th and 25th of 2005.

The third time out was most certainly a charm! We added a field game in one of our Alfalfa fields called the “Aztec Atlatl Battle Field

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The Rebecca Nurse Homestead
Preservation Society

The Rebecca Nurse Homestead Preservation Society is a nonprofit organization dedicated to the preservation, conservation, and programming of the Nurse Homestead, a 27-acre historic site in Danvers, Massachusetts.

The Rebecca Nurse Homestead
149 Pine Street
Danvers, Massachusetts 01923
978-774-8799
www.rebeccanurse.org

Hours of operation:
June 15 through Labor Day
Every day Noon to 4:30 PM
September and October
Sat. and Sun. Noon to 4:30 PM

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Atlatl *(continued from page 1)*

Game.” This game has been developed by Bob Berg of Thunderbird Atlatl; the very same man who I took the workshop from many years ago in Vermont. He and his wife Cheryl have been an integral part of the Atlatl Field Day from the very first year. Two teams consisting of four warriors and a shaman and king representing two Aztec cities try to eliminate the other team by throwing darts at 2’x2’x1’ foam targets set up in a large rectangular area. As with all our ranges we have safety officers on hand to ensure that no one is accidentally harmed. All participants must register and sign a waiver if they want to throw.

We also had “Trapper” John Enos, mountain man extraordinaire, set up several interactive events such as tomahawk throwing. Richard Parker makes what are, in my opinion, the finest lithic tools in North America. His adzes, axes and other tools not only looked great – they actually work! Thunderbird Atlatl set up a big tent full of atlatls made of various woods and darts ranging from 5’ to 7’ along with all sorts of accessories for cordage making and flint knapping. Dave McKenna, long time Alarm List member set up a table showing artifacts from his collection. Many professional and

amateur archaeologists and historians showed up both days including the Education Department staff from the Harvard Museum of Natural History.

Thunderbird Atlatl held a workshop Saturday morning that attracted participants from Massachusetts and Connecticut. Groups of throwers from Phillips Academy (a team of 12 students and faculty) and Franklin Pierce College of Rindge, NH added greatly to the event. The I.S.A.C. is an international accuracy contest that has each participant throw 5 darts from 15 meters and 5 from 20 meters.

Although the local Danvers weekly newspaper ignored the Atlatl Field Day for the third consecutive year, other media coverage this year was superb and way beyond what I expected. I send out a bunch of press releases to a wide range of media each year that prominently mentions the Rebecca Nurse Homestead. The Salem News interviewed me in an extensive well-written article that ran the Friday before the event. The Salem News sent a staff photographer and reporter on Sunday that resulted in a wonderful FRONT PAGE color photo and article the next day! A radio station from Boston University sent a reporter to the event who interviewed participants and even set up a microphone near the target range so that

she could get the sound of the darts as they whizzed by! The Boston Globe covered the event in two listings. We link the event with the Massachusetts Historic Commission’s “Massachusetts Archaeology Month” promotion each year. This year we had 30 to 40 participants and attendees on Saturday and over 200 on Sunday. The weather was perfect. Many visitors bought wares from the Endecott Shop such as our fine line of historic pottery from Ken Henderson of Maine. And the Homestead staff didn’t lose a single visitor to a stray dart! The staff did have a lot of fun after hours experiencing this unique hobby including a Herculean toss by Liz Levenson that almost stayed up in a tree for the winter!

The Grand Champion award went to Gary Nolf of Westbrook, Connecticut. My two long suffering assistants (and co-safety officers) Donny Slater of the R.S. Peabody and my son Maxfield, rose to the occasion beautifully and were a joy to behold during the entire weekend. Many thanks to those who attended and witnessed a historic event at a place that has known historic events for over 6,000 years. I hope to see all of you on September 24th and 25th in 2006 on the beautiful green fields of the Rebecca Nurse Homestead for the “4th Annual Massachusetts Atlatl Field Day and I.S.A.C.”

