



The Nashua Historical Society

Preserving the Past for the Future

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www.nashuahistoricalociety.org

And the Bride Wore....

A Showcase of 150 years of Nashua bridal fashion

*Exhibited at the Abbot-Spalding House
5 Abbott Street, Nashua, New Hampshire*

Members only preview on Saturday, August 5 from 1:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.

Open to the public on September 10 & 11 and October 8 & 9 from 1:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.

Members admitted at no cost on all dates.

Non-member cost is \$10.00 cash or \$12.00 for credit or debit cards.

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2022-2023**

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**After a Two-Year Covid Delay
The 150th Anniversary Celebration Begins**

Over the years of its existence, The Nashua Historical Society has been the very fortunate recipient of many treasured family heirlooms, gifts from Nashua's citizens, prominent and humble. Before the year 2020, The Society had reached the final stage in planning our 150th anniversary celebration. At that time a decision was made to include objects from the clothing and textile collection to showcase 150 years of Nashua bridal fashion. Nothing speaks more to a viewer than a wedding dress, no matter when it was worn, as each era provides clues into social status, and speaks to an individual's style.

Then came COVID, totally shutting down the country, especially everyone's lives, and, sadly, for the Historical Society ended celebration plans for a very long time.

Yet the work and planning continued in spite of the shutdown. Dresses were studied and analyzed in terms of style and fiber content, but something without the context connecting them to the most important date of someone's life, and without knowing something about the individuals who actually wore them, the story these dresses had to tell was incomplete. Study of the dresses provided a chance to learn about Nashua brides, their families, our donors and their descendants and celebrate their contributions to life in Nashua, NH.

*The Nashua Historical Society is now ready for the **And the Bride Wore...** exhibit to open. As a Society member, we invite you to a member's only preview of the exhibit on Saturday, August 6 from 1:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. There is no charge to members, and you do not need to register in advance.*

We begin with Martha Jane Cross and her granddaughter, Gertrude Irene Pierce, two brides brought together by grandmother's lace. They came from two separate, but distinct, generations of dress. Each dress was chosen for the bridal exhibit because of the familial connection. Particularly touching was Gertrude Pierce's use of lace from her grandmother's 1851 gown to trim her wedding dress in 1913. Each dress silhouette (a dress's overall shape) clearly represents fashion during each bride's era. Gertrude Pierce would never have worn her grandmother's gown in 1913 but chose instead to honor her grandmother in a way that makes perfect sense.

MARTHA JANE CROSS and JAMES L. PIERCE
OCTOBER 8, 1851

Martha Jane Cross was born in Hudson, N.H., in 1831, to James P. F. Cross, a farmer, and Hannah Goodspeed of Litchfield, N.H. James L. Pierce was born August 6, 1824, in Watertown, MA, to James Pierce and Belinda Cross (m. October 11, 1821). Martha Jane died on April 28, 1887, and she was buried in Hudson. James died May 21, 1888. After their marriage in 1851, the Pierces had two sons: Frank J. Pierce (b. 1852), and George Randall Pierce (b. February 22, 1857).

As with so many women of the past, Martha's voice is rather silent, making her life a bit of a mystery. Her name appeared in the U.S. Census of 1850, indicating that a Martha Cross might have lived on Canal Street. The story of the New England mill girls is very well known. During the rise of New England's textile mills many farmers' daughters left the farms surrounding those mills to find work for wages. Being a farmer's daughter, Martha too might have left her father's farm in Hudson, N.H. to earn a living or provide additional monetary support to her family through work in Nashua's textile mills, a fact that remains unknown. Whatever circumstance brought James and Martha together, they married on October 8, 1851.



Martha Jane Cross



James L. Pierce

Martha was the wife of James, a local merchant who was well known and very involved in the community. Their two sons probably kept Martha very busy during their growing years. The U.S. Census for 1860 shows Martha's mother, Hannah, lived with the family and might have provided child care and help with household chores.

In the years before Martha and James met and married, James came to Nashua and opened a crockery business with partner John Coggin in approximately 1845. Eventually, James' son, Frank became a business partner in J. L. Pierce & Co., located at 52 Main Street, a business that sold household goods. With Frank's sudden death in 1883 at age 31, his brother, George Randall, became James' business partner. James Pierce lived five more years and died in 1888. The family lived on Abbot Street in Nashua. Martha Jane died on April 28, 1887, and she was buried in Hudson.

