Potluck Dinner, Annual Meeting & Program

Annual Meeting, Sunday, May 19, 2019, at the Congregational Church, 25 Great Rd., Bedford

Due to a scheduling oversight, the Annual Meeting & Potluck Dinner has been moved from Memorial Day Weekend to SUNDAY, MAY 19. The time, location and speaker are unchanged. Please see below for full information.

The Annual Meeting and Program are open to the public as always. Friends of the Society are invited to become members before the meeting or at the door, entitling you to join in the potluck dinner. Annual membership ($25 Individuals & $45 Family) entitles you to all benefits through the end of the year including the year-end Holiday Party.

Program:
6 pm Social Period with Appetizers, Punch
6:45 pm Potluck Dinner
7:30 pm President’s Report & Annual Meeting
8 pm Guest Speaker Frank Rigg

A buffet dinner will start around 6:45 pm. Society members are asked to bring a main dish, side dish, salad or dessert to feed about eight. The Society will provide appetizers and beverages.

Around 7:30, President Don Corey will give his year-end report of Society activities, and the Annual Meeting will follow to elect Society Officers and Directors for the coming year. After the elections, guest speaker Frank Rigg will begin his presentation.

Enjoy our lecture:

Paul Revere, the Myth & the Man—lecture by Mr. Frank Rigg

How did Boston silversmith and bell-maker Paul Revere end up riding to alert the countryside in April, 1775 that “the British are coming?” It makes sense that he rode to give this alert, since he was an express rider for the Boston Committee of Correspondence and the MA Committee of Safety in 1774 and 1775, and carried news, messages, and copies of important documents from Boston as far away as New York and Philadelphia.

Mr. Rigg, a Carlisle resident, retired from the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library as Museum Curator. He worked at the Kennedy Library for 29 years, first as Director of Visitor Services and later as Director of Museum Operations, Deputy Curator and Museum Curator. In that last position, he was responsible for the design and orchestration of the Library's Museum exhibits and preservation and cataloging of the entire Museum collection.

Mr. Rigg also served as Executive Director of the Paul Revere Memorial Association, which preserves and interprets two historic Boston properties: the Paul Revere House and the Pierce/Hichborn House. He has agreed to serve on the Bedford Historical Society's soon-to-be-created Museum Advisory Board comprised of experienced museum professionals who will advise the Society on exhibits, programs, and other activities for Bedford's new historical museum at Old Town Hall.

Carol Amick
The Evolution of Retail Business in Bedford,  
by Mary Drake

According to the 1728 tax roll, there were 46 persons residing within the present boundaries of Bedford. About fifty homes were present in the new town in 1729 which was made up of seventeen families on the east and south of Concord and thirteen families living in the south part of Billerica. There were cart paths, but no roads. Marked trails might show the general direction of a road, but its exact location depended on the weather. Bedford's population grew rapidly after incorporation in 1729. By 1765, the census recorded 457 people with 72 families and 67 houses. Occupations included farmers, millers, or innkeepers. Bedford was a farming community of a few honorable, religion-oriented men and women determined to carry on their Puritan customs and lifestyles. Every family grew their own vegetables, grains, and fruit. Cattle supplied the table with meat, milk, cheese, and butter; cattle also supplied the leather for their shoes, wearing apparel, harnesses, and all the leather straps and hinges needed for farming. There was little that the farmer's table did not have directly from the land, except perhaps such delicacies as tea, molasses, and spices.

The town's first general store was established in about 1800 in a building located in the west side yard of 4 Great Road, next to Fitch Tavern and opposite Willson Park (see photo). It also became a post office in about 1825 after the Boston & Keene Stage Company was established. The stagecoach ran from Concord, New Hampshire to Boston, and it carried the mail. Elijah Stearns, Esq., owner of the store and adjacent house, was the town's first postmaster. Bedford was a way station on the stage route, giving rise to taverns and stables constructed at the town center. Also present in this business area was a harness shop, candle shop, carpenter shops, and a wheelwright/blacksmith shop.

Industrial and commercial activity in Bedford began in earnest in the first quarter of the 19th century. The earliest shoe manufacturing in the town dates to 1805, when Jonathan Bacon and John Hosmer established a business, reportedly the first of its kind in the country, that produced women's and children's shoes. In the years to follow, the business of shoemaker became something that belonged to almost every farm in the town, giving the inhabitants profitable work. For almost fifty years, the little shoe shops helped enrich the lives of the people of Bedford. About 1812, Thompson Bacon and others began mining ochre in South Bedford for yellow ochre mineral paint. This paint, known as “Bedford yellow,” had previously been used to paint the first meetinghouse when it was repaired after the Revolution. Other manufacturers of the period produced window blind fasteners, bandboxes, coarse paper, and blinds and sashes.