Pooling our resources

By Bob Osgood, resident caretaker of the Nurse Homestead



The question: *What are vernal pools?* Under the Massachusetts Wetland Act, they are defined as “confined basin depressions which at least in most years, hold water for a minimum of two continuous months during the spring and summer, and which are free of adult fish populations, as well as the area

within 100 feet of the mean annual boundaries of such depressions, to the extent that such habitat is within an area subject to protection under the Act”.

Here at the Nurse Homestead, we have two such areas: one to the east and one to the west of the Homestead. By certifying these areas, it provides another tier of protection for the Homestead’s vista. Under the state and local act, it is much easier to protect the area if it is certified. The local act is stiffer in its protection of the resource. Vernal pools often have endangered species within their boundaries such as salamanders, both adult and in embryo, and fairy shrimp.

We have been waiting for the pools to dry out so that the bottom can be examined and we can get some measurements and photos of the size and depth of the areas. Late this fall, we looked at the pools and found them dry. Now we can do all that is

required to certify them. We hope to have Rick Roth and his Cape Ann Vernal Pond Team up soon to resume the certification process.

On a historical site such as the Rebecca Nurse Homestead, it never hurts the property to put as many and diverse types of protection on the land, area, and buildings as possible. It has been a year since the Town Meeting empowered the Town Manager to establish an Agriculture Commission – the commission has yet to be organized. To create the commission, of course, would slow down development: something which town government does not want to do.

Postscript: Guess what! I met the town manager outside Town Hall recently and I asked him when he was going to establish that group and he replied “soon”, and then asked me if I would like to be on the commission. Of course I responded “yes.” Nice timing.

The other Homestead residents

By Bob Osgood



Twelve years ago when we first came to reside here at the Nurse Homestead, we were surprised at the variety and number of birds, mammals, and reptiles that resided and passed through the area. Over the years, the varieties and numbers have changed greatly.

As for the mammals, there were the woodchucks, squirrels, a few skunks, a family of red foxes, a varied number of deer, the occasional opossum, moles, mice, and field rats. We were even host to a muskrat who lived down on the banks of the Crane Brook.

Changes started happening not on the Homestead property but on land close by. Expansion, new development, and rule changes in regard to the state's outlook on predatory animals all caused an increase of predatory species living on the property. We now have at least one pack of coyotes roam-



ing the area as well as a pair of fisher cats. In fact, hardly a week goes by that we don't get a visit or a call from a neighbor looking for their cat or small dog.

Our squirrel population varies wildly—no doubt due to predation. Our pheasant population is also gone and we haven't seen a mole, field rat, or opossum in years. The deer do not come to the apple trees any more but we did see a little evidence of their presence, in the form of a hemlock stripped of bark, during the last part of last winter.

We have also seen a red fox this year but no evidence of a den or family. Previously, we had watched a family evict a group of woodchucks from their hole then live there through summer. In fact, they were so used to humans they became a bit domesticated. One midsummer's day, I was sitting on the stairs of the Endecott Barn and guess who comes trotting up: the mother fox! She sat down no more than fifteen feet from me, scratched her ear, and watched me for a while before walking away.

Next edition: the birds.

Around the Homestead — *Highlights of our historic property*

In 1985 a film production company, NightOwl Productions, was preparing to make a docu-drama for public television and motion picture release. The film, "Three Sovereigns for Sarah," told the story of Sarah Cloyce, who lived in Salem Village in 1692. Cloyce and her sisters Rebecca Nurse and Mary Esty were accused of practicing witchcraft and of afflicting villagers.

As much of the 1692 witchcraft proceedings took place in the Salem Village Meetinghouse, and as there was no authentic structure available to film these critical and dramatic scenes, screen writer and producer Victor Pisano asked Richard Trask, historical consultant to the movie and former Nurse Homestead curator, to research the original Salem Village Meetinghouse so the production company could build a reproduction for use in the film. The resulting replica structure was built on the Homestead property, and used extensively in the filmmaking which starred Academy Award winner Venessa Redgrave as Sarah Cloyce.

