The Preservationist

Newsletter of the Bedford (Mass.) Historical Society
Founded in 1893

February 2008 Volume 115, Number 4

John Brown (center right) and Historic Preservation Commission members Bob Slechta (far left) and Don Corey join Libby Herland of the Great Meadows Wildlife Refuge (far right) and two members of her staff on a walk through the Great Meadows Wildlife Refuge to the Two Brothers Rocks in November 2007. (See last page.)

Our next meeting

Our lecture series resumes with "U.S. Army Medical Dept. Serving a Country at War." Brigadier General Oscar S. Depriest, commander of the 804th Medical Brigade and a dentist with a practice in Bedford, shares his expertise on the role of medics and surgeons during wartime. As always, our meeting begins with coffee and snacks and a chance to get acquainted.

Wednesday, February 27, 7:30 PM
First Church of Christ, Congregational
25 The Great Road, Bedford
Free and open to all
Please bring your friends!

To our new readers

If this is the first time you've read *The Preservationist*, welcome! We are glad to have you with us. If you aren't sure why you've received our newsletter, check the mailing label for your status. The word "Complimentary" indicates that we've added you to our mailing list because we know you're interested in local history and think you might enjoy our newsletter. It might be that you've made a donation to our fund drive, or have donated something to our collections, or have purchased some of our merchandise, or contacted us with a research request… or perhaps because a little birdie put your name into our ear. Whatever it was, enjoy!

The Preservationist is published seven times yearly for the purpose of sharing topics of interest for the education and enjoyment of the Society's members and the community in general. Comments, suggestions and contributions of relevant articles are welcome and should be addressed to: Editor, ***The Preservationist,*** 2 Mudge Way, Bedford MA 01730.

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(781) 275-1212 ext. 140 (BHS office)
Email: bedford-history@usa.net

Bedford Historical Society, 2007-2008

Officers

Alethea Yates, President
Jan van Steenwijk, Vice President
Phyllis Cooke, Secretary
Don Corey, Treasurer

Directors

Carol Amick ('08)
Norman Toti ('08)
Julie Turner ('08) - Board Secretary
Don Corey ('09) - Board Chair
Miriam Brown ('09)
Jan van Steenwijk ('09)
Marion Bryan ('10)
Marietta Ellis ('10)
Donald Jenkins ('10)
Doris Crowell ('11)
Neil Leary ('11)

Committees

Activities: Jeannette Pothier
BOD Liaison to Executive Board: Don Corey
Hospitality: Phyllis Cooke and Marietta Ellis
Membership Secretary: TBD
Merchandise/Ways & Means: TBD
Newsletter Editor: Alethea Yates
Nominating:
Wilma Johnson (appointed by Executive Board, '08)
Carol Amick (appointed by Membership, '09)
Julie Turner (appointed by President, '07)
Program: Cecile Walker
Sunshine: Sharon McDonald
Welcoming: Lois Jenkins
Finance Committee:
Don Corey (Board Chairman, Treasurer)
Mike Seibert ('08)
Neil Leary ('09)
Frank Gicca ('10)
Alethea Yates (BHS President)

New members

We are delighted to welcome Julia Whiteneck and her family to the Bedford Historical Society. Julia and her daughter Valerie happened to be shopping at New England Nurseries when our Christmas party was beginning. They saw us and came over for a chat, then joined the Society on the spot. Welcome!

Hospitality helpers

Marietta Ellis and Phyllis Cooke, our Hospitality Committee, have lined up two people to help with the February meeting but hope to find one more person who could bring something to add to the refreshment table and also help with a little setup and cleanup at the meeting. If you're willing please call Marietta at 275-0159 or email her at mellis1@verizon.net.

Where are the tablecloths we use at our meetings? They went home with somebody to be washed – we do remember that much – but we don't remember the name of that kind person. Please call Marietta Ellis if you know their whereabouts.

Sunshine on tap

Do you know of a Historical Society member who is bereaved, or unwell, or just in need of a little cheering up? Please write or call our Sunshine person, Sharon McDonald:

s_mcd_bos@yahoo.com
781-275-5643

Sharon will send a card or note on behalf of the Society along with some bright rays of her own special caring and kindness.