Expanding industrial interests and the construction of new buildings on established roadways characterized the mid-19th Century in Bedford. The 1865 census recorded 212 dwellings, 202 families, 820 inhabitants, two churches, and six schoolhouses. In 1844 a second general store opened on Great Road, near School Avenue (see photo). It was adjacent to the Bedford House Inn (present Fire Station). On entering the store, you first met a large rotary display of long horsewhips and quirts. Groceries lined the shelves on the left; hardware was at the back. Across the aisle you faced the Bedford Post Office, a cubbyhole with a barred window and glass front mailboxes. An outside stairway led from the road to a fish store in the basement.

During the last quarter of the 19th century, a number of industrial and commercial enterprises were established at Depot Square. In the 1890's the industrial area extended east along Loomis street, beyond the old narrow gauge right of way as far as the present DeAngelo Drive. Near the present Railroad Avenue-Highland Avenue intersection in the 1880's was a pickle factory and grain elevator. George C. Skelton, who according to the 1887-1888 directory manufactured “pickles, catsup, etc.” for sales in Somerville and Boston, may have been the owner of the pickle factory.

cont. next pg. 5.
Bedford Historical Society’s - 2019 Annual Meeting to elect Officers and Directors

This year's Bedford Historical Society Annual Meeting, to be held on Sunday, May 19, after the Society's annual Potluck Supper at the First Church of Christ, Congregational, will feature the election of Bedford Historical Society Officers and Directors.

The Nominating Committee (Carol Amick, Marion Bryan and Julie Turner) has announced that its slate of officers is not yet complete, as a candidate for Society President has not yet been identified. As a result, out-going President Don Corey has agreed to remain as President for the interim, until a candidate is found.

The other officers, all to serve one-year terms, will include two incumbents and one first-time candidate:

- **Vice President**: Merri Lee Johnson
- **Secretary**: Jane Puffer
- **Treasurer**: Janet Humphrey

Society member and former Bedford Recreation Department Office Manager Janet Humphrey is the first-time candidate who will join incumbents Vice President Merri Lee Johnson and Secretary Jane Puffer, if elected by the Society membership.

The Nominating Committee's slate of Directors to serve on the Board, all for four-year terms, includes:

- Incumbents Paul Purchia and Jan van Steenwijk, and newcomer Clive Grainger, who will replace retiring Director Judie To.

Mr. Grainger is an award-winning documentary, performance, and event photographer and television producer who has worked for BBC Television in the United Kingdom and the Smithsonian Institution in the U.S. His photography has been featured in many US and UK publications, including the Boston Globe, The Financial Times, New York Times, Times of London, and Wall Street Journal.

The Annual Meeting will be preceded by a potluck dinner at 6 pm in Upper Fellowship Hall of the First Church of Christ, Congregational. After dinner (around 7:30 pm), the election of officers will be held, followed by President Corey's year-end report and guest speaker Frank Rigg. (Please see story, page 1.)

**Society members are asked to bring a main dish, side dish, salad or dessert to feed about eight people for the potluck dinner. Appetizers before the meal, and refreshments during the meal, will be provided by the Society.**
This Program Year was marked by 2 very significant developments:

The Society welcomed Kathleen Fahey as its Executive Director. Her education, service on her town's Historical Commission, and experience with the Wellesley Historical Society's museum and archives bring important skills to help carry out the Society's mission.

Re-establishment of the town museum moved another step forward with funding approved at Annual Town Meeting for rehabilitation of the ground floor at Old Town Hall for a museum.

Community outreach efforts included the following:

– The Society was awarded a Bedford Cultural Council grant for its program series.
– Bedford High School students were recognized and given awards for their outstanding performance in the History Day competition.
– The Society hosted 2 archival interns from Simmons University's Master of Library Science program.
– The Society continued to add images to its on-line virtual museum, which is accessed through our web site.
– Discovery kits with vintage household artifacts were again provided to Lane School for its 5th Grade History class discussions.
– The Society continued to work with the Nashoba Learning Group providing non-classroom learning experience for developmentally challenged students.
– Displays of Society artifacts were maintained at the Job Lane House, Town Hall, High School lobby, Library, and Stearns Memorial Building (Police Station).
– The Society helped celebrate the 90th Anniversary of the VA Hospital and 2018 Bedford Day, with historical displays at each event.
– Speakers participated in Memorial Day observances at Shawsheen Cemetery, Old Burying Ground and World War I Memorial on the Common, and talks were given by Society members at a number of other venues.

