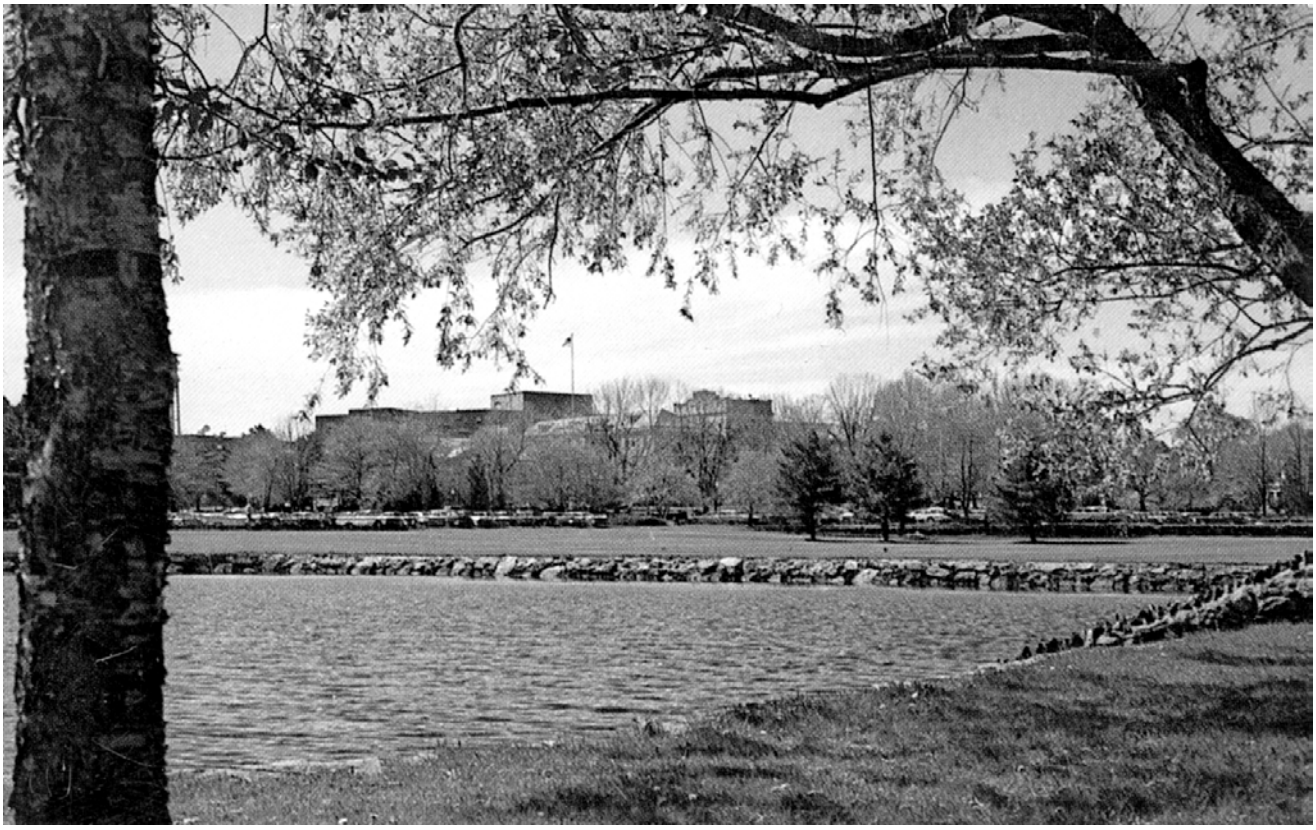
The Preservationist

Newsletter of the Bedford (Mass.) Historical Society

Founded in 1893

February 2009 Volume 116, Number 4



This pond on the grounds of the VA Hospital was once used for skating, according to Town Historian John Dodge, but has since been filled in. Does anyone else have memories of this inviting little pool to share? (From a postcard donated by Bruce Blake.)