Extended Archives hours

Our office hours have been extended as of the first of the year. Our room in the Stearns building (a.k.a. the Police Station building) at 2 Mudge Way is *usually* open at the following times:

Monday, 9 to 12 and 1 to 5
Tuesday, 9 to 1
Wednesday, 9 to 1

Other times by appointment.

It's best to phone ahead before you stop by because we do step out for errands now and then. Please call 781-275-1212 x 140. Our phone is answered by our "roommates," the Bedford police; just ask for our extension. Please don't hesitate to call.

Annual Giving

We are very grateful to the many members and friends who responded to our Annual Giving fund drive letter. Your generous donations are essential for maintaining our collections and for helping us go on collecting and sharing the stories of Bedford.

Anonymous (several)
Donna Argon
Bob Bass and Lee Vorderer
Theresa Bluhm
Bea and John Brown
Larry & Ellen Carlton
Angelo and Grabriele Colao
Phyllis B. Cooke
Stephanie and Richard Davidson
John and Constance Dodge
Katherine Durham
Roberta Ennis
John E. Filios
Col. Jack D. and Joyce Fisher
Frank and Joan Gicca
Lora Goldenberg
Kay and Lawrence Graff
Dr. and Mrs. Harley A. Haynes
David Hennessey
Aldie and Wilma Johnson
Roy and Shirley Kring
Patricia N. Leiby
Roger and Caro Little
Sharon and Tom McDonald
Helen E. Nowers
Noreen O'Gara and Lawrence R. Davis
Lois and Brown Pulliam
Cynthia W. Rider
Betty and Bob Slechta
Ed and Evelyn Stickney
Stephen and Susan Tutko
Doris S. Webber

Haven't had a chance to make your contribution? Not to worry! Donations are always welcome and are gratefully received at any time of year. Please send yours to us at

Bedford Historical Society
2 Mudge Way
Bedford MA 01730-2138

Thank you very much!

Rails and Trails exhibit

There's much more to getting around than stepping into your car. The new "Rails and Trails" exhibit by the Friends of Bedford Depot Park, currently on display in the Reference Room at the Bedford Free Public Library, proves the point. You'll enjoy a look at the golden days of Bedford trains and trolleys and learn about the many foot and bicycle trails you can travel today.

Restoring Bedford's Budd car

It was quite a day when the Budd Rail Diesel Car #6211 was taken from its resting place in the North Billerica Woods and returned to Bedford for restoration as a railroad exhibit and visitors' center.

The Budd RDC #6211 comes down South Road to Depot Park on January 28, 1998.
(Photo courtesy of Robert Slechta)

Today #6211 has been almost fully restored to its former glory through the heroic efforts of the Friends of Bedford Depot Park (www.bedforddepot.org).

The Budd car today with newly upholstered seats.
(Photo courtesy of Jim Shea.)

About John Hancock's John Hancock

Two signatures in the Bedford Historical Society's collections indicate that it may have taken John Hancock years to develop the famous "John Hancock" that appears so prominently on the Declaration of Independence.

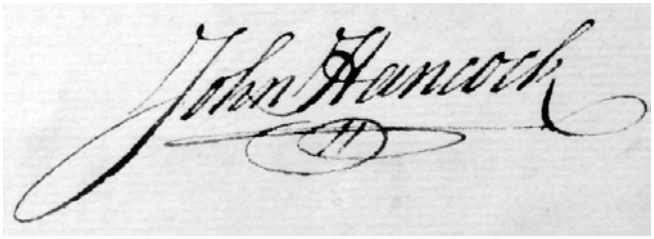
The first of the two signatures appears on a receipt that reads as follows: "Boston Novem^{r} 11th 1758. Rec'd of Mr. John Reed Ten pound thirteen shillings & four pence, being to be Indors'd on Timothy Hartwell's Bond due to the Estate of Rev. Nicholas Bowes Deceas'd, in behalf of Thomas Hancock Esq. [signed] John Hancock."

