The Preservationist

Newsletter of the Bedford Historical Society, Inc.
Bedford - Massachusetts

Founded in 1893

The Stearns Building on Great Road houses the Bedford Historical Society's archives.

April 2013 Volume 122, Number 3

The Bedford Historical Society Presents:

April 24, 2013 at 7:00
at the
Bedford Library

Thoreau is Alive and Visiting Bedford!

A visit to Walden Pond State Reservation in Concord, home of the pond made famous by 19th century writer Henry David Thoreau, may bring an unexpected surprise: Thoreau is still alive and well at Walden!

That is because the Bedford Historical Society's April guest speaker is, by all appearances, Henry David Thoreau, and visits the pond at least once a month to delight tourists of all ages. This "Thoreau" is actually Richard Smith, a Concord resident and historical interpreter. This "Thoreau" will be the Society's featured speaker on Wednesday evening, April 24 in the Bedford Library Meeting Room.

The meeting will begin earlier than usual, in order to meet the Library's 9 pm closing time. Refreshments will be available starting at 7 pm. After a short business meeting at 7:30 pm, Thoreau will come to life. As always, Society members are encouraged to bring their friends to this presentation, which is open to the public.

Richard Smith began researching Thoreau's life 15 years ago. He moved to Concord in 1999 and continued his studies of the famous Concord native who removed himself from society and lived for over two years in a cabin he built adjacent to Walden Pond. Thoreau's experiences living a life of self-sufficiency and seclusion provided the material he used to write his book, Walden, which is credited with starting the conservation movement in this country.

Smith has performed as an historical interpreter for over 10 years. He appears regularly as Thoreau for many schools in the Bedford/Concord area and in Eastern Massachusetts. He also has appeared in some of the locations that Thoreau visited, including Lowell, Boston, Salem, Fitchburg, Framingham, Cape Cod, Brattleboro, Vermont and Moosehead Lake in Maine.

For his presentation to the Bedford Historical Society, Smith will describe Thoreau's life, read Thoreau's famous "Walking" essay, and will welcome questions.

One of Thoreau's famous lines from Walden is: "I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately." In Thoreau's mind, living "deliberately" meant living in a one-room cabin, which he built for $28 dollars and 12 and ½ cents. A replica of his cabin is located across Route 126 from Walden Pond near the parking area for the State Reservation; a trail leads to the actual location where Thoreau built his humble cabin, overlooking the now-famous pond.

Carol Amick

Smith as Thoreau
(photo: Michael Poirier, Trustees of Reservation)

A 120 Year Dream...

Bedford has waited since 1893 to have the thousands of artifacts that fill our archives displayed for anyone interested in our local history to view. Of course, people who have lived in Bedford for many years remember that we once had a small museum space in the Stearns building's basement on the Great Road.

But when the Police were desperate for additional space, we were moved to the second floor, a perfectly safe area that accommodated the storage of artifacts and in one corner a small office.

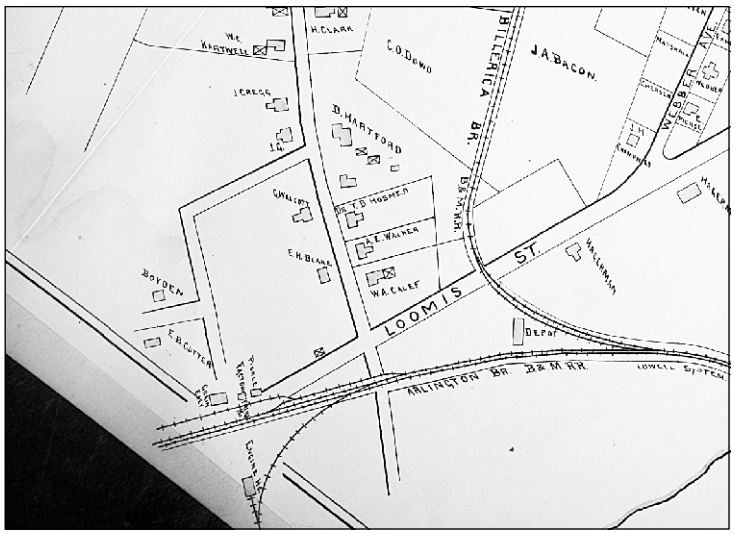
I wasn't present at the inauguration of the Society in 1893 (!)…but I can imagine that the founders already spoke about a proper display place – that's 120 years ago! Today, we are still working to realize this idea of welcoming guests to a gallery where they can see and touch Bedford's past.

Several options have been on the table, but our priority must be to have a space that can safeguard these invaluable, irreplaceable, historic items.

With hard work and funding, we hope that our collective dream will become a reality in the not too distant future.

Jan van Steenwijk

The Bedford Depot area in 1889



"The Freight House was originally the narrow-gauge engine house. It was located on Railroad Avenue and was moved to its present location in the early 1900s."

