



Kathryn Toomey
Register of Deeds

Worcester Registry of Deeds

Newsletter

Issue #2, November 2020

Happy Thanksgiving!

Please be well and safe this holiday season during Pandemic 2020!

If this is your first time reading our newsletter, welcome! We published the inaugural issue in October 2020. I am proud of our new monthly newsletter. But why, you might ask, is the Registry of Deeds creating this?

While our District is made up of 55 wide-ranging communities, the one constant is land. Added to that are the stories, history and relationship we have with our land. This newsletter is to both remind and educate us of what we have in our own backyard, as well as learn about other portions of our beautiful county.

The newsletter is written with the purpose of celebrating our

What's Inside?



Town Spotlight: Southbridge
American Optical (p.2)



Thanksgiving 2020:
Celebrating Safely (p.3)



Reader Submissions: Got a story? Tell us! (p.3)



Word Search: Thanksgiving!
(p.3)

communities and sharing our resources. Our plan is to include local facts, records and information that helps explain the designated "Town Spotlight" for the month from our county. Our information is gathered from our own records and shared resources in the Commonwealth beginning with the records regarding land in our district.

We hope you enjoy our research and absorb the information as you expand your knowledge of our beautiful Worcester County.

Community Statistics

44

Number of Recordings in October

13%

Lower Cost of Living vs Mass Average

42%

Homes Owned vs. Rented

9.8%

% Increase in 2020 Home Prices

372

Density (Houses per Square Mile)

Town Spotlight

American Optical

Southbridge



“One day in the year 1833, the nimble-fingered son of a Connecticut farmer took a close look at a pair of the typically crude spectacles then current. He said to himself: “I can do it better.”

This excerpt, drawn from an American Optical [brochure from 1962](#), describes the humble beginnings of a global giant that started out as a side business for a Southbridge jeweler.

William Beecher and his three apprentices began producing silver spectacle frames at the original factory, located at the corner of Chestnut and Main Streets ([Book 343, Pages 478-479](#)). The spectacles were of such high-quality and priced reasonably, Beecher’s business flourished, and their product lines extended to include other fashionable materials, including steel and gold.

The business continued to grow over the next 30 years, and with Beecher’s mechanical skill, they achieved exponential output, his factory able to produce over 15,000 pairs of spectacles per year. When Beecher retired in 1862, one of his apprentices—Robert H. Cole—took over as head of the firm. Two years later, Cole hired another Connecticut farm boy named George Wells, who would become the future of the company, partnering with Cole in 1869 to create American Optical. Wells applied modern production methods to manufacturing and invented machines and techniques when nothing existing was sufficient.

“I can do it better.”

The company needed to expand, and secured the location occupied by a large textile mill on Mechanic St in 1871, converting it to an optical factory ([Book 853, Pages 298, 299 and 300](#)).

Over the next 80 years, American Optical became the world's largest manufacturer of ophthalmic products, and at its height employed more than 6,000 people globally. By the middle of the 20th century, American Optical’s manufacturing plant included 36 different buildings and over 17 acres of floor space on the Southbridge campus.

For more information into American Optical and their impact on Southbridge (and American) history, please visit the Optical Heritage Museum: <http://www.opticalheritagemuseum.com/>. Special thanks to Dick Whitney for his contributions to this article.

Invitation to Reader Contributions

As Katie mentioned in last month's newsletter, we are all storytellers. Reading the article about the Fruitland's Museum, I learned some more about its rich history. It also served to remind me of the times in my life I've visited. The first was as a fifth-grade field trip, which, admittedly, held little interest for me. It was hard enough to get an immature 10-year-old to concentrate in class, let alone contemplate local history on a sunny autumn day outside the classroom. In addition to the museum, you may not be aware that the Fruitland's is also host to a wonderful 4th of July event, which includes music, food and spectacular fireworks. After being introduced to it by a neighbor as a more accessible alternative to Boston's celebration, it has now happily become an annual family event.

Do you have an interesting story about the Town Spotlight? Or a unique perspective about a town/building/site in Worcester County? We'd like to hear from you as well! Send an email to worcester.deeds@sec.state.ma.us. We'll review them and include selections in an upcoming editions of the newsletter. Please keep submissions to approximately 300 words. Thank you! We look forward to hearing from you!

Thanksgiving 2020

As Thanksgiving Day approaches, there has been a significant spike in the number of COVID-19 cases reported throughout the Commonwealth. Health experts warn even small get-togethers indoors could be risky for spreading the coronavirus.

WORD SEARCH

F	T	I	A	B	I	G	P	T	C	G	M	O	M	Q
D	Y	K	P	S	Z	G	K	O	N	P	T	B	A	E
F	O	Z	J	X	V	J	R	I	C	E	S	U	Y	B
U	T	Q	K	U	D	N	R	O	V	L	R	M	F	O
P	P	N	L	H	B	V	A	K	R	U	M	D	L	U
G	B	W	P	R	H	Z	Q	W	N	F	V	R	O	N
I	N	U	E	S	W	W	T	U	R	K	E	Y	W	T
C	F	A	Q	E	R	G	I	C	X	N	M	K	E	Y
Q	D	A	E	I	G	R	N	A	I	A	S	Y	R	U
P	I	B	M	P	W	Y	P	I	J	H	J	I	G	W
B	U	M	X	I	F	P	V	Y	F	T	K	C	W	S
L	T	R	M	T	L	T	H	A	F	F	D	B	T	C
O	Z	D	H	E	C	Y	I	M	R	P	U	U	R	N
K	G	O	S	L	C	D	G	N	R	G	N	T	E	C
S	M	I	R	G	L	I	P	T	S	A	E	F	S	L

Apples
Mayflower
Thankful
Feast
Sharing
Cornbread
Pies

Family
Pilgrims
Bounty
Nuts
Turkey
Gravy
Stuffing



With this information the decision to attend a traditional in-person celebration has passed through all of our minds to one degree or another.

With that, Mass.gov and the CDC have provided recommendations and guidelines for gathering as safely as possible:

<https://www.mass.gov/news/thanksgiving-during-covid-19>

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/holidays/thanksgiving.html>

This year more than ever, before you and your family enjoy Thanksgiving dinner, or settle in for a football game, we encourage you to take a little extra time to reflect on the blessings in our lives. It may be a little harder to spot this year, but they're there.

And...if one was to find a silver lining (or at least a bemused smile) in the situation, those of us choosing not to celebrate with family in-person won't have to suffer traffic jams, flight delays, or any of the other logistical challenges that typically accompany the day. So...there's that.

Be safe, be aware and most of all, remember what you're thankful for.