This month: Bedford's patriots of color

For our February meeting we observe Black History Month with a talk by George Quintal, Jr., author of *Patriots of Color: 'A Peculiar Beauty and Merit,' African Americans and Native Americans at Battle Road and Bunker Hill.* At least five black men from Bedford served in the Patriot cause. Who were they? Why did they fight? What became of them? The foremost expert on the subject will share his findings with us.

Congregational Church
25 The Great Road, Bedford
Wednesday, February 25, 7:30 PM

Free and open to all. The building is accessible to the handicapped.

Our meetings begin with a half-hour devoted to coffee, snacks, and cozy chatting all around. Please bring a friend or two!

About our newsletter

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.

Alethea "Lee" Yates, Executive Director
(781) 275-3294 (home)
(781) 275-7276 (BHS office)
Email: bedford-history@usa.net

Archives hours

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 our NEW PHONE NUMBER, 781-275-7276.

Bedford Historical Society organization, 2008-2009

Directors

Responsible for long-range planning and for large or long-term expenditures. (Proposed by the Nominating Committee, voted by the membership)

Miriam Brown (term expires in '09)
Don Corey (term expires in'09)
Jan van Steenwijk (term expires in '09)
Marion Bryan (term expires in '10)
Marietta Ellis (term expires in '10)
Donald Jenkins (term expires in '10)
Doris Crowell (term expires in '11) - Board Co-chair
Neil Leary (term expires in '11)
Judie Toti (term expires in '11) - Board Secretary
Carol Amick (term expires in '12)
Norman Toti (term expires in '12)
Julie Turner (term expires in '12) - Board Co-chair

Executive Committee Liaison to the Directors: Jan van Steenwijk, President (*ex officio*; no vote)

Executive Committee

Responsible for the day-to-day running of the Society.

Officers. **(Proposed by the Nominating Committee, voted by the membership)**

Jan van Steenwijk, President
(vacant) Vice President
Phyllis Cooke, Secretary
Don Corey, Treasurer

Committee chairs. **(Appointed by the President)**

Activities: TBD
Hospitality: Marietta Ellis
Sales Manager: TBD
Newsletter Editor: Alethea Yates
Program: Cecile Walker
Publicity: Bea Brown, Cecile Walker
Sunshine: Sharon McDonald
Welcoming: Lois Jenkins

Board of Director Liaison to the Executive Committee: Doris Crowell and Julie Turner, Board Co-Chairs (*ex officio*; no vote)

Nominating Committee

Responsible for finding candidates to serve as Officers and Directors

Wilma Johnson (appointed by Executive Board, term expires in '08)
Carol Amick (appointed by Membership, term expires in '09)
Julie Turner (appointed by President, term expires in '10)

Finance Committee

Responsible for the Society's investments. (Appointed jointly by the President and Board Chair)

Doris Crowell, Julie Turner (Board Co-chairs)
Don Corey (Treasurer)
Neil Leary (term expires in '09)
Frank Gicca (term expires in '10)
Don Jenkins (term expires in '11)
Jan van Steenwijk (President)

Annual Giving

Although the economy is in a difficult state, our members and friends have still come to our assistance in our Annual Giving drive. We are very grateful to so many people:

Anonymous (several)
Louise Maglione
Frank and Joan Gicca
Helen Nowers
Chuck French
Roberta and Louis Ennis
Ted and Cindy Rider
Francis and Ruby Walters
Betty and Bob Slechta
Roy and Shirley Kring
Sue and Tom Crowther
Don and Lois Jenkins
Susan and Don Corey
Kaye and Rick Spofford
Janice and Richard Burnes
John Gerdes
Lora Goldenberg and Bruce Murphy
Margaret and Neil Leary
Ellen and Larry Carlton
Brian Oulighan
Aldie and Wilma Johnson
Bob Bass and Lee Vorderer
Dennis Warner
Marguerite Hamilton
Lois and Don Brown
Julia Bosomworth
Nancy and Wallace Campbell, Jr.
Col. Jack D. Fisher