The 1758 "John Hancock"

What was this all about? John Hancock was then 21 years old and working for his uncle Thomas Hancock, a wealthy businessman of Boston. The late Rev. Nicholas Bowes had been Bedford's first minister. His widow, Lucy Hancock Bowes, was Thomas Hancock's sister. Thus it was that the famous Hancock family had connections in Bedford. Thomas Hancock may have been helping to settle Rev. Bowes' estate. John Reed, who made the payment for this receipt, eventually bought the Bowes house, now known as Domine Manse, in 1767. (Timothy Hartwell was also a Bedford resident but his role in the story is not clear.) The receipt is just a routine business document signed perhaps without much thought by a foppish young gentleman working as one his uncle's clerks.

The second signature appears at the end of a pre-printed legal form with which Massachusetts Governor John Hancock appointed the same John Reed, now known as John Reed, Esquire, as a Justice of the Peace for Middlesex County on March 27, 1781.

In the years since the first signature, John Reed had taken an active part in the Revolution and had even held secret meetings of Bedford's partisans in a back room at Domine Manse. Perhaps his appointment as Justice of the Peace was something of a reward for political services.



The 1781 "John Hancock"

The John Hancock of this second signature was 44 years old and had acquired great fame since the time of the youthful 1758 signature. In 1763 he became his uncle Thomas's business partner. A year and a half later in 1764 he inherited his uncle's estate, becoming the wealthiest man in Boston. He soon became a Boston selectman and member of the Massachusetts General Court. The increasingly active role he played in the Revolution led to his executing the most famous of all "John Hancocks" in 1776. He had by then acquired the unforgettable signature that appears again, unchanged, on the 1781 document.

How had he managed to improve his signature so dramatically? Had he spent the long winter evenings in his Beacon Hill mansion industriously spoiling reams of foolscap by signing his name over and over again? Not likely. He would have had plenty of practice in the ordinary line of his duties. But there is something to be read from his handwriting.

In *Handwriting in America,* Tamara Plakins Thornton makes the point that there was not one style of 18th-century penmanship but many, each one making clear at a glance the writer's rank, occupation, and gender. Gentlemen wrote in a different hand from their clerks. Ladies wrote differently from gentlemen. There were specialized hands for merchants, for courts, and for social usage. Writing teachers advertised the number and variety of handwriting styles for which they could offer training. In this milieu, both Hancock signatures sent a loud and clear message: GENTLEMAN. Yes, young John had entered his working life as a business clerk but he had been raised as an aristocrat, had attended Harvard, and was the heir to a great fortune. He was not limited to writing a merchant's or secretary's hand, if he had ever learned them, but commanded a place at the top of the American social scale.

Sources

Handwriting in America, Tamara Plakins Thornton. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996.

John Hancock: His Book, Abram English Brown. Boston: Lee and Shepard Publishers, 1898.

Remembering John Brown

Many people were saddened to learn of the unexpected passing of John F. Brown this January. John was many things: a lifelong resident of Bedford and its Town Historian; a member of countless town committees and citizen volunteer activities; a Director of the Bedford Historical Society; an engineer and teacher; a husband, father, and grandfather; and a friend to all. Many have written remembrances of John for this month's newsletter.

It's now fifteen years ago that I began a lasting friendship with John as we started a long-term collaboration on a mutual interest in recording and mapping all of the memorial stones and tombs in Bedford's Old Burying Ground. He was our "engineer and surveyor" and never ceased to be innovative in finding new and easier ways of solving our technical problems.

When that was completed, culminating in the BHS publication entitled *The Old Burying Ground: Gravestone Survey, Map and Data Bases, Bedford Mass. 1993-1995*, which John largely put together and funded, we began another project to revise the list of Bedford's soldiers of the Revolution that are buried there, and to take part in the design and erection of a new brass plaque to honor their service.

After that, we worked together as consultants in the grant-supported rehabilitation of the Old Burying Ground gravestones and tombs that has been going on for the past several years and will continue. And right up to the time that snow began to fall in November of 2007, we worked together for weeks at "hard labor" with a team cleaning the gravestones.