James Pierce's life was discussed in some detail in the Nashua Daily Telegraph, May 22, 1888, in an obituary column, after a brief discussion about his early life in Nashua. The article also included some of his other activities in Nashua, such as his membership in the Rising Sun Lodge, A. F. and A. M., as well as his membership in the Unitarian Church. He was Alderman of Ward 1 in 1869, and again in 1873, and twice the Democratic nominee for Nashua mayor. He was an active member of the fire department and served as an assistant engineer. He was president of the Underhill Edge Tool Company, clerk of Pennichuck Water Works, a director of Hillsboro Mills (Wilton), and trustee in the Nashua Savings Bank.

The Telegraph further stated in kind words of him, "...among all the prominent and honored citizens of Nashua, none stood higher in the estimation of the community than James L. Pierce. He was a modest, unpretentious, courteous and obliging man who looked upon the bright side of everybody and everything. He had no enemies to punish, and in all his career he acted solely upon his convictions regarding the truth at issue, and in obedience to his judgment and obligations....Nashua loses a citizen who has furnished a pattern young men may safely imitate. An affectionate husband, indulgent and confiding parent, warm friend and kind neighbor has passed to his reward...."

**TILLIE BETTCHER and GEORGE RANDALL PIERCE
November 19, 1884**

Before discussing Martha Jane Cross Pierce's granddaughter, Gertrude I. Pierce, it is important to include information about Gertrude's parents, Mathilda (Tillie) Bettcher and George Randall Pierce (Martha and James' son). The Nashua Historical Society is in possession of garments worn by Tillie, but her wedding dress to our knowledge at this time is not part of the collection. Tillie Bettcher (b. 1859) and George Randall Pierce (b. 1857) were married on November 19, 1884, in Jersey City, NJ, and they had four children together: Gertrude (b. 1885), Louise Martha (b. 1888), Arthur (b. 1889), and George, Jr. (b. 1894).

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Tillie Bettcher



George Pierce

George R. Pierce's imprint upon Nashua was fairly brief. Before George became involved in his father's business, as mentioned previously, George's brother, Frank, was James' business partner, probably because Frank was the eldest son. Frank died suddenly on October 28, 1883, at the age of 31 years, and George then succeeded into the partnership. Five years later, in 1888, James died. The circumstances of the business at the time are unknown, but George might not have been completely dedicated to keeping company operations going, even though he was a partner for five years before James' death. Evidence suggests that George either sold the company or shuttered it completely because by 1890 he went on to become a partner in the insurance firm of Stark & Pierce, located at 69 Main Street in Nashua. Also, in that year George purchased property in Lyndeborough and Hudson from Joshua C. Pierce (possibly a family relation, but unknown at this time). In June of 1893, George and his wife, Tillie, took a trip to the Bellevue in Mont Vernon, perhaps for a social visit. In the days of traveling by carriage, the trip to Mont Vernon was undoubtedly bumpy, uncomfortable, and long. In that same year, George was Clerk for Pennichuck Water Works, and the Nashua Daily Telegraph provided legal notice of the annual meeting of the stockholders in his name.

Apparently, in June of 1894, George traveled alone to California, the purpose being unknown at this time. It is possible he went to California to conduct some sort of business deal, or he might have gone for health reasons (something that doctors often recommended to patients with health problems in those days), but the visit turned into an extended stay. At some point in his travels, he had reason to be riding a stagecoach traveling from Los Angeles to Milton. Something caused the coach's guard, William J. Hendricks, to stand up and fire his rifle at someone waiting along the roadside with an unseen accomplice. The "robber" fired his gun into the coach, injuring two of the passengers, but later the robber died because Hendricks fired first. During the calamity, George having witnessed it all provided his version of the story to the San Francisco Examiner which was later reprinted in the Nashua Daily Telegraph. What an event! Though George survived an attempted stagecoach heist, and unfortunately for the young Pierce family later that year, George never returned home but died in Pasadena, California. At this time, however, an obituary for George has not been found, but mention of him was made in The Nashua Daily Telegraph's Necrology column of December 31, 1894. The column listed all Nashua resident deaths, providing scant information about George's circumstances, but recorded his date of death as November 20, 1894, in Pasadena. He was only 37 years old. According to the 1900 U.S. Census, six years later, the Pierce family lived at 30 Manchester Street in Nashua. Tillie Pierce was a devout Universalist Unitarian, who worked and traveled for them. She died at home in 1929.