We are especially grateful to those who have made memorial donations. What a fine way to pay tribute to beloved family members and friends who were proud of their Bedford roots. Our deepest appreciation to the following donors:

Paddy Wade, in honor of her husband, Jeptha Wade
Susan Bennett and John Rosenberg, in honor of John F. Brown
Susan Bennett and John Rosenberg, in honor of Miriam Chrisman
Susan and Donald Corey, in honor of their son, Douglas Corey
Michael and Dawn Rosenberg, in honor of Douglas Corey
The family of the late Abbott Reed Webber II, in honor of his sister, Nancy Webber

New members

We've gained quite a few new members since our November newsletter went out. Welcome, all!

John and Jean Dacey
Bill Stern
Kaye and Rick Spofford
Janice and Richard Burnes
Carol and Steve Jamison
Robert Clark
Raquel Singh
Brian Oulighan
Rodney Leskowski
Mary Archer

Bedford dairies exhibit

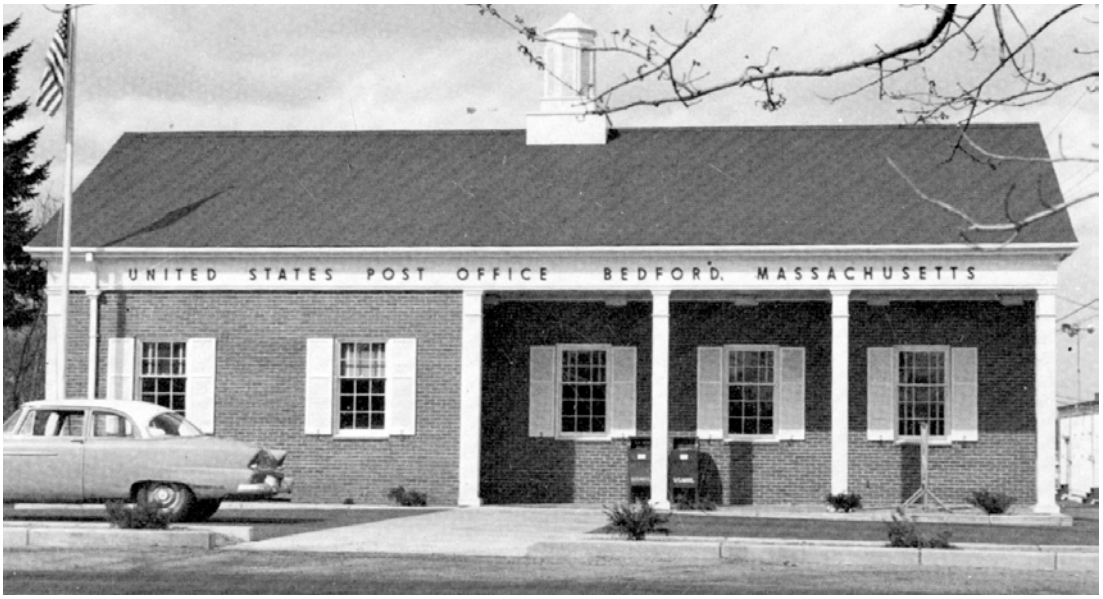
Last week we had just decided to replace the exhibit on Bedford industries in the display case just outside our office, and were pondering what to put in its place, when we got a phone call out of the blue. Rodney Leskowski, who grew up in Bedford and now lives in New Hampshire, collects milk bottles as a hobby. He came to the office to show us some of his many Bedford milk bottles and related memorabilia. Until the 1950s or so Bedford was very much a farm town, with milk as one of its most important products. Bingo! Our new exhibit will be about Bedford's dairy industry.