For several years now, John and I have shared the schedule of providing tours of the Old Burying Ground each May for the third grade classes of the Lt. Job Lane School. It will be difficult to learn to work in that quiet spot without him.

I can't even estimate the amount of time we spent together pursuing our mutual historical interests (and even once taking a few hours to canoe leisurely on the Concord River). But, furthermore, John spent many other hundreds of hours alone at his computer and in the town or Historical Society archives searching out information for the town and for the many people who had asked for his help.

These were only part of John's many selfless activities which he undertook eagerly, conscientiously, and without fanfare. – *Bob Slechta*

My memories are of a quiet, gentle man, with emphasis on "gentle." – *Carol Amick*

I would like to add an event that showed a side of John that many will recognize and enjoy.

John, Bob Slechta, I and others sometimes visited the Registry of Deeds in East Cambridge to research various historic properties – construction dates, National Register ownership records, etc. The oldest books of deeds are kept in a records room on the lowest level of the Registry, and until several years ago that room was always in a state of disarray – deed books left lying around, young people filling most of the tables having their endless coffee breaks and lunches and talking and laughing. We would spend a great deal of time each trip re-shelving books in order to just find what we needed. In my mind, that was part of the current social order, like it or not.

After one such trip, John gave me a copy of a letter that he had just written and sent off to the Middlesex Registrar of Deeds. In it he recalled how when he was young he would visit the Registry with his father and how he felt a sense of great respect for the place and the knowledge that was stored there. He expressed his dismay at the current state of affairs, and then enclosed in the letter small brittle scraps of pages that had broken off of older deed books from being mishandled – he had collected the paper scraps from the tables unnoticed. My first reaction was "nice job, John, but lots of luck."

I don't think that we were back there for several months. However, on the next trip when I rounded the corner to go down the steps to the deed record room, straight ahead was a Registry employee sitting at a desk in front of the oldest deed books. Every book was in its proper place, the endless lunch crowd was gone, and order was reasserted from that day forward. While I have no proof, in my mind John achieved something that I had considered quite impossible – politely challenging bureaucratic indifference and winning! – *Don Corey*

John Brown was a wise and gentle man who encouraged those of us from "away" to cherish the very soil of this old town, and so to put down roots. – *Donna Argon*

John Brown, John Dodge and my husband, Reed Webber, were boyhood friends of the same age who lived and grew up around the Town Common. As

young married couples, we enjoyed the John Browns' company in the 1950's. The best lesson John taught us was to support and anchor our Christmas trees with the 3-way wire secured tightly to a firm surface…because their long-needled pine tree had fallen over. Martha, the first child and a toddler, recovered from looking like a porcupine after a trip to Emerson Hospital. (Just one of many memories.) – *Doris Webber*

John Brown was a life member of the Friends of Depot Park and joined when it was in its infancy.

Many Wednesday afternoons during the summer when I was on duty at the Freight House, John would come in and tell me stories of early Bedford. This was most interesting to me as he was an excellent teller of tales.

On instance stands out above others.

When the railroad ties and track were torn up we salvaged many spikes that held the rails to the railroad ties. John knew that we wished to sell some of these in the Freight House and they needed to be cleaned of the years of rust and dirt.

He said if I would clean the rust off he would dip them in his "famous secret gunk" to make them look more appealing. And they did, and we sold many far and near.

To this day I never knew what the "gunk" was and he has carried that most precious secret with him.

Thanks, John, for enriching my life. – *Ed Stickney*

At the time of John's passing, I was startled when I opened the computer at the Town Center to see I had a file marked "John Brown." And I remembered all the effort he had put into the history of the Town Center, Center and Union Schools, plus Old Town Hall. The background information is kept in that file. As always, he was so helpful, and he obviously spent considerable time on various searches that was so appreciated. He is a loss to his family, his town, and to me. – *Fay Russo*

I first became acquainted with John in the late 90s when he called and wrote to lend me moral support in our fledgling battle against Massport. We were organizing a town meeting to fight for the containment of burgeoning commercial airplane traffic at Hanscom Airfield. John described to me the history of the airfield and how Bedford residents first resisted the conversion of their town farmland into an airfield back in the 40s.