GERTRUDE I. PIERCE and ARTHUR S. BOLSTER

October 29, 1913

One of George's children, Gertrude Irene Pierce (b. 1885), our second featured bride, had many talents in her youth. As a student of Bertha Snow Lund's dancing school, Gertrude participated in a special exhibition performed by Miss Lund's young students. Gertrude danced around the Maypole with other participants and performed the fairy dance on that May date in 1896. During the same month, Gertrude and other friends formed a bicycle club, as bicycling had become quite popular across the country. By 1902, exercising her vocal cords she performed in the opera, *Egypta*, at the Nashua Theater, and performed as one of the opera's shepherdesses, as well as an Egyptian maiden. Her sister, Louise, and brother, Arthur, were performers, as well. The Pierce family seemed very involved in their community.

In 1909, the Channing Society of the Unitarian Church held an Easter Sale, where Tillie Pierce, Gertrude's mother, provided the cake, and Gertrude, with other young women, provided the candy. In March of 1910, Gertrude, soprano, became part of a special octet at the Pilgrim Congregational Church. In April, the new *Magnificat* in F by Charles Milis was sung for the first time in America (in Nashua) and Gertrude performed the solo, as well as MacDermid's *Charity*. It is possible that her vocal work performed at Pilgrim Congregational Church might have led to her meeting Arthur Stanley Bolster, whose father was a former pastor of Pilgrim. Arthur's bass was a counterpoint to Gertrude's soprano.

George and Tillie Pierce's eldest daughter, Gertrude Irene, married Arthur Stanley Bolster, on October 29, 1913. Her brother, Arthur, walked her down the aisle. Arthur Stanley Bolster was born on January 4, 1882, in South Weymouth, MA. He attended the Boston Latin School, class of 1898, attended Dartmouth College, and graduated class of 1904. During his lifetime, Arthur worked as a sales executive for the Nashua Corporation and upon retirement became a staff member of The Second National Bank of Nashua. In 1911, he was registered as a notary public.



The Pierce-Bolster marriage announcement appeared on page 1 of the Nashua Telegraph on October 30th, 1913. The headline stated, "Well Known Nashua Vocalist Becomes Bride." The newspaper went on to describe the bride's dress, "The bride was very beautiful in her dress of white charmeuse satin, trimmed with rose point

lace which had been worn by her grandmother, and was cut en train. The bouquet consisted of white rose buds with maiden hair ferns. The maid of honor wore yellow chiffon and carried a bouquet of yellow rosebuds.”

The Bolsters had two sons, William Henry (b. 1915) and Arthur Stanley, Jr. (b. 1922). There has been some difficulty acquiring information on the sons, and more research needs to be done. However, their wives were the Historical Society donors. Further, young Arthur was a Nashua H.S. graduate, and in 1943 graduated from Dartmouth College. He also served as a Naval Lieutenant for 3-1/2 years. Gertrude died on December 31, 1968. Arthur Stanley Bolster, Sr., after a declining period of health, while at Greenbriar Nursing Home, fell, broke a hip, and died on June 24, 1969. The family lived at 40 Orange Street, Nashua, but the sons lived in Massachusetts as adults.

Just a few further words on bridal dresses...



Martha Jane’s 1851 wedding dress is fabricated of white cotton gauze, with a round neckline, fan-shaped bodice (dress top), and long wide sleeves. The dress silhouette is bell-shaped.

1855



Gertrude’s wedding dress is fabricated of champagne silk, has what is called a blouson bodice front, and has elbow-length sleeves. The dress has swags over the hip area, as well as a cumberbund with a satin front bow, and also features a train down the back. The dress silhouette is tubular.

1910

Please visit our bridal show and celebrate The Nashua Historical Society’s 150th Anniversary with us.

Nashua Historical Society

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