The Society's collections include milk bottles and related items from the Prescott (Bedford Farms), Blue Ribbon, and Lexford Farms dairies. Mr. Leskowski is going to let us photograph items his collection. These will form the core our new exhibit.

We are seeking other items to add. Do you have any objects, photographs, or documents related to Bedford's dairies? If so, would you be willing to lend them to us? The exhibit will be placed in a locked cabinet in one of the most secure buildings in town (the one we share with the Bedford Police Department). Also, do you have any memories to share with us? We'd love to talk with you. If you can help, please call our office at 781-275-7276.

Remember when?

The American Legion installation of officers in 1971 or 1973. Notes on the back of the photo identify some of the people as follows: In the back row, from left, Pierre Dillen and Pat Genetti. Front row, second from left, Dom Genetti; fourth from left, Nick Genetti. Can you identify any of the others? If so, please phone us at 781-275-7276 or email us at bedford-history@usa.net. (Photo courtesy of Mike Rosenberg.)



This building, once the Bedford Post Office, and now a Post Office processing facility, appears on a color postcard. We particularly like the car in the foreground. Can any of our automobile aficionados identify the make and model? (Courtesy of Bruce Blake.)

Springs Brook Park is born

It solved two problems. The Veterans' Administration Hospital had more land than it could use, and the town of Bedford needed recreational facilities. The Federal and State governments were willing to contribute funding. Thus the Town of Bedford, for the sum of only $5,725, acquired the large tract of land now known as Springs Brook Park.

It takes a village to create a park, and folks from all over Bedford pitched in to make it happen. The Town Report for 1968 documented it all. First, the V.A. Surplus Land Advisory Committee coordinated the purchase and received suggestions for many recreational projects.

The Bedford Rotary Club cleared an acre of woodland for a picnic site and donated a picnic table. The DPW created a road into the new park. Five acres of land occupied by "old stumps, boulders, tree trunks and debris" were cleared for a parking lot.

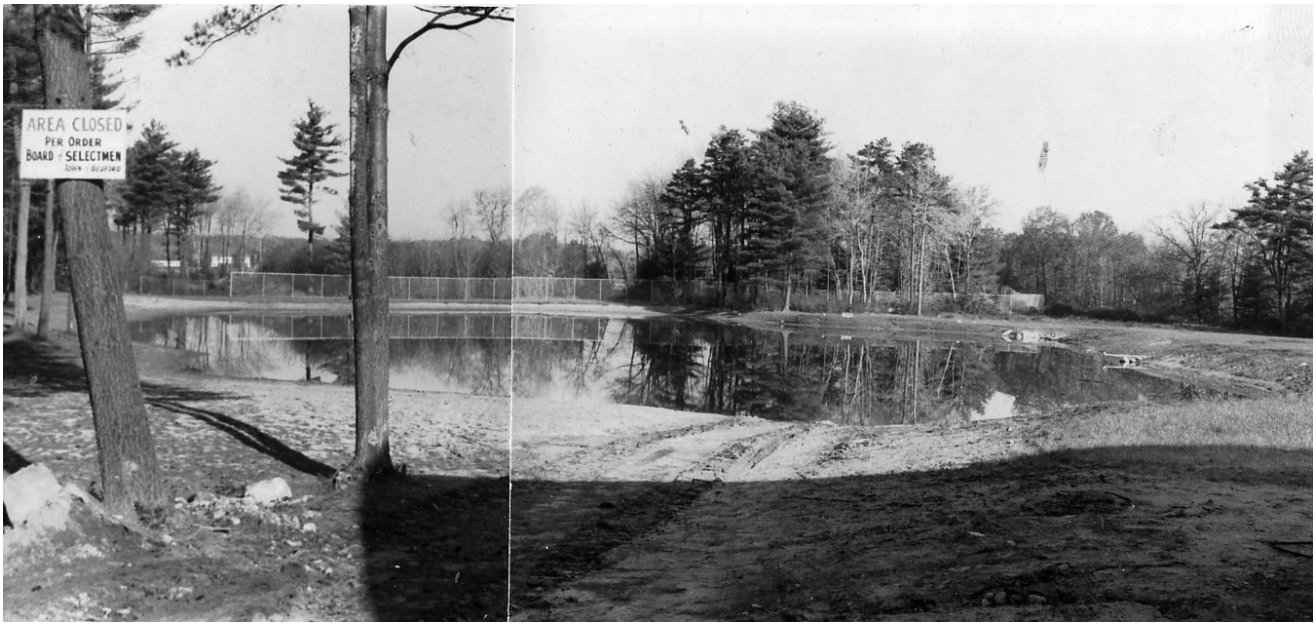
Next, the committee "dredged out a pond, one-half acre in size and about 16 feet in depth." The pond was "spring-fed and also surface-fed from an adjoining hospital basin… the committee wishes to expand and improve this water basin… and hopefully stock it with fish" because "future fishing derbies are contemplated."