The Society's financial position continued to improve. A generous bequest was received from the Estates of Edward and Evelyn Stickney, and annual memberships and donations increased from the prior year. Nevertheless, additional financial resources will be needed in order to generate the income required to operate the museum.

Don Corey

From there to here....

The Bedford Museum was housed in the Old Town Hall until 1952...
...when it was moved to the Stearns Building - now the Police Station...
...there was a small museum in the basement...
...now we look forward to move back to the Old Town Hall...
Although our town center today has several businesses, in 1729 there were no buildings opposite the Meeting House on the Common. During the 19th Century, the Hartwell House (1842) was built on the corner of Great Road and Springs Road, and the Lane-Fitch House (ca.1810) was located on the Great Road opposite the end of Elm Street (see photo). Mary (Hartwell) Fletcher inherited the Lane-Fitch House, and in the late 1880s Mary laid out Fletcher Road. She moved the original house to Fletcher Road and built a store on the lot from which the house was taken. Cosmo Albani opened the Bedford Fruit Store in 1900, and it was the third building to have been placed on Great Road between Fletcher and Springs Road. Other stores followed the first one until the entire block was used by retail businesses except the Hartwell House at 90 Great Road. Although it was originally known as the Fletcher Block, it became the Sheldon Block when Walter Sheldon opened Sheldon’s Drug Store.

Over the years, other stores in the Sheldon block included Bedford Lunch, Edward F. Cox Restaurant, Howard F. Davis Provisioner, Harold Dodge Variety, Bedford Center Market, Bedford Post Office, Polo’s Barber Shop, White’s Lunch, Great Atlantic and Pacific Tea Company (A&P), Stefanelli’s Fruit Store (see photo), Goulart’s Hardware Store, Davidson’s Pharmacy, and Frank Hennessy Insurance.

In 1986, a plan to redevelop the Sheldon Block was defeated. However, in 2007 Bruce Blake received approval to demolish and rebuild the block. It was completed in 2012 and is now known as the Blake Block.

Don Corey

Stefanelli’s

Support the Society at Stop & Shop

We are excited to announce that the Bedford Historical Society is participating in the Stop & Shop Community Bag Program. For the entire month of May each time a reusable Community Bag is purchased at the Stop & Shop located at 337 Great Road, Bedford MA, $1 will be donated to the Bedford Historical Society. Thank you for your support!

Kathleen Fahey

Directors’s Corner

Stay in touch with the Bedford Historical Society! If you are not receiving our emails and would like to, please send along your email to me at info@bedfordmahistory.org or you can sign up on our website by clicking “sign up for email” on www.bedfordmahistory.org. We'll keep you up to date with program reminders, event updates, and fun articles such as “History Mystery” and “Today in Bedford's History.” Are you on Facebook? Check us out and like us at www.facebook.com/BedfordMaHistory. We post entertaining articles and photos and look forward to reading your comments.

Kathleen Fahey

THANK YOU for Your Continued Support!

Donations
Jean & Ralph Hammond

Membership
Jane Blasi
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“"We Don’t Make History...
We Keep It Alive..!”

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Expansion of Bedford Depot Park

The Town has reached an agreement to purchase the former VFW Post at 76 Loomis Street. This parcel was part of the B&M's railroad yard before it ceased use of the Passenger Depot and yard by 1958. The railroad property encompassed all the land east of Loomis Street between the Narrow Gauge Branch to Billerica and the Concord Reformatory Branch (now Minuteman Bikeway). This early 20th Century photo taken from Loomis Street shows a shaded B&M park on the left, the Passenger Depot in the center and a horse cart being loaded at the Freight House on the right. The VFW Post now occupies the open yard in the foreground.

The B&M property was carved into at least 5 parcels that were sold in the late 1950s and early 1960s. The Town previously acquired the 2 parcels containing the Passenger Depot and Freight House, which are now listed on the National Park Service's National Register of Historic Places. Acquisition of the VFW parcel will increase the portion of the former railroad yard within Bedford Depot Park, providing more parking for Depot businesses and Bikeway users and making the long narrow park more cohesive.

Don Corey

You discover “it” in your attic; you find “it” in the back of that drawer; or when planting a new tree in your backyard, you find a piece of an old tool or maybe a thousand year old spear point. Give the Society a chance to look at it. Maybe someday you will see it on display in the future Bedford Museum identified as “Donated by....”