Following the making of the movie, the building was donated to the Nurse Homestead, and is now used to show a 15-minute computerized audio-visual program, "The Meetinghouse in Salem Village." The program explains the role of the meetinghouse in Puritan society and recounts the story of the 1692 witchcraft outbreak, including various testimonies given. This program has become a regular feature of tours at the Nurse Homestead, and is much appreciated by visitors to the site. Though much of the building's fabrication is the result of educated guesses based on original records and study of three partially surviving meetinghouses, the general visual characteristics of this reproduction building would have been very familiar to the inhabitants of 1692 Salem Village. The film "Three Sovereigns for Sarah" is available on both VHS and DVD at the Nurse Homestead's Endecott Shop, or online at rebeccanurse.org



Upper: Exterior of the Meetinghouse

*Lower: Interior photo taken during the filming of **Three Sovereigns for Sarah***

Good neighbors

The Perkins family remembers the Homestead

By Pat Bridgman

Betty and Norris Perkins bought their house on Mello Parkway in 1956. The place was nice, but it had its drawbacks. “There were a couple of ponds nearby,” Betty recalls. “With young children, you worry about things like that.” Then there was the \$15,900 price tag. The Perkinses didn’t want to go over \$10,000. But the property had one big plus: It backed onto the Rebecca Nurse Homestead. “It turned out to be a wonderful place to live and raise kids,” Betty says.

A lifelong history buff, Norris Perkins gave daughters Elaine, Patty, and Linda an appreciation for the Homestead and its story. “Dad felt it was important that we have the right perspective,” Elaine says. “Rebecca Nurse and her family were unfortunate people in a

Perkins girls also learned a lot from the Homestead’s caretakers, Ray and Mildred Swinerton. “We loved the Swinertons,” Patty says. “We had a little path through the woods to the house and we hung out there all the time. The Swinertons told us about the original building, what parts were added on, what the tools were used for. Mr. Swinerton taught me the names of all the flowers: Queen Anne’s Lace, Butter and Eggs. He even went skating on the pond with us.”

Initially a source of concern, the pond turned out to be a lot of fun. The girls and their friends ice-skated and played hockey in the winter and paddled their rowboat in the summer. “Summertime were the best,”

There have always been “millions of toads” on the property, Betty reports. “Maybe people thought Rebecca Nurse was a witch because of all the toads—that they were her ‘families.’” Linda remembers the snapping turtles. “When turtles came up to our house,” she says, “Dad wrote ‘Elaine, Patty, and Linda’ on the shells so we’d know them if we saw them again.”

Walking the property was a year-round activity. “We always had dogs,” Patty says, “and it was a great place to walk them.” One family tradition was to walk down to the cemetery after Thanksgiving dinner. “Norris did it with the girls when they were little, then with the grandchildren when they came along,” Betty says.

Norris used the walks to keep an eye on things. More than once he surprised hunters trespassing on the property. “He had an old rifle—an heirloom—over the fireplace,” Elaine recalls. “I doubt that it even worked. But one time he took that rifle down, put it in the crook of his arm, and told a hunter to move along. The man asked, ‘You own this property?’ and Dad said, ‘No, but I take care of it.’ The hunter left. “We took care of the property as if it belonged to us,” she adds. “That’s the way we were raised. We had an obligation to the place.”

That’s why the family was relieved when DALCO took it over from SPNEA [Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities]. “We were afraid someone would subdivide the land and build on it,” Elaine says. “We hope the land will stay the way it is forever.”

Some things, of course, have changed. The barn burned down, with the little girls watching in tears from their parents’ bedroom window. The ponds dried up. The rowboat fell apart. The airport closed. The Perkins daughters grew up and had families of their own. Norris passed away. But a lifetime of memories remains: in the garden, the cemetery, the house, the fields, the woods.