More recently, this past fall, John and I were companions in cleaning gravestones in Bedford's Old Burial Ground, as part of Bob Slechta's project. We sat together with pails and brushes scrubbing lichen off of slate stones. He lent me his mahogany chisels to work the difficult spots of the incised letters. We chatted about the artwork on the stones, word usage on the epitaphs, and speculated about the personalities of the grave occupants and how they responded to the epidemics that robbed them of family members so frequently. Our conversation also turned to discussion of our children, John's various occupations and his loneliness as a **male** with breast cancer. "Everything associated with the disease is pink," was his wry comment.

What a wise, sweet and gentle man John was. I wish we had had more time together. How blessed was his family to have had him as husband, father and grandfather! I will think of him often, especially when I visit the Old Burial Ground and admire the stones we cleaned together.

It will be a poignant moment for me to visit John's gravestone in Shawsheen. – *Lori Eggert*

For many years we hosted a Christmas holidays "Open House" which was attended by many friends from both Bedford and several other towns. John and Bea were almost always there. One year John Dodge and his wife were also there. The two Johns became engaged in reminiscing about Bedford in the "old days" and kept all the other guests intensely interested for over an hour! – *Alan and Barbara Maier*

It was wonderful to work with John in the period I volunteered for the Historical Society. It was my feeling that John could see the continuity of Bedford's history, from its settlement as an agricultural village, quite autonomous, to being drawn into the larger economy through the drovers bringing their cattle down from New Hampshire to Boston, stopping in Bedford the night before they drove their shipment into Boston, pasturing the cattle in what is now the Dalya's parking lot. He had stories from his own life, gathering in the morning to be taken by trolley, later bus, to Concord high school. He was a warm and caring human being. – *Miriam Chrisman*

I knew John not as well as I would have liked, but there were a few fortunate times that Garvin and I sat at table with him and Bea at events, and I recall what a true gentleman he was, not only in manner, but in his

nature as a gentle man, with a circumspect outlook on the world. Those few times are treasured, as I touched base with a man who embodied the essence of the true Bedford citizen. – *Nancy Moore*

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John always looked for the best in people. John attended our family's Christmas Eve party. At one of them, all the young children opened small gifts. My five-year-old son, Hank, showed John a toy gizmo that records your voice and then plays it back. Of all the things John could have suggested that Hank say into that gizmo, John chose these words: "Hank is a neat guy." He saw the best in people and he wanted a very shy boy to see the best in himself. Thank you, John, for that parenting lesson, that life lesson, and all the other little lessons that you taught just by being you. – *Sandy Couvee*

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John would often tell me stories about growing up in Bedford. One of my favorites took place in Kelly's Pasture in the late 1930's. John and a couple of friends were cutting across the Kelly farm when they encountered the Kellys' BIG BULL. The bull chased the boys across the pasture where they sought refuge on top of a large rock. While John and his peers sat there contemplating their situation, along came one of the Kelly boys, probably no more than 7. He walked right over to the boys and the bull and said, "Don't be afraid of him," then with the confidence of a grown man picked up a stick and drove the bull away from the rock. John said he was amazed that this little kid, half his age, with no fear had done what none of the big boys on the rock would have done. – *Neil Couvee*

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Working with John was one of the most enjoyable aspects of my work as BHS Archivist. John combined the precision of the engineer with the passion of the historian. His love of Bedford and its history was an inspiration to me. He was a colleague and friend, an intelligent, gentle and generous man. I will miss him. – *Susan Bennett*

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I feel privileged to know John because he was such a prominent, much loved, and respected member of our community. I've always enjoyed his writings about Bedford topics including those of his own childhood. His vast knowledge and love for Bedford past and present, will always remain with my memories of John. – *Don Jenkins*

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On one Bedford Day, when our girls were 7 or 8 years old, John was demonstrating his spinning-button-on-a-string game in the Historical Society museum. He spent time with each girl, teaching the technique until they could all do it, pleased that they were interested in the simple old fashioned game, and then sent one home with us. We still have the game and the girls have taught it to others since then. We will all remember John's very helpful, patient and good-natured way with everyone. – *Abbie Seibert*