See related 1880s story on pg.3.

Letters to the Editor

We're delighted with the responses to Brian Oulighan's article on old Bedford restaurants and are pleased to share several other individual's recollections on fine dining here in years past.
Several comments:

-"Wonderful piece!! I grew up in Bedford in the 1930s and 1940s and have been doing some research on the town in that era ...
- you left out Cunningham's Restaurant, a major spot in the center of town for many years.
- you also left out Peretti's, on the site of the motel and Polly's - which opened right after the war and I guess was followed sometime in the 1950s by the Navoy. We used to hang out there in high school - famous for fried clams.
- I have only faint memories of the big inn in Bedford center, on the site of firehouse [Bedford House/Grange] - but I assume there was a restaurant there - it came down sometime in early 1940s.
- The place on Loomis Street was Malaguti's store in the 1930s and Charlie Purcell bought it in 1947 or so. It was not a restaurant but a small grocery/meat market. Charlie I guess sold it in 1954 or so. I know this well as my brother worked there, as did I from time to time when I was in high school (graduated from Lexington HS in 1950).
- Herman Schofield also had a little place on Great Road for a few years, next to Puffer's Garage and Blue Ribbon Dairy - then he went to West Concord for a while. He made terrific apple pies.
- I remember Swanky's Rolling Lunch - after the war these were popular - essentially pickup trucks set-up to serve coffee, donuts, sandwiches and snacks from the back. This is how the guy who created Dunkin Donuts got his start in Quincy - he had 2-3 trucks, then opened a little storefront and the rest is history!
There really weren't many places in the 1930s and 1940s because people didn't eat out much! I'd love to chat sometime."

John Stewart

"I thoroughly enjoyed Brian Oulighan's savory article of old Bedford restaurants. Several years ago, on eBay, I bought several old Bedford restaurant matchbooks, including many that Brian recalled. One not mentioned was Cunningham's at 44 Great Road with the unusual slogan, 'Just Like Mother Tried to Cook.' Another matchbook is from Chickenland, diversely featuring 'beers, ales, wines, fried clams, southern fried chicken, sandwiches, steaks, cigarettes, cigars and ice cream.' Was this at Pine and Main, and also known as Cora's Lunch and YD?
The Hanscom Hill Top Inn at Hanscom Field promised 'Heavenly Treatment Here On Earth.' Thanks for the culinary tour!"

John Gibbons

Brian also responded with several new questions:

"- See if anyone remembers "The Red Horse Beer Parlor". This was run by John Thatcher and was at 300 Great Road in 1940. John's wife Hazel was a waitress and his brother Henry was a bartender. The address seems to be [west] of The Bedford Diner (now Dunkin Donuts). It's hard to picture something there since the Shawsheen River is there. I hope someone remembers where it was and actually visited.

- One more... Does anyone remember White's Lunch at the Fletcher Block in 1940? Frank White ran the place maybe with his wife Louise White."

And thanks to readers for helping to fill in some gaps in Bedford's exquisite dining history!

Volunteers Anyone?

The Historical Society works with other community groups and residents interested in Bedford's history to spread the word in preserving its history. For example, every year in late May and early June the Society works with others to make the Walk of Bedford a memorable experience for all of Bedford's 3rd graders. This involves "show and tell" talks with pictures and historic items from the Society's museum collections shown to small groups of students and their teachers. Also, for years Bob Slechta gave tours of the Old Burying Ground (including a scavenger hunt of sorts) to all of the 3rd graders. ***The Society would love to hear from individuals that might be interested in participating and ensuring the Society's continuing success with the Walk of Bedford.***

Phoners Needed!

Every year for the Historical Society's annual meeting in May, the Society organizes a Potluck Dinner along with the final guest speaker of the season. **This year's Annual Meeting will be held on Wednesday, May 22, starting at 6:30** in the Congregational Church, on Great Road. The guest speaker will discuss *"Beneath the Streets of Boston: Building America's First Subway."*

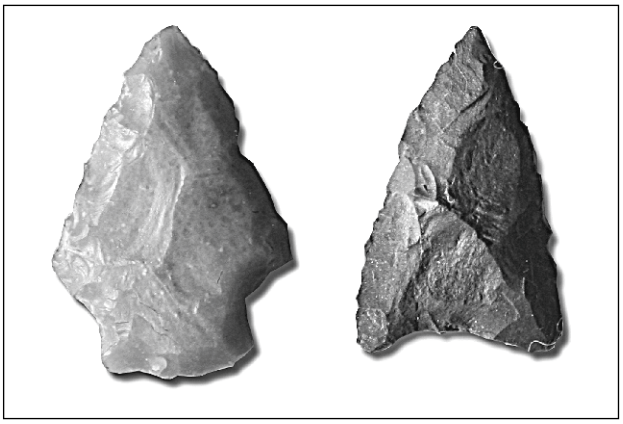
Society members are asked to bringing dishes to share (salads, main dishes, and desserts), a group of telephoners is needed to call every Society member with a reminder about the meeting, the early start-time, and bringing a food dish.