Elaine says, “There’s a Beatles song that goes, ‘There are places I remember all my life, though some have changed, some forever not for better, some have gone and some remain.’ That song always reminds me of the Homestead. It’s one of the few things you can always come back to.”



situation not of their own making. We learned to treat their home and memory with respect.”

The sisters became regulars on the Homestead’s guided tours. “Different people gave different parts of the story,” Elaine says. “I put it all together.” She became a tour guide herself at age 13. “I did it because I loved it,” she says, “not for the money” (a whopping 25 cents an hour). “Elaine took that job very seriously,” her mother recalls, even when her prankster father called the Nurse house and asked to speak to Rebecca Nurse. Elaine took the call. “I’m sorry, sir,” she answered, believing the call was legit. “She’s dead!”

Elaine’s fascination with the Homestead led her to earn a degree in Colonial American History at Brown University and to take part in DALCO events during the 1970s. The

Patty says. The girls ran free, observing nature, rescuing wounded animals (Elaine went on to become a veterinarian), and watching planes scrape the treetops taking off and landing at Robin Landon Airport. “We built forts out of sticks and twigs,” Elaine said, “and named the drainage ditch ‘Hidden River.’ We called it that because when things dried up, it went away.”

The girls adopted feral cats and abandoned dogs—one of which had a litter of pups shortly thereafter. “There was lots of wildlife,” Linda says, “muskrats, beavers, wild turkeys, bats. I still like to throw rocks in the air and watch the bats swoop in on them. The bats bother my husband, but not my sisters or me. Growing up where we did, we’re not afraid of anything.”

Notes from the president's quill...

By Bill Clemens



Since its inception, the Nurse Homestead Management Committee has worked under a set of guidelines, one of which is that it can only proceed with the execution of a project if the checkbook has available funds to cover the entire cost. This inherently limits the size of any given capital plan or at least how often large projects may be undertaken. There are two primary reasons for this. First, the available projects monies are those in excess of a checkbook balance that the committee does not believe is prudent to dip below unless an extremely dire emergency exists. This budgetary floor provides enough money to operate the property for a number of years with little or no excess revenues over ex-

penses. And second, the amount the checkbook grows from year to year is not that great even under the best of circumstances.

So how do we intend to proceed with a number of major projects that are envisioned as either necessary preservation wise or for the future growth of the Homestead programs? One avenue is to seek out and apply for various grants that exist. To that end, one of our newer members, Niamh Dolan, (that's pronounced Neeve) has been spending a lot of free time researching grants and what would be required of us to be successful recipients. Although there are many grants, the number that are a suitable fit between their requirements and our operation size and resources is quite small.

A recurring requirement that pops up in a number of grant applications, is that if matching grant funds are to be received, specific monies must be in hand, earmarked and segregated from normal operating funds, to equal the amount of the grant match. Therefore we have initiated our Special Projects Funds to accumulate all donations given to us for specific projects related to possible grants. The two current projects we have designated are the lining of the Great Hall fireplace chimney and the Endecott Barn roof restoration. These two projects will enable the expansion of our public educational program plans and to protect our wonderful Endecott Barn. So to this end I would like to acknowledge sev-

eral recent large donations to these projects; The Towne Family Association, Sondra Carlson of NY., Barbara Baylis of TX., Gladys Evans of CA., Virginia Nourse Solomon of MA., Grace Forlenza of NJ. and Kevin Riley of MA. I want to thank all these members for getting our new fund off to a rousing start. Their contributions totaled \$1,350 and I hope will encourage more members to contribute that extra support that will ensure success for our endeavors.

Bill Clemens

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This short piece was written by one of our most experienced tour guides, Kathy Morano, as she enjoyed a very early October snowfall at the Homestead.

Early Snowfall at the Homestead

Silent and soft,

*From the pearl gray aloft, lacy flecks
drift to the ground*

Blurring the contours of fence and farm,

*Lawn and fields graced
with white eider down,*

*Green peeking through trees
draped with gauze,*

The russet house wears an ermine gown,

Pause,

Enjoy the beauty all around!