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Knowing John was like knowing a true source of wisdom and kindness. I had the privilege of meeting him on numerous occasions. John, with his wife Bea at his side, attended many town meetings - Selectmen's, the Planning Board, the Bedford Historical Society – where the topics being explored included Bedford's history. He was not the most outspoken, provocative person in the room, but when John said something, it was always meaningful, well considered and of value. Usually sitting modestly in the back of the room, he would constantly write notes in his spiral binder. When everyone else had exhausted his or her opinion, John, in his soft voice, would offer comments, observations, or ask specific questions, making us all think "now why didn't I think of that…"

I had the privilege of photographing John and Bea for my series *25 People in Bedford*. Quietly, he let me do the job, setting up my lighting and camera in their rustic kitchen. After a couple of test shots, he said, "I like it, but if you move your camera a bit to the left, you will see more of the fireplace – that's after all more beautiful than me…" Modest is a poor word to describe John (and Bea, too!), but it comes to mind thinking of him. Bea and their family lost a wonderful person; the Town of Bedford lost someone who is in many ways irreplaceable. We surely will miss him. Fortunately, we will have many good memories of John to look back on that may bring us comfort. – *Jan van Steenwijk*

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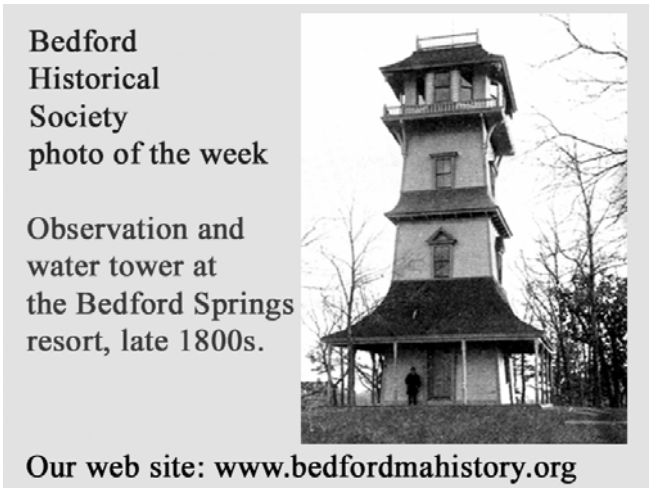
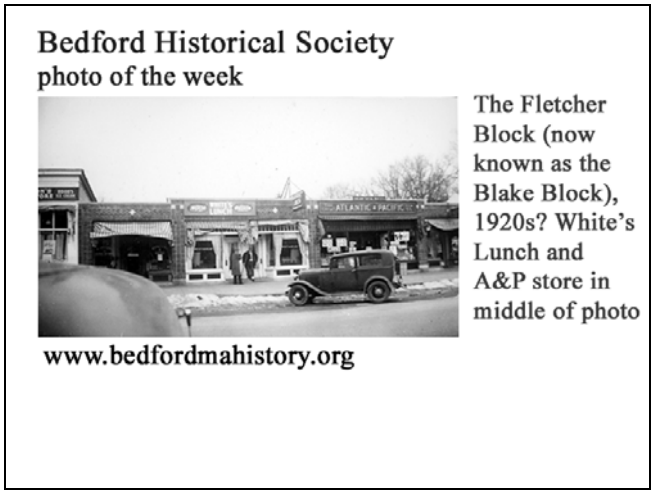
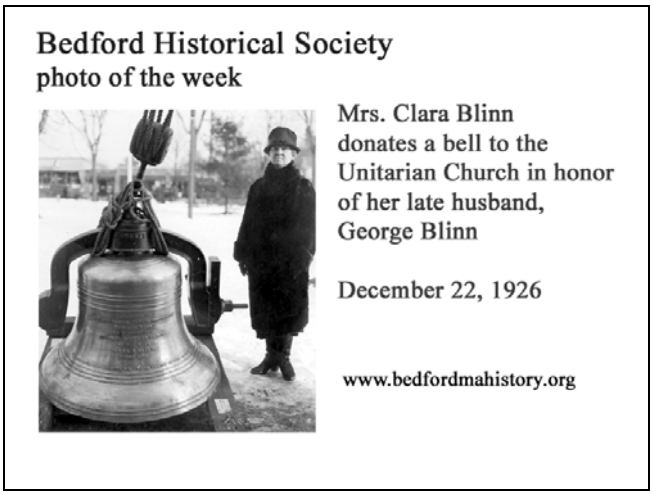
Many people shown their regard for John through donations to the John F. Brown memorial fund for the Old Burying Ground, established by John's family in his honor. The fund will be used to help restore the town's first graveyard as a fit resting place for Bedford's founders and early defenders. Donations are still being accepted. If you wish to make a contribution please send it to the Bedford Historical Society, 2 Mudge Way, Bedford MA 01730. Thank you to all who have contributed. Your thoughtfulness is appreciated.