Boy Scouts also did their bit by "marking trails leading toward Page School on town land adjoining this 65.3 acres."

Work continued in the following year. The pond was further excavated to make it an acre in size. In the 1969 Town Report, the Advisory Committee were able to say that "The area has been used a great deal by the townspeople for picnics, horseback riding, walking, ball playing, etc." Boy Scout Troop 161, led by Scout Master Ted Sandy, cleared more land and "had a wonderful camp-out in our new picnic grove."

By 1970 the pond was fully excavated, lined with crushed rock, and given a sandy shoreline. It could now accommodate 500 people. According to the 1970 Town Report, "The biggest news of the year was construction of the bathing house." Though valued at $20,000, the bath house was built for only $4,000 because of all the volunteer work done by many Bedford residents. "The willing co-operation and community feeling that prevailed among volunteers who participated in the fashioning of Springs Brook Park and especially in the construction of the bathhouse, reminds many of us of the building 'bees' of years ago when hundreds pitched in to give of their time and talents on a project that will benefit everyone."

Though lacking any of the natural ponds that adorn much of New England, Bedford people found a way to build for us what is now one of the most beautiful and enjoyable recreational facilities to be found anywhere in Massachusetts.



The humble beginnings of the pond at Springs Brook Park, now the best little swimmin' hole east of Walden Pond and west of the Atlantic Ocean. This artificial pond was dredged on part of the "V.A. Surplus Land" acquired by the Town of Bedford in the mid-1960s. (Photo courtesy of Mike Rosenberg.)

From the new BHS President

This January I became President of the Bedford Historical Society, following the resignation of Lee Yates. One of the hardest things to do is to take over a job from someone who has accomplished so much and breathed fresh air into our Society.

For five years Lee Yates has, with great enthusiasm, been not only the Executive Director, but also fulfilled the task as our President. She simultaneously led every meeting, was the curator, archivist, producer of this newsletter and mastered other functions like Bedford Day and initiating our successful Holiday Gift Shop. Lee has done extensive cataloging in the archives, photographs and old and new acquisitions. Thanks to her, several enlargements of the archives photographs are now displayed in Bedford businesses.

We are grateful to Lee for all the work, the goodwill she created and, especially for the numerous volunteer hours she has spent on "keeping the wheels turning."

Fortunately Lee will continue as our Executive Director leaving the burden to me as the interim President until our annual meeting when our members will elect a new slate of officers.

It will undoubtedly be a difficult task to take over Lee's creativity and energy, but with the help of our outstanding committees, subcommittees and volunteer members, I am positive we can continue to grow and fulfill many of the goals we have set. Most important is to maintain and expand our membership base, because, after all, our members are the foundation on which we can build.

We will still provide members with the programs you enjoy – lectures, historic walks, and participation in events like Bedford Day, Farmers Market, annual gatherings, and more. Our mission hasn't changed. Raising funds to create a Heritage Center is, of course, still high on our list. We ask everyone with good ideas to come to our meetings – and be a volunteer to make those ideas happen!