Cry Innocent plays the Homestead

By Jackson C. Tingle

On the weekend of September 17th, court was held at the Meetinghouse here at the Homestead. Bridget Bishop, the first to be executed in 1692, was resurrected, garbed in her famous red paragon bodice, and paraded out to trial. Unlike the dread proceedings during the spring and summer of 1692, dear Bridget, though found guilty—twice—was spared the noose as the crew from *Cry Innocent* certainly couldn't spare a cast member to the hangman.

After much work on the part of the members, and a swift advertising campaign, it was with great excitement that we here at the Homestead received the actors from History Alive. The famous acting troop from Gordon College, who did two performances in our replica 1692 Meetinghouse here on the property, took time out of

their busy academic lives to help us raise funds. Grossing \$690 on ticket sales, History Alive accepted \$600 (\$200 short of their usual fee for two shows) and generously donated the extra \$90 to the Homestead. In the Endecott Shop, we earned a mighty \$519 from the enthusiastic crowd.

Aside from valuable funds, the Homestead received invaluable attention. Many of the people visiting us had never been to the property before and were very pleased with what they saw. Several memberships to the RNH Preservation Society were issued and much interest in the history of the property and the Alarm List Company was mustered. We hope to continue a relationship with History Alive in the coming years, so keep an eye to the newsletter for future performances and ticketing information.



The cast of Gordon College's *Cry Innocent: The People vs. Bridget Bishop*

www.rebeccanurse.org

Danvers, Massachusetts 01923
149 Pine Street

The Rebecca Nurse Homestead Preservation Society

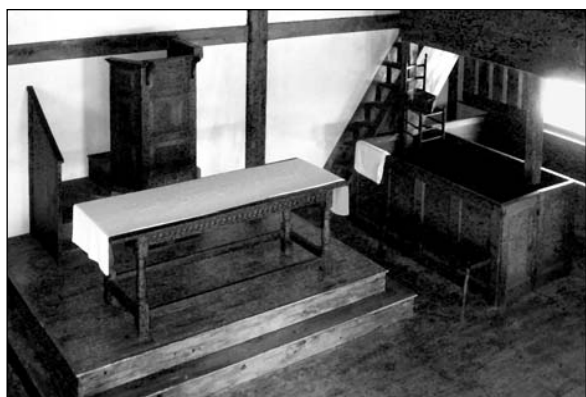


NEWS FLASH • UPCOMING EVENTS • NEWS FLASH • UPCOMING EVENTS • NEWS FLASH

Archaeological survey of the Homestead to begin next summer

The Rebecca Nurse Homestead has learned that Phillips Academy—Andover, Massachusetts has decided to offer a Field School of Archaeology course as part of their 2006 Summer Session. This offering will consist of classroom instruction in methodology by professional archaeologists at the R.S. Peabody Museum of Archaeology at Phillips Andover, followed by on site field work at the Rebecca Nurse Homestead. This field school was the idea of Danvers Alarm List Company member Glenn Mairo who also serves as the Massachusetts Archaeological Society - Northeast Chapter Chair. Mairo will serve as the Project Coordinator for the duration of the field school. This will be the first professional archaeological survey ever undertaken at the Homestead. Exciting details will follow in a future issue of the newsletter.

Musical event coming to the meetinghouse this spring



Glenn Mairo, Danvers Alarm List Company member and manager of the Endecott Shop at the Rebecca Nurse Homestead wishes to announce a very special event scheduled for Spring 2006 at the Salem Village Meetinghouse. "Salem Towne" a song cycle based on the events of 1692 by singer/songwriter Linda Towne Clifford will be performed at the Meetinghouse with a live cast and professional orchestra. This work, composed by a descendant of the Towne sisters, features a dozen original songs and dialogue based on transcriptions of the examinations and trials held in Salem Village and Town in 1692. Details to follow in a future issue of the newsletter. Also please be on the lookout for information concerning a new CD of music from 17th century Salem that was recorded in early November at the Salem Village Meetinghouse.