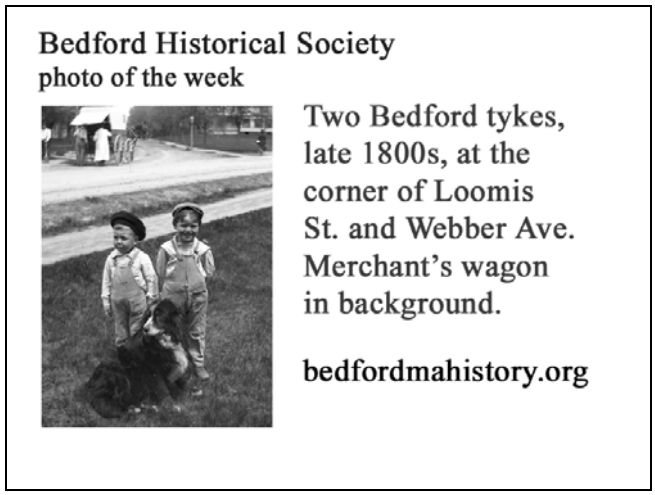
BCAT Picture of the Week

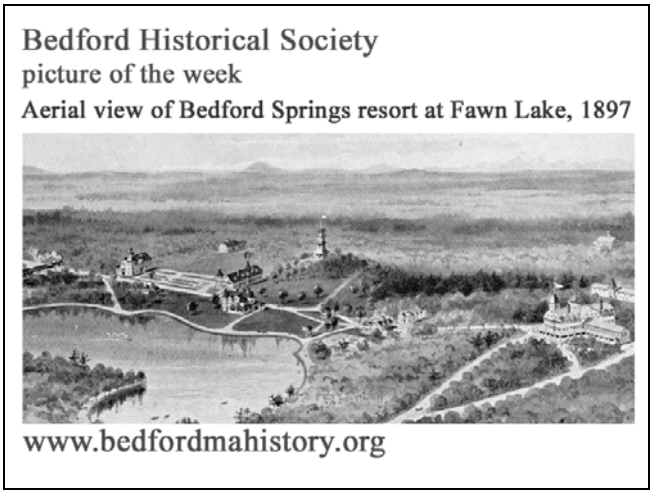
If you're a subscriber to Bedford Community Access TV you might have seen some of our Photos of the Week on Channel 9. This channel plays community notices in a rotating sequence. We hope you'll tune in at least once a week to see the latest offering from our photo archives. Here are some that have been shown recently.