I thank you for all your support and input to make the Bedford Historical Society an even greater asset in our community.

Jan van Steenwijk

Revision of the Society's bylaws

The last time the BHS changed its bylaws was in 2002. Several amendments have been added over the years, but now the board of directors felt it was time for a thorough look at the complete bylaw, and make updates reflecting the society's ever changing environment, including the fact that we now are a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. Last month the Board of Directors voted unanimously to appoint a committee to review and update the bylaws. The committee members are Don Corey (committee chair), Judi Toti (committee clerk), Carol Amick, Bea Brown, Doris Crowell, Julie Turner, and Jan van Steenwijk.

Most revisions are minor corrections to the language to make the meaning clearer. A few articles and/or sections are added, but in principal the overall bylaw stays the same. The bylaw committee has met every week for the last two months and will soon be ready to present the proposed changes to the board of directors. When approved, the revised bylaw will then be distributed to all members. After all comments are taken in consideration, the new bylaw will be – we hope – ready for our upcoming annual meeting in May. If you have any suggestions or concerns please feel free to contact any member of the committee.

A great thank you to the committee members for their hard work!

Jan van Steenwijk

This bronze plaque, once an ornament on a Bedford fire truck, was recently donated to our collection of Fire Department memorabilia by Richard and Marjory Davis.

Community outreach

We have recently done a number of things to help spread the word about Bedford's history to members of the community.

Store on the Common. In December we ran a holiday gift shop in retail space generously donated by Bruce Blake. Many hands made light work of decorating, stocking, and staffing the store. Our thanks go to all who helped to make it such a success.

Bedford Springs show on BCAT. We recently used some of our vintage Bedford Springs photos to create a narrated slide show for Bedford Community Access TV.

"Bedford Common" show on BCAT. Don Corey and Bob Slechta appeared on the most recent edition of the "Bedford Common" show to talk about the proposed Two Brothers Rocks-Dudley Road National Historic District.

"Bedford History" column in the *Bedford Minuteman*. As the result of a project launched by Don and Lois Jenkins, the Bedford Minuteman newspaper will soon begin running a regular series of brief history articles accompanied by vintage photos from our collections.

Speaking of the *Bedford Minuteman*, we would like to take this opportunity to congratulate Town Historian John Dodge on his recent article in the town paper. We very much enjoyed his reminiscences on the subject of winter sports in Bedford and look forward to his next contribution.

Eagle Scout project at Two Brothers Rocks site

Late fall, Bedford resident Dennis Warner carried out a project to improve the Two Brothers Rocks site. He has cleared underbrush and rubbish, and will add a bench or two in the spring. (The Historic Preservation Commission is also contributing an interpretive sign.)

Dennis has not only raised the needed funds and done a great deal of work toward earning his Eagle Scout award, he has done it under budget and then contributed the remaining funds to the Bedford Historical Society. We appreciate the donation, and are grateful to him for helping to make this important historic site more accessible and enjoyable. Thank you, Dennis!

Membership Application and Renewal Form

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

Name: _____

Address: _____

_____

City: _____

State: _____ Zip: _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____

Donation

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

Total enclosed: $ _____

Bedford Historical Society, Inc.
2 Mudge Way, Bedford MA 01730-2138
781-275-7276
bedford-history@usa.net

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

Howard F. Davis (left) and Billy Halpin at the Davis Market in the Fletcher Block (now the Blake Block), circa 1932. In the windows can be seen signs offering smelts at 25 cents/pound and haddock at 12 cents/pound, plus "Friday Specials" including rump steak. In the left window is a stack of cauliflowers and in the right, a huge tin of Wesson oil and several packages marked "57," no doubt referring to the 57 varieties of Heinz pickles. (Photo courtesy of Richard and Marjory Davis.)