The phoning brigade is organized by Carol Amick. Anyone willing to help Carol make about 15 minutes of phone calls (pages of the Yearbook are assigned) should contact her at carol.amick@verizon.net or **781-275-5278**. ***Thank you in advance for your help.***

Spear Points

The Society has many old and interesting artifacts, but these Spear Points are definitely among the oldest in our archives. They were found on Old Billerica Road in Bedford, and date to the Late Archaic Period (6000-3700 years ago). If you happen to be digging in your backyard and should find some...please consider donating them to the Bedford Historical Society.

Jan van Steenwijk



Bedford in the 1880s

By the 1880s the railroad brought Bedford out of a quarter century recession and into a period of substantial prosperity. The cottage shoe industry that had boomed in the 1st half of the century was gone; there were 7 people left in the business in 1880 and only 3 left in 1890. However, residents working for the railroad grew from 8 in 1880 to 28 by 1890. The population was creeping back up toward its pre-Civil War level. The narrow-gauge railroad had failed, but the standard gauge railroad that replaced it in 1885 was bringing many customers to Dr. William R. Hayden's Bedford Springs Hotel. Local residents that rose to prominence and others that arrived and settled here during the 1880s included Charles Jenks, Wallace G. Webber, Judge Elihu G. Loomis, Dudley Pickman, and the Parker family that in time acquired much of the land along Old Billerica Road.

In the outside world, the United States had 4 presidents during that decade - James Garfield, Chester Arthur, Grover Cleveland and Benjamin Harrison. North Dakota, South Dakota, Montana and Washington were admitted to the Union as the 39th to 42nd states. The Statue of Liberty was completed in New York and the Eiffel Tower in Paris. The postage rate for letters was two cents.

Some important happenings of that decade in Bedford which overshadow the above include:

- The 1885 State Census showed Bedford's population at 930, with 934 cows outnumbering humans. There were 113 farms and 208 dwellings.
- Bedford Center started to grow again, with the construction of Loomis Street (ca.1880), Webber Avenue (1885), Hillside Avenue (1888), Fletcher Road (1890), and other streets. Many fine homes were built on South Road and on the new roads during the boom that are still preserved. Prominent housewrights of the era included Isaac Fitch, Edwin A. Hartwell, Amos B. Cutler and Oliver J. Lane.
- Cyrus Page, Captain of the Minuteman Company, gave the Bedford Flag to the town in 1885. Cyrus was a 6th generation Page in Bedford, and had served in the Civil War at age 60 as a Private in the 26th Mass. Infantry Regiment.
- A 2-year high school was established in 1885. One of the 3 members of the 1st graduation class of three was Mr. Winifred P. Fitch. The high school was closed around the turn of the century, and students then attended Concord or Lexington until the new high school was built in 1955.
- The Roman Catholic Mission Chapel was established in 1885, the third church in town.
- J. Bartlett Prescott was a milk dealer who lived with the Farrell family in the old Kazarian house on Carlisle Road that was later moved to Harvard MA by the Leemings. He founded J.B. Prescott Dairy in 1880, which later became Bedford Farms Dairy, where Dalyas Restaurant and Bedford Farms Ice Cream are now located.
- In the 1880s the Kimball house at 461 North Road, then owned by Henry and Belle Dezmases, served as a local Lying-in Hospital. In 1885 five deaths were recorded there - several of consumption (TB-then a common incurable disease), one from convulsions, and one of bronchitis (pneumonia?)
- Charles C. Corey, whose stagecoach business was wiped out by the railroads, went with the tide. By 1880 he owned a coal, lumber and grain business down at the Depot.
- The Bacon-Fitch mill on the Shawsheen River was by then owned by Charles H. Clark. The town eventually bought the mill from his son, Herb Clark, and immediately demolished it and removed the dam on the river.

Don Corey

The Preservationist

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"We Don't Make History...
We Keep It Alive..!"

The Bedford Historical Society, Inc. is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. Support your Heritage.

2013 Lectures

Wednesday, April 24, 2013, 7:00 pm,
at the Bedford Library:

Richard Smith: "An Evening with Henry Davis Thoreau."

One of Thoreau's famous lines from "Walden" is: "I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately."

Wednesday, May 22, 2013, 6:30 pm,
at the Congregational Church, Great Rd.
Potluck Dinner ,Annual Meeting.
Guest Speaker *Joe McKenry: "Beneath the Streets of Boston: Building America's First Subway."*

The picture is titled: *"Man and Cow"* Does anyone recognize the farmer and the two girls? We appreciate any suggestions.

Please feel free to visit our archives to browse though the many volumes of genealogical resources.

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