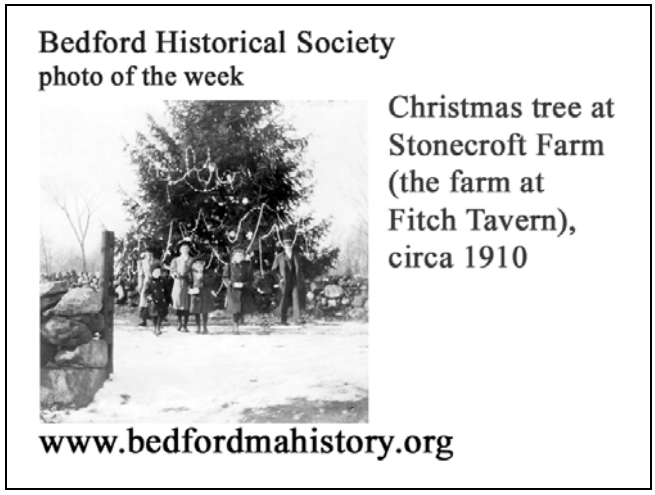












Bedford History 101

Have you forgotten what you learned about Bedford's history in school? Or perhaps you spent your school days elsewhere and wish you knew more about the little town we love so well. Now's your chance to catch up a bit. Society president Lee Yates will be giving a talk on "Bedford History 101" on Thursday, March 6, 7:30-8:30 at the Whole Foods supermarket, 170 The Great Road, Bedford. When you enter the store turn left and go past the cash registers, then turn left into the dining area. Turn immediately right and go all the way back to the swinging doors of the community meeting room. **Free and open to all.**

Bedford books on Google Books

If you're an Internet user you might be aware of the Google Books site, **http://books.google.com**. Google has digitized a vast library of books of every description and made them available to the public free of charge. The online library includes full-text versions of several books on Bedford's history. They are fully searchable, making research and genealogical investigation much easier than ever before.

The following titles are currently available:

History of the Town of Bedford, Abram English Brown.

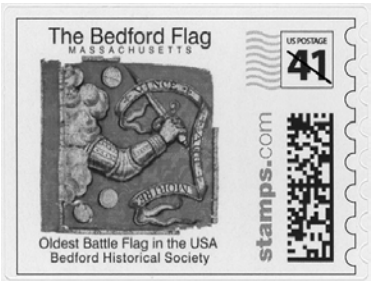
Beside Old Hearth-Stones, Abram English Brown

Old Paths and Legends of New England, Katharine M. Abbott, 1903.

Vital Records of Bedford, Massachusetts, to the Year 1850, published by the New-England Historic Genealogical Society, 1903.

Flag stamps still available

Several people have recently asked if we are still selling our Bedford Flag stamps. Yes, we certainly are! Stop by our office (call first at 781-275-1212 ext. 140) or order by mail at Bedford Historical Society, 2 Mudge Way, Bedford MA 01730-2138. Each stamp is good for 41¢ first class postage. The price for a sheet of 20 is $20 for nonmembers, $18 for members. If ordering by mail, please include $2 for postage and packaging.



Membership Application and Renewal Form

This is (please check one):

____ A new membership

____ A renewal

____ **A gift subscription**

Name:_____

Address:_____

_____

City: _____

State:_____ Zip:_____

Phone: _____

Email:_____

Dues (please check one):

__ Student:	$3.00
__ Individual:	$10.00
__ Couple or Family:	$15.00
__ Supporting or Business:	$50.00
__ Patron:	$250.00
__ Life – Individual:	$150.00
__ Life – Couple:	$200.00

Donation

I would like to contribute the following amount to aid the Society: $ _____

I would like to contribute the following amount to the John F. Brown Memorial Fund for the Old Burying Ground: $ _____

Total enclosed: $_____

Bedford Historical Society, Inc.
2 Mudge Way, Bedford MA 01730-2138
781-275-1212, extension 140
bedford-history@usa.net

The Preservationist
Bedford Historical Society
2 Mudge Way
Bedford MA 01730

PRSRT STD
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Non-Profit Org.
Permit No. 30

Are your dues up to date? Please check the mailing label for your membership status

The Two Brothers Rocks site on the Concord River may soon get a spring cleaning under a project launched by the Bedford Historic Preservation Commission in conjunction with the Great Meadows National Wildlife Refuge. Recent photos indicate the need. Note that the Winthrop rock on the left has a large tree growing next to it, almost obscuring the inscription "Winthrop 1638." Looking at the Dudley rock on the right, it is clear that the undergrowth threatens to obscure the site and make it inaccessible. A little cleanup, a park bench, and better signage are expected to make this historic site more welcoming to visitors.